

Vietnam Generation

Volume 2

Number 2 *Kent and Jackson State: 1970-1990*

Article 19

1-1995

Brother and Sisters on the Land: Tent City, 1977

Miriam R. Jackson

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/vietnamgeneration>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jackson, Miriam R. (1995) "Brother and Sisters on the Land: Tent City, 1977," *Vietnam Generation*: Vol. 2 : No. 2 , Article 19.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/vietnamgeneration/vol2/iss2/19>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vietnam Generation by an authorized editor of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact careyc@lasalle.edu.

Brothers and Sisters on the Land: Tent City, 1977

Miriam R. Jackson

For two months during the late spring and early summer of 1977, a group of tents sat on Blanket Hill at Kent State University. The little colony, called Tent City, was the response of a student group called the May 4th Coalition to a plan by the University to construct a gymnasium annex on part of the site of the student-National Guard confrontation of May 4, 1970. Neither appearances before the KSU Board of Trustees nor demonstrations had done any good at persuading the administration to change its plans, so the young Coalition had decided, on May 12, 1977, to take over the hill with tents and people, to remain until the administration backed down.

The immediate controversy surrounding the University's gymnasium annex plans revolved around the impact construction would have on the May 4 site and the memory of those who had died there. A more general, though related controversy raised a question about the entire antiwar movement and the Vietnam war era: what deserved to be memorialized—the “noble cause” of military victory over the revolutionary insurgents (the “Viet Cong”) or the activities and memories of those who had opposed it? Adherents to the “noble cause” theory saw nothing in the events of 1970 to be memorialized, generally feeling that the “rioters” had gotten what they deserved and merited only oblivion. Former antiwar activists and some politicians and media writers, however, felt that the Kent State dead, cut down unjustly, ought to be remembered, leaving the land on which they had died as their memorial. And there was the question of a larger memorial—a more thoughtful nation reconsidering where its “interests” lay abroad and at home.

That was not all that made Tent City. There was the communitarian feeling of the 1960s, the environmentalism of the 1970s, which produced concern for grass and trees, groups living and planning communally. But at base it stood as a living social and political statement by those at Kent State about the meaning of the deaths of 1970. During the period of its existence, it was a potent reminder, to KSU and to the entire nation, that some soul-searching needed to be done about how the Vietnam war era ought to be viewed.

At a meeting on the first full day of Tent City's existence, May 13, 1977, its occupants decided that certain rules would have to be made and followed for the sake of the political objectives of the Coalition. Since the group had announced its intention of remaining on Blanket Hill either until the annex was moved or until the Coalition was, it realized that it would have to make every effort not to give University authorities any excuses for evicting it for other reasons. Habits of long standing would have to be drastically altered or even eliminated for the duration of the occupation. Thus, the first sign greeting visitors and recruits to Tent City read:

Welcome to Tent City
Please! No drugs
No alcohol

Additional instructions requested, "No violence and no gym."¹

Although it is certain that someone smuggled in an occasional joint or a can of beer, the rules, in general, stood up quite well. Cooking was done communally, in hibachis, as no fires were allowed. Meals were usually vegetarian, from mixed motivations of preference and economy. Littering was strongly discouraged and the tents were moved every few days to avoid killing the grass.²

In short, there was no ready excuse for KSU to dismantle Tent City, so it tolerated the settlement for as long as it thought it could. In the meantime, the Coalition had the moderate pleasure of knowing that its existence was costing the University time, embarrassment and money on a daily basis. If KSU officials would not listen to arguments about the ecological, legal, political and historical defects of the gym site, perhaps they could be pressured into changing their minds by the creation of a bad public relations image. An unremitting media focus on Tent City and its relation to 1970, the Coalition calculated, could produce sufficient public relations nightmares for a University desperately trying to avoid further publicity about 1970 issues to force the Board of Trustees to change the site.³

Tent City stood as both a political statement and as a living, futuristic community. Participation in it became a "way of life," as had draft resistance groups during the 1960s. Its members, like their 60s predecessors, lived "in opposition to the majority culture...moving toward an alternative consciousness and community." They constructed their own conceptions of reality, as opposed to what Barrie Thorne calls "conventional understanding of the real, the possible and the moral," trying to place themselves in clear opposition to ideas "predominant" in the national culture in preparation to persuade the public to view reality their way.⁴ Tent City fostered a strong feeling of solidarity among its otherwise diverse residents because everyone was there for the same reasons and was taking similar risks (of eventual arrest) by remaining.⁵

Tent City, 1977

The administration at first tolerated Tent City as a moderate nuisance which it expected would disappear at the end of Spring quarter in early June. But despite cold, rain, two violent windstorms, final exams, the coming of summer vacation and mild police harassment, it remained for two full months, until police, enforcing a court order, dismantled Tent City and physically removed its stubborn occupants and supporters. In the end, the sixty-two days of Tent City were to constitute (at the very least) the longest sit-in in the history of the student movement in America.

