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THE SAN JOSE STATE COLLEGE ANTI-WAR RIOTS OF NOVEMBER 1967

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The period between the mid-1960's through the early 1970's, also known as the Vietnam Decade, was a time of violent change. The Vietnam War was raging on, its peak in 1968 with the occurrence of the massive Tet Offensive. At home, the younger generation, or the "hippies," were busy fighting the older generation, the "Establishment," which included anyone over thirty years of age. Hippies everywhere rejected all authoritative adults and their conservative customs and thinking. Race riots continued to break out all across the United States, while the crime rate soared to alarming heights incities such as Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City. Still, tensions continued to mount on the divided country. The Vietnam War overlooked all this disorder and contributed additional pressure among the American public and government. Soon after America's escalation in the war, anti-war riots and demonstrations started occurring in public places. Many protesting young Americans joined in peace marches to Washington D.C. in order to express their views of the unpopular war. Gradually, college campuses became the main attractions of anti-war riots. The Kent State riot, well-known for the protesting students killed there, seemed to symbolize the attitudes of what many people, especially college students, felt about America's involvement in the Vietnam War.

The riots at San Jose State College took place during this ever-changing time period. Although much lesser known than other college riots, the riots at this state college were still part of the nationwide trend of growing opposition towards the Vietnam War and anything related to the war. In the case of the San Jose State riots, Dow Chemical Company

representatives were the main cause of the disturbances that occurred on the college campus. This essay will reveal what occurred at the San Jose State riots and will also show how these riots represented the feelings of social unrest among the young generation throughout America during this turbulent decade of American history.

THE RIOTS

Out of the two riots that occurred at San Jose State College on November 20 and 21 of 1967, only one could actually be labeled as a "riot." This was the first of the two riots and the more violent of the two. It was known that Dow Chemical recruiters would be on campus on November 20 and 21, interviewing interested students who earlier applied for jobs.¹ These Dow interviewers sparked the start of the riots. During part of the Vietnam War, the Dow Chemical Company supplied napalm to the United States government from 1966 to 1970.² Dow Chemical had previously signed a contract with the Defense Department to provide the military with napalm, like any other normal sale. Economically, the napalm production only amounted up to one-half of one percent of Dow's total sales.³ The production of napalm, a "jelly-like, inflammable substance packed into canisters and dropped by planes on observed or suspected enemy targets in the jungle fighting,"⁴ was the target of the rioters. It had always been a tradition of San Jose State, however, to invite representatives from various industries to come to their college and interview interested students.⁵ The college had to remain impartial

¹San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 1. (microfilm).

²Richard Long, letter from Dow Chemical, April 1, 1986.

³The Wall Street Journal, Dec. 8, 1967, p. 18. (microfilm).

⁴Don Whitehead, The Dow Story (n.p., n.d.), pp. 262-263.

⁵Dr. William J. Dusel, interview with the ex-vice president of San Jose State, Saratoga, California, May 25, 1986.

in controversial and conflicting views and situations, which included the Dow representatives.

However, quite a few students quickly objected after finding out that Dow representatives were coming on campus to interview students. Dr. William J. Dusel, who was in charge at the time of the first riot while President Robert D. Clark was away, received complaints from students, especially from those who were involved in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and also was presented with petitions signed by students and professors from Professors Against the War (PAW).⁶ Getting no response this way, many students went to other means to voice their opposition.

On November 20, a peaceful noontime demonstration was held at Seventh Street, put on by the SDS.⁷ Several hundred students attended this rally, which moved to the Administration Building on Sixth and San Fernando Streets, where Dow was conducting its interviews.⁸ This was where things started to get hostile.

Students began to surround the building and refused to allow people to enter and exit the building. After someone smeared a container of something that looked like blood against the building's doors, Dr. Dusel alerted the city police of possible violence.⁹

⁶Dr. William J. Dusel, interview with the ex-vice president of San Jose State, Saratoga, California, May 25, 1986.

⁷Spartan Daily, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 1.

⁸Spartan Daily, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 1.

⁹Dr. William J. Dusel, interview with the ex-vice president of San Jose State, Saratoga, California, May 25, 1986.

