

Foreword

Most of the time, we historians must go out and find our research materials. But sometimes, the research finds us. Such is how I came to know Doug Weiskopf and the story of the 1970 student strike at Portland State University (PSU).

One morning in 2022, I opened my inbox and undertook what has become a morning ritual for many of us in our digital world: I began aggressively deleting the junk messages that had piled up overnight. One of the emails that I marked for deletion had come from Doug. I marked it for deletion because I'd never met a Doug Weiskopf nor ever heard the name. Right as I was about to hit the little trashcan icon that would've forever deleted his email, I took a chance and opened it. I can't say why.

The email was addressed to several scholars in Oregon, letting us know about a plaque commemorating the 1970 Student Strike that Doug and many of his fellow antiwar activists had gotten successfully installed on PSU's campus.

The email caught my attention for two reasons. The first was that, even though I'm a historian who specializes in the history of the Pacific Northwest and teaches about social movements and the Vietnam War, I knew embarrassingly little about the 1970 PSU student strike. I'd heard of it but knew next to nothing of the details, to say nothing of its larger significance. Doug's email seemed like an opportunity to begin learning more. The second reason was that, at the time, I was working with a talented undergraduate named Sarah Wittmann, who was interested in writing an honors thesis on some aspect of the Vietnam-era antiwar movement, but not sure exactly the story she wanted to tell. I immediately forwarded her Doug's email, with some message to the effect of, "I don't think much has been written about the PSU student strike. Maybe there's a thesis project here?"

Sarah quickly reached out to Doug, and a few weeks later, she and I sat down to speak with him. Of the many oral histories I've conducted over the course of my career, this one stands out as one of the most interesting, revealing, and insightful. Over the course of nearly two hours, Doug painted for us a vivid picture of his upbringing, what brought him to PSU in the late 1960s, the culture of Oregon's antiwar movement, and the drama of the student strike. Immediately after the interview concluded, Sarah and I looked at one another and both said to each other, nearly simultaneously, more people need to know the story that Doug just finished telling. That's because so little has been written about the antiwar movement in Oregon. Instead, scholars have focused their attention on the hotbeds of antiwar activism, places like UC-Berkeley and Columbia. The implication, intended or not, is that what happened here in Oregon during the unrest and tumult of the late-1960s and early-1970s didn't matter. Doug's interview convinced Sarah and I that it certainly did.

Sarah did her part to correct the historical record, ultimately writing an exceptional thesis

about the PSU student strike and using Doug's interview as a major source. That thesis, "The PSU Student Strike: A Legacy of Collaboration and Nonviolent Protest," is available through the University of Oregon's Knight Library, and I highly recommend it as a companion piece to Doug's writing here. I did my more modest part by incorporating a more thorough history of the student strike into my classes on the Vietnam War and American social movement activism.

And now, with his memoir, Doug has done students and scholars a great service by giving us a firsthand account of Oregon's antiwar movement and why it matters—not just in Oregon's history but in the larger history of the Vietnam era antiwar movement, and even, if I'm being bold, in American history.

Several important themes emerge over the course of Doug's story. There's the growing understanding among young people of America's involvement in South East Asia, their growing sense of moral unease about U.S. intervention in Vietnam, their attempts to organize a movement to convince politicians to chart a more ethical course of action, their growing frustration as they were ignored by the country's political leaders, and the strategies and tactics they pursued to make their voices heard. Doug's memoir is also noteworthy because he continues his story well beyond his college years, telling us how the lessons he learned as a student activist at PSU informed a life of activism that continues to this day.

But perhaps, the most important theme in Doug's book is that it highlights his unwavering, life-long commitment to nonviolent resistance. At many points over the course of his life, Doug and his peers could have turned to more violent forms of protest. Indeed, many in the Vietnam era antiwar movement chose that path. Not all, of course. And not even a majority. Nevertheless, it's the stories like the riots in Chicago in 1968, the Weathermen's "Days of Rage" in 1969, and the domestic bombing campaign that they initiated thereafter that looms large in popular memory of the antiwar movement. Doug's story reminds us, however, that many in the antiwar movement remained committed to nonviolence, even when things seemed darkest, even after four antiwar protesters were murdered at Kent State University in the spring of 1970 and many in the antiwar movement decided that the only way to counteract the violence of the state, was with violence of their own.

But not Doug, and not his fellow activists at PSU. His memoir is a lot of things. It's a thoughtful look back on his younger years. It's a window into a time when America's social and political landscapes were radically changing and an investigation into how young people fit into those changes. It's entertaining and moving, at times funny and at other times heartbreaking. But above all else, it's a story about the importance of, if not the necessity of, nonviolent resistance.

As such, I hope his book finds a place on scholars' bookshelves next to the dozens of other memoirs written by antiwar protesters of the Vietnam era, too many of which seek to

excuse or justify the antiwar movement's violent turn. Doug's story provides an important counterweight to these stories, reminding us that many antiwar protesters remained committed to nonviolence well into the 1970s, as it explores the challenges they faced. But more than that, I hope this memoir finds its way into the hands of young activists today. Like college-aged students of Doug's generation, young people today face national and global problems that seem insurmountable. And, again, like young people of Doug's generation, they're too often ignored by politicians and campus administrators. As such, more violent forms of activism may hold some allure for them—in no small part because the violent protesters of the Vietnam era have been so romanticized. But Doug's story helps us understand that, when done right, nonviolent activism could and should hold that same allure.

Make no mistake. As Doug reveals, nonviolent resistance isn't passive. It isn't capitulation. It isn't easy and, indeed, as he shows us, it may be more the more difficult path but, as Doug makes clear, movements for peace and justice must model the sort of world they want to create.

Steven C. Beda

Professor of History
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon
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