There appears to be a strong consensus that the Tent City phase of the 1977 gym struggle was its most unified and positive one. Beyond that, there are considerable differences in the way Tent City was perceived by both participants and observers. Some, for instance, remember the community as a nearly ideal combination of participatory democracy and effective political protest.⁶ Others remember sensing problems with the community, its democratic processes, and its political outreach activity. Such recollections clearly reflect the degree of integration achieved by the individuals involved at Tent City during this period, as well as their own political perspectives. They also reflect the goals and ideals such people saw as being met or partially unmet, necessary or unnecessary parts of Tent City.

To Jonathan Smuck, for instance, Tent City was not an entirely satisfactory experience. A curious combination of anarchist and communitarian, Smuck believed in the ideals represented by Tent City and was distressed when they were not met. He worried about the influence the Maoist Revolutionary Student Brigade (RSB) seemed to be starting to wield over the activities and decisions of the Coalition, the growing influence of several individuals in the group through a sort of status-through-endurance system and the overdoing of what might be called "re-education" efforts there. Too soon, he believes, Tent City became: "1) mystical; 2) isolated (introverted); and, 3) passive."⁷

Perhaps it was unrealistic for such people to have hoped for effective group activities without the emergence of leadership. (Indeed, not all of those emerging as Coalition leaders during this period felt entirely comfortable with their roles, conflicting as they did with the leaders' own ideals of egalitarianism.)⁸ It is also likely that most of the complaints made, then or later, about the supposed extent to which the Tent City community did not live up to its ideals of participatory democracy came not from those who disapproved of leadership *per se*, but from those annoyed that others, for one reason or another, were more politically effective than they, were gaining increasing amounts of influence of the Coalition with ideas of which they disapproved. Therefore, what seemed to be simple demands for openness from some Tent City participants and observers were often actually attempts by those less influential than they would like to have been to compete more effectively with influential Coalition factions, particularly the RSB.

Some Tent City residents maintained that the community provided a marvelous opportunity to build a kind of "Movement culture,"⁹ but complained, then and later, that some community members neither held to the kind of Movement lifestyle that might have had some appeal for the local community nor hesitated to manipulate language by juxtaposing "militant" and "liberal" rhetoric to intimidate their internal opposition. Fatimah Abdullah, for instance, generally liked the community's atmosphere, but was bothered by some of the more contradictory aspects of its life. Members, she recalled, were not often in their tents at night. They were downtown drinking beer or elsewhere "getting high." They kept to their drinking and drug rules on Blanket Hill, but not in general. This fact, she says, hurt Tent City's image in the eyes of area residents, but most Coalition members seemed indifferent to this potentially serious public relations problem. They said they wanted to convince the public that their cause was just and reasonable, but refused to compromise on the very matters of lifestyle that were helping to prevent many from giving them a sympathetic hearing.¹⁰

While the residents of Tent City tried out their experiment in community and political statements (with generally positive but occasionally contradictory results and responses), Kent area residents were taking note of the settlement. Even President Olds and his wife, Eva, expressed positive sentiments about Tent City and paid a visit there. The atmosphere seemed so relaxed to them in comparison to the tension they had encountered in both campus and community settings at the time of their arrival at KSU in 1971 that they could cope with Tent City rather easily.¹¹

The Blanket Hill community certainly charmed many visitors, part of the charm arising simply from its wooded setting. The setting actually overwhelmed some previously indifferent people with new concern and opinions, once guided tours and private contemplation had taken place. This process produced an important convert to the Coalition's cause, a convert whose subsequent efforts in the Coalition's behalf would last throughout the summer: Joyce Quirk, the Trustee who had stumbled into supporting annex construction at two crucial meetings in 1976 and 1977.

A visit to Tent City did what two acrimonious board meetings had failed to accomplish: it gave Quirk an understanding of the basis for the Coalition's position and caused her to start questioning her previous position. After perhaps two more visits, she decided to change her position to opposition.