A little later, policemen arrived and stayed off the campus on Seventh Street, waiting to see the outcome of the students' behavior. By now, many other onlookers had gathered around the area surrounding the Administration Building, both students and outsiders. Dr. Dusel tried to talk to the rioters, telling them to disperse or he would have to allow the police to come in and disperse them. However, this warning was answered by rocks and glass thrown at windows of the building. At this point, the police started coming in through the large crowd of people, while students chanted, "We are the people."¹⁰ The students began to get angry, asking Dr. Dusel why the police were coming in, but he told them that he never gave the police permission to enter onto the campus.¹¹ Finally, the Administration Building's double glass doors were broken by a metal chair that was thrown at the doors by a student. It was at this point when the police used tear gas in an effort to disperse the crowd, which was described to have "combined the flavors of a community picnic and a lynch mob, salted with more than a little tear gas."¹² All along, shouts of "fascist" and "Nazi" were heard, directed toward the police,¹³ while demands of Dow's departure were also heard. In addition, a burning material was thrown into the lobby of the Administration Building by a student. It was thought to be an American flag.

¹⁰San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

¹¹Spartan Daily, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 1.

¹²San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 1. (microfilm).

¹³San Francisco Chronicle, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

After the tear gas and smoke bombs were thrown into the crowd, much panic resulted. People started to push away from the building in an effort to get away from the smoke. Others besides the students were affected by the tear gas, including several secretaries and other staff members inside the building, who were red-eyed from the gas.¹⁴ As more people started moving from the Administration Building, Police Chief Ray Blackmore started moving through the crowd. By this time, other units of law enforcement had arrived and were standing by for assistance.¹⁵ Police officers with billy clubs in their hands were apparent. The sight of the clubs made the crowd frantic in thinking that the policemen were going to use them. An incident occurred that brought on more crowd hostility. A student was seen talking to a police officer when he suddenly fell down, untouched. This officer started to pick him up when the crowd surrounded him, yelling, "The cops are kicking him!" More people came and started shouting police brutality.¹⁶

When it was all over, the riot left sixteen known people injured and twelve people arrested. San Jose State Health Center treated fifteen people by 3:30 P.M. for minor injuries and tear gas irritation. One professor, Peter Collins, also was hurt during the riots. Although he didn't actively participate in the riot, he was hit by a "flat object," causing him to have minor head injuries.¹⁷ Out of the twelve people

¹⁴San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

¹⁵Spartan Daily, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 1.

¹⁶San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

¹⁷Spartan Daily, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 1.

arrested at the riot, nine of them were students. Charges included failure to disperse, unlawful assembly, and battery on a police officer.¹⁸ A SDS leader that was arrested, Nick Kopke, had been suspended the previous week for his participation in an anti-R.O.T.C. demonstration.¹⁹ Also arrested was a San Jose lawyer, John Thorne, for failing to disperse and to leave the campus. Thorne had this to say:

I completely disagree with the news accounts of what happened.

It was a great misfortune Dow Chemical was not asked by the college to leave. . . It was unfortunate the police used the tactics they did.²⁰

Although there appeared to be many students involved in this riot, only a minority amount of them was actually hard-core rioters. It was approximated that only about 35% of the 700 students at the riot were actually involved in the riot.²¹ The majority of the people present at the riot were onlookers; many of them ate sandwiches and drank beer on rooftops of nearby buildings, while others just mingled with the crowd. Still, others appeared to enjoy the smell of tear gas and stood right in the midst of it.²² There were also opposing views among the students

¹⁸San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

¹⁹San Francisco Chronicle, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

²⁰San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

²¹Captain Dei Rossi, interview with a police officer, Sunnyvale, California, May 16, 1986.

²²San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

during this riot. When some students tried to bring down San Jose State's flag and other flags, other uninvolved students strongly opposed them by fighting them off.²³

News of the riot at San Jose State traveled quickly to Sacramento, where Governor Ronald Reagan strongly denounced the students involved in the riot:

I have no sympathy for those who would use riots and violence to press their views on others and who refuse to grant on others the same rights of freedom and dissent they insist on for themselves.²⁴

In addition, Reagan wanted the expulsion of every student who participated in the riot, and the firing of every teacher who also participated in the riot, if any, basing his firm stance not as "political interference in our higher education system."²⁵ The governor continued to call the riots "inexcusable," and that the disturbance wasn't fair for those students "who are working hard to obtain an education . . . undisturbed by frequent disruptions and disorders."²⁶ A harsher critic of the riot was Senator Clark L. Bradley, who blamed the riot on "radicals" and on the "weak administration" of San Jose State President Clark.²⁷ When

²³Los Angeles Times, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 3. (microfilm).

