

# The Little Generation That Could, and Did

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What happened in 1968 was by all accounts a memorable phenomenon; however why it happened then and there is a rather disputed topic. It was an extraordinary generation of adolescents. They were students who had grown up after World War 2 at a time when America was both prosperous, and relatively stable. They were the sons of hardened G.I.s and many had served in the armed forces themselves. It was also an extraordinary generation of adults, parents, and those in managerial positions such as Grayson Kirk, the president of Columbia at the time. Some were hardened war veterans. They had lived through America's roughest hours and they were, in many cases, finished with excitement in their lives and just seeking stability, something that they had lacked through their adolescence and young adulthood. With these two frames of mind, one seeking stability and the other seeking reform, it was in a way inevitable that something would happen similar to Columbia University in 1968.

*I really did not find my own individuality until 1968. I think that Bernadine Dohrn said it best when she said that "the events of 1968 had implications, not only for the world but for each individual who participated." – Robert Auerbach*

For many of the adolescents who grew up in the 1950's and early 60's, individuality was hard come by. They grew up in tract houses built by Levitt in a pre-planned suburbia where Elm Street looked like Maple Street which in turn resembled Oak Street. They went to large schools where they were forcibly molded to become another generation of America's workforce. One was rewarded for conforming and given heretic status for showing individuality. They were just a broken cog in "The Great American Industrial Machine". Their parents had a strong neurosis with their darling children growing up to be doctors and lawyers. For a while, it was fine; sure there was the Beat Generation but they were small and posed little threat, as long as your own children weren't following their scandalous teachings of homosexuality or committing treason through their poetry. Unfortunately for "The Great American Industrial Machine", cracks began to form more and more often, and the repairmen were having trouble replacing all the broken cogs. Frank da Cruz, a participant of the events of 1968 at Columbia, explains his growth towards individuality:

*I was an Army brat, and then I was in the Army, prior to coming to*

*Columbia. Although I was stationed in Germany, not Viet Nam, I was well aware of the human toll of the Viet Nam war, both on American soldiers and on the Vietnamese people. It was also during my Army tour that the United States invaded the Dominican Republic, which, even at my tender age, really shocked me. It was very clear to me that I was in the Army of the bad guys, not the good guys. – Frank da Cruz*

So began the Anti-American sentiment within American borders. Why?

*Because the country sucked. Everything was going wrong in the country: the way our parents were bringing us up, the lies and deceit of our government, the way the administration handled the entire student body as mere pawns of the military industrial establishment, it all sucked. – Robert Auerbach*

The babies of the mid to late 40's had grown up fast to become discontented with their parents, their opportunities, and their country. The discontentment that had once only been represented only through the art of the beats had gained a new voice, a far more organized and political voice, with a much higher volume.

Luckily for “The Great American Industrial Machine”, a desire for change was not enough to reform a country. The radical youth still lacked the means to exact any reform on American soil. They were still the minority, and they were a minority that had been taught to handle their own disempowerment throughout their childhood. Today at schools there exists the phenomenon of the “Student Council”, where students are deceived and pacified by the sense of achievement they get when their rally to place a frozen yoghurt machine in the cafeteria passes after three long years of campaigning. Maybe if Grayson Kirk, the president of Columbia University, had given them token and irrelevant victories like that frozen yoghurt machine, the students would have never stepped out of line, but he didn't, and they did.

*I was desperately seeking issues to vent my frustration and disempowerment. It really didn't matter what the issue was if it gave me a chance to protest at Columbia and say: “Hey listen to me. I'm a student here. I pay tuition. Hear me and let's have some democracy”. I guess the gym issue was the catalyst for what followed. The protestors went to Morningside Park and tore down the fence. That was right after they were told to leave Low Library where they presented Kirk a petition or something. That just shows what a stupid idiot he was because on one day, a petition was presented and rejected, people were arrested, a fence was torn down in the park where more people were arrested. Still on the same day, the students leave the park and occupy Hamilton Hall. This all happened in a single day. This downward spiral of events, from petition to militancy, was caused by an inept president of the University. As for the Gym in Morningside Park being a*

*worthwhile issue on its own, that's a curly question. Honestly, Morningside Park in the '60s was nothing but a place for junkies to shoot up. It had no environmental value to either Columbia or to the residents of Harlem. It was all just symptomatic of the way that Columbia treated so disdainfully and arrogantly anyone who got in the administration's way. I was really pissed off about the Gym in Morningside Park but do I really feel that it was an issue worthy of occupying buildings? Naa. You're also right that Columbia owned a lot of the property on the upper west side and evicted tenants when they wanted to convert buildings and stuff like that. Again, it was just one issue which, standing alone, probably would not have caused the events of '68. The gym in Morningside Park was just the straw that broke the camel's back. No single issue alone would have supported what happened at Columbia in 1968. They were all symptomatic of an administration that was rotten to the core. – Robert Auerbach*

These issues drew together a very diverse group of people to assemble a force that could compete with the establishments of the Columbia administration, and maybe, just maybe, the American government

*In another way, however, student life WAS at an all time low in 1967-68, with the administration's policy on reporting class rank to the draft board (getting bad grades could get you killed), siding with big business and big government on every issue, and refusing to listen to students about anything. This didn't make students depressed or anything, just angry. – Frank da Cruz*

Indeed, they were quite angry, and “they” quickly became the majority of the students at Columbia University.