There's no question.... I completely changed my mind. I realized at that point that [constructing the annex] was just a ridiculous thing to do, and it was going to be...extremely...serious. After going up there...I knew I'd really made a very serious mistake... that we [the Trustees] all were.¹²

Although public response to a large June rally at Tent City was, in general, quite positive,¹³ there was no indication that either the Trustees or the administration had any intention of backing down. Indeed, a number

of faculty members who had signed a student newspaper ad at the beginning of June, worried about the possibility of a confrontation (when and if construction began) sent a letter to their colleagues concerning a meeting called to discuss taking “a more active and constructive role than we have assumed to this date” in the controversy.¹⁴ Meanwhile, bidding on annex construction contracts was coming to an end: all state construction appropriations had to be absorbed in contracts by June 30, the last day of the current biennium. Perhaps it was the pressure of this deadline that had caused the Trustees to table a motion made by Joyce Quirk to alter the annex site at the Board meeting on June 9 on a 3-2 vote.¹⁵

KSU President-elect Brage Golding made several comments during a telephone press conference in June that boded ill for the fortunes of the gym struggle specifically and recognition of May fourth in general. “It would be nice,” he said, “if the gym could be delayed, so we could get a clear delineation of the various positions. But my understanding is that the contractors are ready, so any change now might imperil the gym completely, and that we can’t afford.” Golding realized the controversy might make his entrance “difficult,” but hoped everything would be settled by the time he came in September. “I take the protest quite seriously, but my understanding is that the gym is not on the site of...you know what.” He concluded his remarks with the ominous observation that, although he felt “as badly as the students” about 1970, he hoped there would not “continue to be a memorial publicly in the national press every year. Seven years is seven years, and it isn’t doing Kent State any good.”¹⁶

The extended presence of Tent City, in the meantime, was clearly beginning to have an impact on the area press. It was uncomfortable with the spectacle the community was creating and wished some compromise could be found to at least move the project away from Blanket Hill, if not further. The *Cleveland Press* was especially unhappy with the extended tenure of Tent City because of the presence there of “drifters with nothing better to do, rebels without a cause and frankly, some kooks.” It blamed this phenomenon on the coming of “firebrand civil rights lawyer” William Kunstler. The paper hoped officials would “bend” and that the Coalition would stay “cool.”¹⁷

The growing polarization was now also beginning to be echoed in letters to editors of area papers. One, from Richard Larlham, exclaimed that, “We have had all the foolishness we are going to take from students who insist on causing trouble.” The responsibility for the events of 1970 lay, he said, “entirely on the shoulders of those students, professors and outside agitators who planned and carried out the riots on [sic] Kent...” Larlham wanted the Trustees to assert themselves about what he saw as unjustified demands to honor Kent State’s role in the antiwar movement—including the honor implicitly in the gym struggle—and he threatened to organize a taxpayers’

coalition in order to restrict public funds “to the use of education” if he failed to see such a change in Trustee behavior very soon.¹⁸

Another letter, however, took a completely different tone. It suggested that the Trustees move the annex—preferably to the KSU stadium, which was not currently being used to capacity, possessed both ample parking space and accessibility, and which had neither trees nor memories to be uprooted. The writer believed that the Board could gain more respect from the Ohio legislature by rethinking its stand than by simply reacting to the fear of losing its state construction appropriations. Plans could always be changed. A taxpayer of a different sort than Richard Larlham pointed out to the Trustees that their present position was similar to those of military, state, and University officials in 1970 and pleaded with them to “go back to the table and think and meditate before blood is shed again at KSU.”¹⁹

Whatever the realities of public opinion toward the Coalition and chain reactions of political activism might have been, it is clear that both Coalition members and sympathetic media people believed (or, at least hoped) that both were important and positive factors in the gym struggle and for a new national movement for social change as well. Nevertheless, one could feel the tension growing day by day, in that last week of June. The annex construction contracts were signed on June 27, completing the web of obligations incurred by the KSU Board of Trustees for the annex as presently planned. In a forum conducted June 25 with the Coalition, President Olds had warned that injunctive action would be sought to remove Coalition members from Blanket Hill if they failed to leave of their own accord.²⁰

The Coalition soon decided to prepare for a mass, nonviolent arrest, probably in the presence of some of the families of the wounded and dead of 1970, and to worry about its next step later. The Coalition’s decision forced the University, in turn, to start planning for this eventuality. If mass arrest was inevitable, how could it take place so carefully as to avoid anything like a repetition of KSU’s human and public relations disaster of seven years before? William Kunstler had asserted the impossibility of a second massacre at Kent State, and to the extent that University officials worked in fear of what such an event would do to the University’s already tarnished image, Kunstler’s assertion was well-founded. Determined as the majority of Trustees might have been to go ahead with the annex plans, they knew they would have to make careful plans for any contemplated arrests as well. One of the factors behind the 1970 disaster had been the loss of University control to outside military authorities; KSU officials like the Trustees did not want to repeat at least that surrender of autonomy.