²⁴Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 4.

²⁵Los Angeles Times, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 3. (microfilm).

²⁶San Francisco Chronicle, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

²⁷San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 1. (microfilm).

Senator Bradley was asked why he felt that "left-wing radical elements" had picked San Jose State to stage their opinions, he answered that "President Clark is a pretty weak individual and he has been practicing a policy similar to President Clark Kerr."²⁸ Senator Bradley referred to U.C. Berkeley's former president who was criticized for the way he handled similar riots at the U.C. campus. Governor Reagan ended his attack on the riots by commenting that unless "those the people have elected . . . put an end to such irresponsible actions . . . the people will find someone who will."²⁹

The cause of all this excitement was centered on Dow's representative on campus, Glenn Allen, the western recruitment manager for Dow Chemical.³⁰ Although he had encountered protests when interviewing students on other college campuses, including U.C.L.A., Oregon State University, Washington State, Sacramento State, and Long Beach State, the opposition that he encountered at San Jose State was the worst that he had ever seen.³¹ Allen described the students as "animals, screaming 'murderers' at us . . . I've never seen them like that."³² Dr. Dusel even called this riot the worst in San Jose State history.³³

²⁸San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 1. (microfilm).

²⁹Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 4.

³⁰San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 1. (microfilm).

³¹Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 4.

³²San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

³³Dr. William J. Dusel, interview with ex-vice president of San Jose State, Saratoga, California, May 25, 1986.

It was the determination of the protesting students of no one stopping them that made this riot a "riot." According to an officer, feelings of defiance and the pressure that was felt by these students just turned everything loose.³⁴ Another officer at the scene described both sides, the students and the police officers, over reacted in the violence. The students were "overwhelmed" by the whole situation, especially by the presence of the policemen. This officer commented that although the policemen were well trained, they weren't as trained then as they are today.³⁵ Another opinion by another officer, who was a student at the time, was that the students had started the violence, not the police.³⁶ Dr. Dusel described the students as being "intolerant with conflicting ideas" of the administration. The SDS were more "militant" than usual, wanting to violate school codes on purpose to voice their opinions. Dr. Dusel said that although he had great respect for the students, the administration was required to take action.³⁷

However, a conflicting view of the riot was also formed. PAW charged that the presence of police officers on campus wasn't necessary, and that the police were the ones who started the violence, not the students.

³⁴Fred Esparza, interview with a police officer, San Jose, California, May 10, 1986.

³⁵Captain Dei Rossi, interview with a police officer, Sunnyvale, California, May 16, 1986.

³⁶Sergeant Gianni, interview with a police officer, Santa Clara, California, May 20, 1986.

³⁷Dr. William J. Dusel, interview with ex-vice president of San Jose State, Saratoga, California, May 25, 1986.

PAW drew up a list of ten charges against the police and the administration, showing their resentment toward the way the riot was handled.³⁸ Although PAW claimed that police used brutality at the riot, the San Jose Mercury News denied observing any police brutality.³⁹ In a staff comment, a member remarked that before the arrival of the police, the students were basically "restrained," until the police arrived, which acted as a "catalyst" on the students. He commented that when the police started using the tear gas on the crowd, "turmoil resulted," and started all the violence.⁴⁰ San Jose State's own newspaper, The Spartan Daily, seemed to favor the position of the protesting students rather than that of the police. Dr. Dusel explained that the newspaper took this position because it usually gave demonstrators good publicity and often helped them out.⁴¹

Whichever viewpoint was correct, this riot was not the end for the students, its administration, and the police. Another riot, although much more subdued than the previous one, would occur the very next day.

On the morning of the 21st of November, about a thousand students crowded into Morris Dailey Auditorium to hear and discuss with a specially formed panel on the Dow issue. Included in this panel were Dr. Dusel,

³⁸Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 4.

³⁹San Jose Mercury, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 1. (microfilm).

⁴⁰Spartan Daily, Nov. 21, 1967, p. 2.