*Obviously there were also conservative and/or right-wing students on campus too, and they were fine with all that. They were a minority then. In those days, Columbia was a pretty strange school to choose if you were conservative, puritanical, or racist.  
- Frank da Cruz*

Out of this mass of before-disempowered youth arose leaders, those who felt more strongly about the issues, and those who were most excited about this new found power that they gave each other through unity.

*Mark Rudd had excellent communication skills. That is one of the most important qualities that a revolutionary must have. You could have a lot of people that are great thinkers and have all the answers but if they can't communicate and connect with the crowd, they will not achieve anything for the movement. Mark connected*

*with the crowd. Take my word for it. I was in that crowd.* – Robert Auerbach

But in a way, having set leaders was contradictory to the cause. Personal power was the key.

*The Columbia Rebellion was not led by anybody. The media focused on certain people who could be counted on for colorful sound bites, but the real "business" of the rebellion took place in endless meetings where consensus was reached through open and (perhaps surprisingly) orderly discussion.* – Frank da Cruz

With the numbers, the desire, and the overwhelming unity that the project demanded, the fateful day of April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1968 finally came. A combination of the SDS (Students for Democratic Society) and the SAS (Student African-American Society), as well as students affiliated with neither, marched on Low Library where they were blocked by jocks and Grayson Kirk himself. But they refused to be thwarted there and marched straight down to the gymnasium construction site in Morningside Park. They were met by the 26<sup>th</sup> Precinct of the NYPD. So, they gave up, but only on destroying the gymnasium construction site. They turned around and marched straight back to the sundial, a central location at Columbia University. Then came the decision that undoubtedly changed the course of history.

*Look, one of the most exciting things about the student uprising was that none of us, I repeat none of us, was following any script! This is a lesson in life. Every attempt to repeat an earlier event usually ends in disappointment. Alien 4 is not as good as Alien 3, that sort of thing. We didn't know what we were doing until the moment we did it. We didn't follow any script. Mark Rudd didn't even have a script. He couldn't get into Low library. He probably thought to himself: "Now what do I do with this mob of screaming protestors?" He couldn't just say to them "Well, I will see you all tomorrow". My point is that Mark Rudd had to think fast on his feet without a script. He didn't pull out from his back pocket a plan B or a plan C. The same with the occupation of Hamilton Hall. We didn't have a script, so everything was new, a case of first impression. There is no time to put your feet up on the desk when you're creating history at the same time as you are living it.* - Robert Auerbach

The protestors took control of Hamilton Hall. Now, the students had bargaining power, and between them, in a participatory democracy, they decided what to do with it. It was fun.

*The long hours passed like minutes. We were singing and chanting. We were having alternative classroom discussions. The excitement*

*and electricity in the place was palpable. It was just awesome. It was probably the most exciting thing that happened in my life.*

- Robert Auerbach

*What about the day I was born?*

- Shane Auerbach

*That was less exciting, and the day that you were conceived was a real day of mourning.* - Robert Auerbach

Sure, there were problems: Dean Coleman, debatably, taken as a hostage. Did they have moral grounds to do this within the restrictions of peaceful protest?

*The idea of "legitimate peaceful protest" bears some scrutiny. If it's not peaceful, that doesn't necessarily mean it's not legitimate. You have to remember how many people were dying every day because of us. Peaceful protest had been going on for years to no effect. At some point, human life has got to be more important than etiquette. (This comment is not directed at the Dean Coleman incident, but applies in general. Anyway, did you know that a few years later, Dean Coleman was shot multiple times by a deranged student in the very same office?) – Frank da Cruz*

*In my judgment (long pause) if you didn't harm him and if you kept him for a token amount of time, which was all that he was kept, one day or so, that would not exceed the bounds of passive resistance. We tried to get the administration to hear our complaints and we were rebuffed every step of the way. I don't think this even occurred, but if the students said "Dean you can't leave until you listen to our concerns", I think that would be acceptable. The students generally liked Dean Coleman. He wasn't really the bad guy. – Robert Auerbach*

Or was he even held hostage at all?