At the beginning of July, the Coalition put out a leaflet asking supporters from in and out of state to “come to Tent City to stay.” Coalition strategy was contained in the following plea:

Tent City, 1977

Now we need your support. THE GYM CAN STILL BE MOVED. The key is your physical presence. A large number of persons at the time of removal standing alongside the parents cannot be moved. The University will stand incapable of taking any action if thousands of us mobilize our strength and our strength is you. JOIN US AND THE VICTORY IS OURS²¹

Clearly, the Coalition was intent on following a strategy of mass passive resistance originated by Gandhi during India's struggle for independence against the British in the 1940s and used by unions, the civil rights, and the antiwar movement in the United States. It seemed to be the most appropriate resistance tactic "alternative history" had to offer.

In a last-ditch effort to end the controversy, Trustees George Janik and Michael Johnston and KSU Vice-President for Finance Richard Dunn flew to Columbus on July 7 for a meeting arranged by Kent's state assemblyman, John Begala, to discuss annex "rotation." This plan called for the shifting of the annex about forty feet from its presently projected position, at a cost of about \$750,000.²² Rep. Begala had helped formulate the idea after news of the rising level of tension at KSU prompted him to call Glenn Olds. The President had said he was frightened. Begala suggested rotation as a possible "mature response" to the problem. What worried him was the strong possibility that such a change might produce demands from underbid contractors for the rebidding of construction contracts and uncertainty as to whether annex rotation would produce breach-of-contract suits.²³ What worried Olds was the likelihood that the compromise would not satisfy the Coalition, would anger right wing people, and would prove too expensive to be feasible. Begala, however, had volunteered to try to get the money and to talk to the Coalition, believing the right wing "could be isolated if we all pulled together."²⁴

But Begala's optimism was misplaced. The Board of Trustees gave not the slightest indication of its intention to pass the requested resolution and Coalition spokesperson Greg Rambo dismissed the plan. He was virtually positive that the Coalition, if and when it was called upon to vote on the question, would choose to reject rotation. Rambo pointed out that rotating the annex would not move it entirely away from the May 4 site. He commented that three quarters of a million dollars was a lot to move a building forty feet and suggested, instead, a joint Columbus conference to "discuss putting the gym money in escrow pending development of plans for a smaller building."²⁵

The Coalition never seems to have voted on the matter. The idea was put forth to the Coalition leadership and the group seems simply to have accepted their judgement that rotation was a bad thing without ever really discussing it seriously. So much for the idea of mass participation in decision-making—the Coalition was clearly being controlled, at this point, by a small, but "critical mass" of influential people. Begala's plan had

depended on the willingness of both sides to compromise, and failed when both sides clung to their basic positions—despite all his attempts to moderate them.²⁶

By July 8, it was clear that neither side was going to back away from a confrontation. Although President-elect Golding had a reasonably friendly meeting with Tent City people, outgoing President Olds did not. When he appeared at about midnight—to tell the Coalition that it must vacate the site because it was time to hand it over to its major contractor its members merely chanted “Move the gym!”²⁷

Old’s eviction notice was to be read formally to the Coalition by KSU police early on July 10.²⁸ The Trustees were expected to finalize plans for injunctive action at a meeting at KSU’s Stark County Branch that afternoon.²⁹ Joyce Quirk had suggested to President Olds that the Federal Mediation Service be called in to try to resolve the situation, but got no response, as late as July 9.³⁰ Quirk might have been determined to shift the construction site by any means available, but Olds clearly was not interested in any such suggestions.

On July 9, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* pleaded editorially for peace at Kent State. Both Coalition concern and University exigency were understandable—could the annex not be shifted a bit? Perhaps the Coalition was justified in its suspicion that the University had, indeed, “quietly sought to withhold any official recognition of the events of May 1970.” Why, the editorial did not venture to suggest. Lack of recognition had been unwise, though, because May 4 had been a historical event worth memorializing, and because, “Had the University done so years ago, much of the passion of the current controversy would not have arisen.” So far, things had gone well. Restraint had been maintained on both sides. Now, however, as it was time for the tents to come down and the annex to go up on Blanket Hill, the coalition was going to have to concede defeat. The *Plain Dealer* sympathized with the Coalition, but felt its options had run out; it appeared to be the time for the Coalition to be “reasonable” and take its loss gracefully. A noble effort had reached the limit of its capacities and failed.³¹

The KSU Trustees duly met near Canton. They went into Executive Session almost immediately and made a quick decision. Only Joyce Quirk voted against a motion to go to Portage County Common Pleas Court the next day for an injunction to remove the Coalition from Blanket Hill.³² The Board had apparently decided to persist with its original construction plans out of a sense that its control was being challenged, from fear of incurring financial and legal problems if the plans were changed, because of peer pressure and out of sheer stubbornness.³³