⁴¹Dr. William J. Dusel, interview with ex-vice president of San Jose State, Saratoga, California, May 25, 1986.

Jack Jones Jr. (regional representative of Dow), student president Vic Lee, Army Colonel Edgar Colladay, Dr. L.H. Lacey (chairman of the college's Academic Council), Peter Collins (member of PAW), and a representative from SDS.⁴² Students at the rally presented four demands to the panel: Dow leaves the campus forever, police stays off campus, reinstate three suspended students of the R.O.T.C. demonstration previously held, and the students be allowed to formulate the campus policy on recruiters.⁴³ In addition, a SDS leader asked the panel a question to whether Dow would stop making napalm, and if not, if the Dow representatives leave the campus immediately.⁴⁴ However, Dr. Dusel delayed the answer to the question, and so after half an hour into the rally, about half the people, both students and faculty members, left the auditorium to picket on Seventh Street. Meanwhile, the panel continued to discuss and "deal" with the remaining people for about two hours. Eventually, the crowd on Seventh Street grew to about 4000 people, which divided up into one-fourth protestors, one-fourth Dow supporters, and one-half watchers.⁴⁵ In case things became violent, like the previous riot, more than 250 law enforcements stood by on S. Sixth Street.⁴⁶ Fortunately this time, the demonstration turned out quite peaceful. There were a few tense moments during the day, but school and Dow officials quickly took care

⁴²San Francisco Chronicle, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

⁴³Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 2.

⁴⁴San Francisco Chronicle, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

⁴⁵San Francisco Chronicle, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

⁴⁶Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 1.

of things.

At one point, however, some students began to slam against the doors of the Administration Building, where the Dow interviews were taking place. San Jose State President Robert D. Clark, who had just returned to the college, quickly walked out to talk to the crowd, and so brought the threat of violence to a stop.⁴⁷ As he attempted to talk to the students about efforts to form a new recruiting policy for the college, some students continued to bang against the doors, while others wanted to talk to a Dow representative in order to avoid further trouble. So, Jack Jones of Dow Chemical agreed to talk to the crowd, explaining his company's policy on recruiting on college campuses.⁴⁸ Soon after, the crowd began to disperse slowly.

Another incident occurred during the day that could have started another violent encounter between the students and the police. Some demonstrators were allowed to enter the Administration Building in order to talk to the Dow interviewer. Also in the building were police officers, who didn't allow anyone but people with "special business" to enter the building, which started some students slamming against the building again. Then a rumor was started that the students inside the building were being locked in by the police. One of the students inside the building tried to tell the other students outside that they weren't

⁴⁷Dr. William J. Dusel, interview with ex-vice president of San Jose State, Saratoga, California, May 25, 1986.

⁴⁸Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 3.

being held forcefully, but didn't succeed. Students began to push against the doors in an effort to break them down, but another student told them that President Clark was coming.⁴⁹ From there, President Clark took care of the situation.

By the end of this demonstration, altogether five people were arrested, including two Hell's Angels members.⁵⁰ The Hell's Angels involvement in the demonstration occurred when six members came on the campus, vowing to do "whatever is necessary" to prevent another riot like the day before's,⁵¹ and started hitting the students with wooden clubs. Charges on the two included disturbing the peace, assault with deadly weapon, and possession of concealed weapon.⁵²

Like the previous riot, there were quite a few students who opposed the demonstrators. During the protest, a student presented President Clark a petition signed in one hour by 500 students who felt that Dow Chemical should be allowed to recruit students at the campus.⁵³ Another petition in support of Dow was signed by more than 1300 students by 4:30 P.M. that same day.⁵⁴ These two petitions already showed that more students supported Dow's recruitment of students on campus than those who opposed Dow. Later, two more petitions for Dow would be signed.

⁴⁹Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 2.

⁵⁰San Jose Mercury, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 1. (microfilm).

⁵¹Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 1.

⁵²San Jose Mercury, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

⁵³San Jose Mercury, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

⁵⁴Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 2.