Given the intensity of arrest planning and the generality of assumptions that arrests would indeed take place, Portage Country Common Pleas Judge Joseph Kainrad turned out to have a complicated surprise for everybody at the conclusion of his court session. Kainrad handed down a two-part

injunction. The first part ordered the Coalition to vacate Tent City, as the University had asked. The second, however, ordered the University to delay construction until the Coalition's case could be heard, as Coalition attorney Bill Whitaker had requested.³⁴ For Coalition members who had been expecting a simple order to vacate, this decision presented problems. It raised the possibility of successful court action to move the construction site and threw the desirability of mass arrest into serious question as an appropriate tactic. The choice between delayed or immediate arrests, waiting to try "The System" through the courts, or immediately making a militant statement outside such usual channels of protest, guaranteed a lengthy, complicated and emotional last-minute Coalition debate.

The debate lasted for about four hours, during which period perhaps eighty people spoke. It soon became evident that opinion was sharply divided and that both sides were displaying a great deal of emotion. Ron Kovic pleaded with the group to put its bodies "on the line," his eyes filled with tears and his voice cracking. Person after person passionately denounced Judge Kainrad and the "Establishment" he stood for, insisted that Tent City must be defended at all costs, and pledged to "take the bust" tomorrow. Others argued that Tent City was not the object of the Coalition's struggle. It was beginning to sound, they said, as if the Coalition were more concerned with saving Tent City than it was with moving the gym annex. If a judge had provided the Coalition with a chance to have its day in court, why not use it and think about the arrest option later? The Coalition's public support might suffer if it faced arrest when it could have gone to court; wasn't public support important? Nor had the May 4 families expressed their desires; should not the group wait for that?³⁵

In fact, the families were also divided and ultimately announced that their only consensus was on individual action.³⁶ The Coalition vote, when finally taken, was perhaps two to one in favor of immediate arrest. It was clear that the retention of Tent City had become an issue in itself in the minds of many people; the abandonment of the community now carried too many negative implications to make it a politically or emotionally feasible option. The decision to hold the Hill until removed by the police, the determination to "make a stand," obviously held militant appeal. Whether or not such a tactic was the best at the moment was not quite the same question, though some who considered themselves radicals certainly failed to include potentially successful court litigation in their range of options.

Just as conservatives and even liberals entangled in conventional thinking concerning the acceptable parameters of dissent were uncomfortable about the prospect of even nonviolent civil disobedience under such circumstances (especially given the choice offered by Kainrad's dual order), the Coalition radicals who swung the vote in their favor that evening were tied to rather narrow "militant" notions of what kind of behavior would be appropriate. Some who had tried to argue both from a radical and a

pragmatic perspective had promoted the use of the court (or any other channel of influence or power available) as a newly-available weapon. Since "The System" had provided the Coalition with an instrument to fight for some of its plans and ideas, why not take advantage of it? But the emotional pull of Tent City and the general desire to make a stand outweighed such considerations in the end. Thus, the stage was set for a mass arrest on Blanket Hill on the morning of 12 July 1977.

An open letter to the Board of Trustees written in June by one Coalition member expressed some of the hope, frustration, bitterness and pride that hundreds preparing for the arrest felt. For seven years, he maintained, people like himself had tried every available channel to achieve accountability for 1970. He had learned much from failures of petitions and court cases; now he was learning more about the nature of justice in contemporary American society. To him, the Trustees were the local reflection of a national problem.

Seven years later, you remain a harsh teacher. Your latest course instructs us we cannot even have the land where that terrible chain of events occurred: You tell us [you] must build a gym there. Oh, we've learned our lessons well. Seven years have taught us not to be surprised at your insensitivity and injustice. If Watergate taught us that some outrages may be covered up with lies, then you've taught us that others can be covered up with buildings.

Bill Arthrell understood things now: "I am camped at Tent City. I am determined to hold the land," he declared. He believed doing so might break a cycle of seven years of injustice with action and by the building of an alternative consciousness:

Seven years is too long to wait for justice. Seven years is too long to bear the pain of injustice. You will not build a gym on Taylor Hill. We will resist you with petitions, rallies, tents, injunctions and our bodies if we must. We are not learning our lessons from you anymore. We will become our own teachers.³⁷

Eight o'clock arrived on Blanket Hill on July 12 and KSU police officer Donald Schwartzmiller began to read Judge Kainrad's injunction. For those sitting massed under the pine trees, their arms and legs linked to those on either side of them, the reading was almost impossible to hear because of the chanting.

The crowd of observers, supporters and media gathered on the Taylor Hall balcony now numbered about two thousand. Many chanted and sang with the sit-in members as the police closed in and began, person by person, to remove the Coalition from Blanket Hill. Legal power battled symbolism and enthusiasm for the hearts of the observers. A new verse was added to the traditional civil rights song to fit the occasion:

People are the power, we shall not be moved;
People are the power; we shall not be moved.
Just like Tentropolis, up on Freedom Hill;
We shall not be moved.

They sang Stephen Stills' "Find the Cost of Freedom" and a sudden, haunting quiet descended upon the Hill. It sounded like a hymn was being sung, under the old pine and oak trees. Its words floated out through the still morning air to the ears of the observers and the advancing police. Many had come that day expecting violence, fearing another 1970, but the Coalition evoked only the sadness of that year and its roots in the American youth culture, especially in its singing of Neil Young's "Ohio." And in the wake of the singing, a strange peace prevailed, under the different forms of power held that day by the police, the observers, the media and the May 4th Coalition. One could feel an almost tangible power, a kind of dignified hope and confidence, seated there under the tall, silent trees on the Hill, amidst its memories, good and bad. For many, participation in this mass arrest was a personal statement of commitment to the 1970 dead by being there to defend their memories.³⁸

The arrest of two of the May 4 couples—one with all four of their children—was probably the most poignant moment of an occasion already laden with emotion. The wire service photo of the arrest of Martin Scheuer—a Jewish refugee from Germany whose daughter, Sandy, had been killed at Kent State in 1970—surely captured the one ignominious point in an otherwise good day for University public relations. After all, what the University had to do that day to achieve a good public relations image was rather minimal: make sure nobody got hurt.

There was a certain orchestrated quality to the arrest of the "Kent 194;" inevitable, probably, for a procedure practiced so carefully for so long by both sides. A frightened and nervous Joyce Quirk grew rather relaxed once she sensed that nothing serious was going to happen, and spent the balance of the morning observing and taking notes.³⁹

The day so long dreaded by so many people had turned out to be a public relations victory for both sides. University officials and police were roundly congratulated for their professional handling of the arrests⁴⁰ (no one had received more than bruises and numb fingers) and the Coalition was lauded for its disciplined nonviolence. The county sheriff was so pleased at the way the arrests had gone that he decided to drop the charges of resisting arrest leveled against those Coalition members who had not left the Hill voluntarily. Only contempt charges were left.⁴¹ William Kunstler's prediction that Kent State protesters would not be attacked a second time proved accurate; the care with which the July 12 arrests were conducted demonstrated that, however much the University and the nation dislike reminders of 1970 (or

perhaps because both did), neither wanted it to happen again. Kent State, certainly, could not risk mistreating Coalition members (especially when they were clearly engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience) without wreaking havoc with its public image. The TV cameras protected the coalition that day.

The future looked terribly uncertain, all the same. Even as the Coalition meeting that night became a raucous medley of chanting, cheering, and stomping for arrivals fresh from jail, no one could say that the Coalition was closer to moving the annex site than it had been before. All it could say was that the national and international news coverage of the mass arrest had probably increased the pressure on University officials to change the construction plans. On July 12, the Coalition had certainly made a statement—as it had by maintaining its community for sixty-two days—but it had lost Blanket Hill and Tent City, at least for ten days. There was much to be discussed, much to be planned. For the effort to persuade Americans that the Vietnam era was worth remembering as it related to the deaths at Kent State had only just begun on the evening of July 12, 1977.

What is the legacy of Tent City? It was certainly the high point of the May 4th Coalition's struggle to keep the entire 1970 site clear of construction. Overall, it represented the best of the ideals and aspirations of the Coalition: peace, honor, honesty toward the past, courage, egalitarianism, communitarianism, and environmentalism. Coalition members of all political persuasions looked back on it later as a hopeful experiment in dignifying the past and suggesting the future, whatever their other feelings about its problems and contradictions. Never again during the gym struggle would there be that kind of physical or community base in which the Coalition could live and function—perhaps many members anticipated that and partly for that reason resisted the court order to vacate the hill.

Scattered student sit-ins occurred at various campuses during the decade following the ultimately unsuccessful gym struggle. (Yes, the annex was duly constructed, as planned.) These protests involved other issues (usually tuition, apartheid or Central America policy) and did not last as long as Tent City. Surely, though, they took some inspiration from its spirit, tactics and ideals. As late as 1989, one could feel the echoes of Tent City, 1977, however apparently inadvertent, as a part of a slowly rejuvenating American labor movement, the United Mine Workers, set up Camp Solidarity, peacefully occupied company territory and engaged in other acts of nonviolent civil disobedience as part of the months-long Pittston coal strike for retention of pension and health benefits in Southwestern Virginia.