One petition polled 79% of those signed as favoring Dow's position,⁵⁵ while the other petition polled over 2500 students, about 12% of the student body, as favoring Dow.⁵⁶ Some of the students tried to convince the crowd, while it was still in front of the cafeteria, not to move toward the Administration Building, but obviously failed. On the other hand, SDS members felt that they were too "nice" at the protest, which contradicted their earlier pledge on the night of the first riot to protest non-violently together.⁵⁷

Once again, as with the previous day's riot, Sacramento reacted angrily and firmly to the second day's demonstration. This time, however, Senator Bradley demanded the firing of President Clark, saying:

President Clark is inept and we need some new leadership.

If we can't get someone in there who stands up for law and order, we're going to have continued troubles.⁵⁸

Senator Bradley planned to send the National Guard over to San Jose State if violence broke out again.⁵⁹ Surprisingly, Governor Reagan opposed the senator's demand by responding that "maybe someone should inform Senator Bradley that Dr. Clark was out of the country when the riots broke out."⁶⁰

⁵⁵Spartan Daily, Nov. 29, 1967, p. 1. (microfilm).

⁵⁶Spartan Daily, Nov. 29, 1967, p. 1. (microfilm).

⁵⁷Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 3.

⁵⁸Spartan Daily, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 1.

⁵⁹San Jose Mercury, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 2. (microfilm).

⁶⁰San Jose Mercury, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 1. (microfilm).

The rest of Santa Clara's legislation also opposed Senator Bradley's demand. Later, after having a private meeting with State College Chancellor Glenn S. Dumke in Sacramento, Governor Reagan once again warned that he "would find some way to punish student militants who abuse rules designed to protect academic freedom."⁶¹

Although this protest wasn't as violent as its predecessor, it made and forced the college board to take another look at its policies on company recruiting and law enforcing on campus. While the first riot made the problem known to college administrators, the second demonstration caused the administrators to discuss with the students the policies. These two riots did have an impact on Dow Chemical, however. Chairman of Dow's board of directors Carl A. Gerstacker announced that Dow may quit producing napalm because of the strong opposition they received from the riots at San Jose State and at other college campuses.⁶²

Dow Chemical Company did not end up quitting napalm production during that year. They did, however, stop supplying napalm to the U.S. government in 1970, when the American Electric Company underbid Dow Chemical.⁶³ Although Dow tried to keep away from the controversial and political aspect of being the only napalm supplier during the

⁶¹San Francisco Chronicle, Nov. 22, 1967, pp. 1-2. (microfilm).

⁶²San Jose Mercury, Nov. 26, 1967, p. 3F. (microfilm).

⁶³Richard Long, letter from Dow Chemical, April 1, 1986.

Vietnam War, it became increasingly difficult for them to since they encountered much opposition from all the college campuses that they had visited. To many of the college students, Dow symbolized an enforcer to the war since it produced napalm, a weapon that was seen as the number one killer in the war. These students felt that Dow supported the war in the way that Dow wanted to help the government kill more enemies in Vietnam. Some students also felt that Dow was making a large profit off their napalm production, which was entirely wrong since their profit was only at the most one-half of one percent of total profits.⁶⁴

As mentioned before, Dow encountered much opposition from anti-war groups on campuses all across the United States. Even at Harvard University, where scientists from this college had helped invent napalm, students rioted against Dow Chemical.⁶⁵ At Princeton, a similar situation occurred like that of San Jose State's riots.⁶⁶

All of these riots occurred a year or two before the Tet Offensive of January 1968. Up until this point, there was growing social unrest among the population of the United States. More younger people began to go to the streets to riot and express their feelings toward the war, which they felt no one was hearing, especially the government. Many of them feared that they might have to eventually be forced to fight the war

⁶⁴Don Whitehead, p. 264.

⁶⁵Don Whitehead, pp. 264-265.

⁶⁶Don Whitehead, p. 265.

in Vietnam, and so this acted as an enforcement to protest the war at home. Others felt that it was morally wrong to kill all those innocent Vietnamese men, women, and children that they were seeing on television. The result was massive protests and riots on college campuses everywhere. Some of these protests were peaceful, while others, like San Jose State's first riot, were violent and required police intervention. These students protested against the war itself and anything that appeared to support the war effort. Often these people received misinformation, but as long as it sounded good, they believed it without another thought. Of course, these views were accepted by a pretty small amount of students at first. Later events would eventually convert views about the war to the "other" side.