Truly inspiring events created by struggling people are never really lost to history. Thus, Tent City will never be forgotten by those who care to learn and read. It was only one phase in an ultimately losing struggle, but it still

achieved something by its experience, its example, and its consciousness-raising.

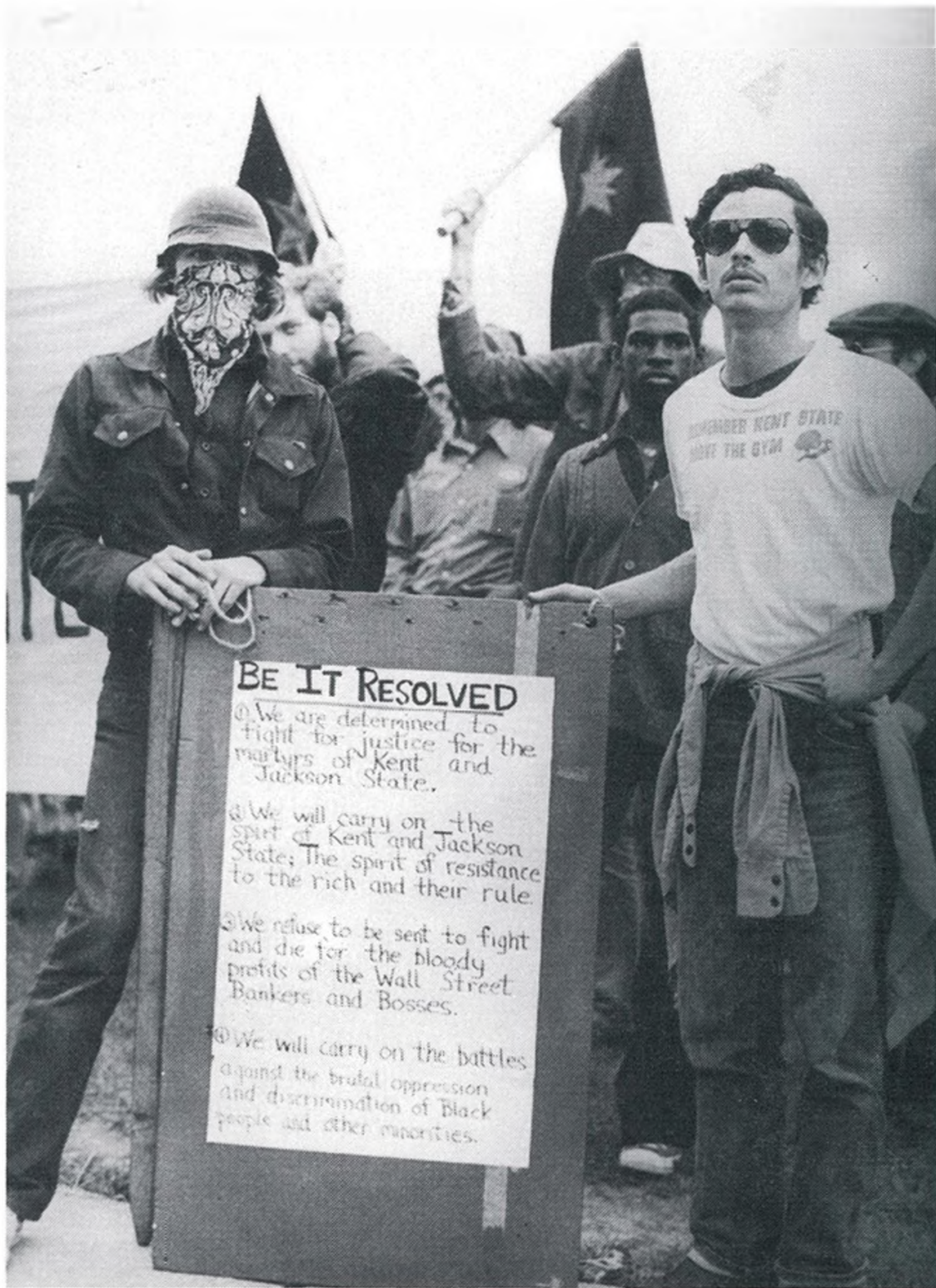
Notes

- 1 Author's recollection.
- 2 Interview with Deb Ungericht, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, (18 May 1977).
- 3 Thomas R. Hensley, "Kent State 1977: The Struggle to Move the Gym," in Thomas R. Hensley and Jerry M. Lewis, eds., *Kent State and May 4th: A Social Science Perspective* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt) 1978: 131.
- 4 Barrie Thorne, "Resisting the Draft: An Ethnography of the Draft Resistance Movement," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University (1971): 197, 227, 321.
- 5 *Ibid.*: 147, 164.
- 6 Dave Perusek, interview with the author, 2 May 1981.
- 7 Jonathan Smuck, interview with the author, 7 January 1981.
- 8 See Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1980. Also, see discussion in Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973) of this phenomenon. Both authors focus on the rise of what became the Weatherman faction of SDS between 1968 and 1970.
- 9 For a detailed description of this process as applied to an earlier era (but in a way quite relevant to the Coalition), see Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press) 1976.
- 10 Fatimah Abdullah (Eve Rosen Morris), interview with the author, 18 and 19 August, 1981.
- 11 *Daily Kent Stater* (3 June 1977).
- 12 Joyce Quirk, interview with the author, 10 June 1981.
- 13 See *Record-Courier*, 6 June 1977.
- 14 "Concerned Faculty" letter, 8 June 1977. In author's possession.
- 15 *Record-Courier*, 10 June 1977.
- 16 Quoted in *Record-Courier*, 10 June 1977; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 10 June 1977.
- 17 "Kent's Newest Dilemma," editorial, *Cleveland Press*. Reprinted as *Record-Courier* editorial, 10 June 1977.
- 18 Letter from Richard Larlham to *Record-Courier*, 13 June 1977.
- 19 Unsigned letter to *Record-Courier*, 13 June 1977.
- 20 *Kent Weekly*, c. 29 June 1977.
- 21 May 4th Coalition leaflet, c. 1 July 1977. In author's possession.
- 22 *Record-Courier*, 9 July 1977.
- 23 *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 7 July 1977.
- 24 John A. Begala, *Reminiscences on May 4, 1970 and Its Aftermath*: 11-12. Unpublished manuscript in possession of the author. Cited by permission of John A. Begala.
- 25 Quoted in *Record-Courier*, 9 July 1977.
- 26 Marie Carey, interview with the author, 21 May 1981; Fatimah Abdullah, interview with the author. The author also wondered later whether the Coalition should have "rejected" this proposal. See Marting Lipset, *Rebellion in the University* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971: xii-xvi) for a definition of the term "critical mass."
- 27 Quoted in *Akron Beacon Journal*, 9 July 1977.
- 28 *Record-Courier*, 9 July 1977; *Akron Beacon Journal*, 10 July 1977.
- 29 *Ibid.*; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 9 July 1977.
- 30 *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 9 July 1977. A story concerning a similar suggestion made by Congressman John Seiberling appeared in the *Record-Courier*, 8 July 1977.
- 31 "Keep Peace at KSU," editorial, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 9 July 1977.

- ³² Author's recollection; *Akron Beacon Journal*, *Record-Courier*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *New York Times*, 11 July 1977.
- ³³ Harriet Begala, interview with the author, 4 June 1981; Dennis Carey, interview with the author, 14 May 1981; Thomas R. Hensley and Glen W. Griffin, "Victims of Groupthink: The Kent State University Board of Trustees and the 1977 Gymnasium Controversy," prepared for the 1979 meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois (18-21 April 1979). Cited by permission.
- ³⁴ *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Record-Courier*, 12 July 1977; *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 18 July 1977. For Pareisi's arguments on behalf of KSU, see *Motion for Temporary Restraining Order with Notice*, filed 11 July 1977. To author courtesy of Bill Whitaker.
- ³⁵ Author's recollection of arguments. Also see *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 18 July 1977, for an account of the meeting. Both the author and faculty member Barbara Child argued in this vein.
- ³⁶ Albert Canfora, interview with the author, 12 August 1981.
- ³⁷ Bill Arthrell, "An Open Letter to the Board of Trustees of Kent State University," June 1977. Copy in author's possession, courtesy of Bill Arthrell.
- ³⁸ Author's recollection.
- ³⁹ Joyce Quirk, interview with the author.
- ⁴⁰ See, for instance, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 13 July 1977.
- ⁴¹ For area and national newspaper coverage of the 12 July arrests, see *Record-Courier*, *Akron Beacon Journal*, *Cleveland Press* and *Plain-Dealer*, *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, 13 July 1977; *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 18 July 1977.



Meeting at Tent City some time between May 12, 1977 and July 12, 1977. Photo © by John P. Rowe.



Members of the Revolutionary Student Brigade state their demands. Photo © by John P. Rowe.



**Robby Stamps and Bill Arthrell attending a rally at Kent State, August 20, 1977.
Photo © by John P. Rowe.**