As escalation of the war in Vietnam occurred, more and more opposition towards the war resulted. People, both young and old, began to realize that this war was not going to be a quick little victory for the Americans. While more young soldiers died in this war, more protests resulted at home. Anti-war riots on college campuses became increasingly violent, the worst one occurring at Kent State, where student deaths actually occurred. Many students wanted America out of Vietnam immediately, but had to wait until 1973, and then saw Communists take over South Vietnam in 1975 despite the tremendous Americans efforts and lives wasted. Of course, probably no one in 1967 could have foreseen this happening to America and Vietnam. All these students at the riots and protests, like those at San Jose State, knew that they didn't like what they saw happening in Vietnam and wanted the American troops out of there, without delay, before anything more could happen. On the contrary, much did happen between 1967 and 1975, and only after the whole affair was over and after 16,000 lives were lost did many Americans realize what a tragic mistake Vietnam was to the United States.

CONCLUSION

The course of events that took place at the two riots or demonstrations at San Jose State College on November 20 and 21 of 1967 similarly occurred on other college campuses across the United States. As war-related companies and groups like the Dow Chemical Company and the R.O.T.C. visited campuses, some type of opposition always seemed to greet them, whether in a peaceful or violent manner. The set of anti-war riots described in this essay is an example of two different types of opposition that the young generation used during this decade, one of them being rather violent and the other being quite peaceful. A police officer, who was a student at San Jose State during the time of the riots, commented that these types of occurrences, the riots, demonstrations, etc., came in cycles in which the young generation learned more and more from each time period.⁶⁷ Whenever the anti-war riots, protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, and teach-ins took place, each were similar in the cause of voicing the participants' impressions towards America's involvement in Vietnam and about "the horror!"⁶⁸ of the war.

⁶⁷Captain Dei Rossi, interview with a police officer, Sunnyvale, California, May 16, 1986.

⁶⁸Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (New York, 1980), p. 147.



THE DOW CHEMICAL COMPANY

2020 Willard H. Dow Center
April 1, 1986

WILLARD H. DOW CENTER
MIDLAND, MICHIGAN 48640

Yuka Nishino
7021 Elmsdale Drive
San Jose, CA 95120

Dear Yuka:

We have not retained extensive files on the college campus disturbances of the late 1960s, but I believe I can help you with some general information.

From 1966 to mid-1970, Dow was the sole supplier of napalm to the Defense Department for use in the Vietnam war. Napalm and Dow became symbols for the anti-war movement, and several hundred protests resulted. We were a convenient target, because our recruiters were making scheduled and publicized visits to the placement centers to interview prospective employees. And, "DOW" fit rather nicely on placards, posters and other methods of visualizing protest.

Some of those demonstrations were peaceful; others were quite violent, with arson, destruction of property, arrests, etc., resulting. On some campuses, students were disciplined for their actions.

Our position at the time was that we were doing our patriotic duty to supply needed war materiel to our troops in Vietnam. We tried to avoid the political question of whether the U.S. belonged in Vietnam. If our elected officials voted to support the war effort, we felt it wasn't our place to make a separate judgment. In the end, it was our dogged determination to meet our commitments that accelerated the pace of protests.

As a new Dow employee at the time, I remember much of the debate over napalm. Some said that dying from napalm was no different from being shot with a rifle or being killed by shrapnel from a hand grenade. That argument didn't hold much water at the time, in part because many of us didn't understand the symbolism involved in napalm.

We ceased to be the sole supplier of napalm in 1970, when American Electric Company underbid us. We were surprised that anyone would want the business, considering all of the grief we had taken over a relatively small contract. At no point did napalm generate more than half of one percent of our profits. We weren't then -- and aren't now -- big in the defense industry.

Yuka Nishino
April 1, 1986
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Napalm was Dow's first encounter with public controversy. We didn't understand the societal upheaval that was going on at the time. Nor, for that matter, did many of the social commentators who were writing on the subject. Many of the young college students of that era, and the journalists who covered the Vietnam story, are influential in their chosen fields today. And, we encounter some lingering hostility from time to time.

I am enclosing pages 261-272 from the most recent edition of Dow's company history for additional information.

I hope this helps you in your project.

Regards,

Rich Long
Richard K. Long
Manager, Corporate Communications

js

Enclosure

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