*Well this is a debatable point. Some say that he could have left any time that he wished. He wanted to stay and be a martyr. He stayed one night, I recall. Nobody was physically restraining him. On the other hand, I have heard it said that he couldn't leave and that the students were holding him hostage until the 26<sup>th</sup> precinct freed the people that they arrested earlier in the day. I'm inclined to believe the former scenario. You have to understand that this must have been as exciting for the Dean as it was for the students. It was certainly a break from a college Dean's everyday routine! I don't believe that at that early stage in the protest, that he was really handcuffed and tied to a chair and prevented from leaving. I'm*

*inclined to believe that throughout the night there was some really robust debate of the issues with the dean. These were not terrorists. These were just Columbia students from the top of their high school classes. I think that Dean Coleman stayed on his own volition. That is my read of the situation. – Robert Auerbach*

Then came the inevitable division between those that were occupying Hamilton. In the end, participatory democracy could never satisfy all participants

*At the time, it was just how it had to be. You have to remember that Columbia was, for all practical purposes, lily-white until just a couple years before. Black students needed to have their own voice. – Frank da Cruz*

*That more than anything else was what separated me, a suburban weekend protestor, from the Mark Rudds. Honestly, I had lots of difficulty when I woke up the following day trying to understand why all these white guys were leaving Hamilton Hall. It just didn't make sense. It has to do with the evolution of the civil rights movement in the United States. – Robert Auerbach*

But, divided they stood, and the evicted whites marched right on over to occupy other Columbia buildings. For a while, everything was well, and nothing could stop them.

*After the first day, activities grew more structured, and thenceforth the occupation was one long meeting governed by Robert's Rules of Order, interpreted creatively ("point of obfuscation!"), interspersed by housework. Contrary to popular belief and press reports, the President's suite of offices was kept immaculate and orderly after the chaotic first day (e). Cleanup detail included vacuuming, shaking out blankets, scrubbing the bathroom, etc. The administration's fears of vandalism (and their special concern for the Rembrandt hanging above President Kirk's desk) were poorly founded, at least in Low. – Frank da Cruz's website at <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/history/1968.html>*

Except for the police that is.

*Soon axes were crashing through the door, the barricade was breached, and an army of TPF piled in, first prying apart the singing clump of us, then forming a gauntlet to pass our limp bodies down the corridors, whacking our heads with flashlights along the way, and dragging us by the feet down the marble steps so our heads bounced. Superficial head wounds are harmless but they bleed a lot, and journalists got some terrific photos of us on our way to the paddy wagons waiting on College Walk. – Frank*

da Cruz's website at

<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/history/1968.html>

*Oh, it was total injustice; it was probably one of the worst police actions in the annals of New York City's history. There have been some pretty bad police actions in this town too. The 26<sup>th</sup> precinct is still not well liked at Columbia. On that night of the 30<sup>th</sup>, I think it was 2 in the morning, I was sound asleep in McBain Hall which is on 113<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway. The noise and screams from Broadway woke me up. You could hear that something was afoot. You could hear the screams even 3 blocks south of where the buildings were being occupied. People were emptying out of the dormitories onto Broadway. I followed. It was as if an occupying army was taking over the upper west side. There were no police cars, only mounted police officers on huge horses and German Shepherd dogs which were really snarly, very frightening. Nobody would dare step in front of a mounted police officer. That was on Broadway. Meanwhile back on the campus, each individual cop was defining the amount of force necessary to restrain a protestor. They were tough cops from Staten Island and Queens. It was as much a class conflict as anything. Take for example an Irish cop from Staten Island. His son probably wasn't going to college. His son might be learning a trade, to become a carpenter or plumber. He didn't have a lot of money. He must have looked at the long haired protestor with a mixture of loathing and envy. Many of us came from comparatively well off families. From a cop's perspective, we were living the good life, but complaining nonetheless. Many of us were Jewish. You can put the missing pieces together. Let's just say that the chemistry was pretty bad between the cops and the protestors. There was a lot of seething prejudice that was expressed in terms of police brutality the night of the bust. – Robert Auerbach*

That was the end of the occupation, but not the end of the movement. On May 6<sup>th</sup>, Grayson Kirk reopened the university. Many students and faculty boycotted.

*I would guess that the percentage of students that boycotted at the law school was between 3% and 7%. At Columbia College, it might have been 10% to 15% or 10% to 20%. – Robert Auerbach*

Well, maybe not so many, but it was a fun time none-the-less.

*I have to say, it was fun. In the liberation classes, you finally felt as if your college education was confronting the real issues of the world, rather a lot of "irrelevant" abstractions of "old white guy" culture, and it was because of what WE did. The Grateful Dead gave a concert on South Field. A lot of famous visitors came for*

*rallies, speeches, teach-ins, etc. We branched out to other campuses, like CUNY uptown, had big marches all over the place, made lots of noise. For a time, the barrier between Harlem and the Acropolis seemed to melt away. – Frank da Cruz*

Then there was the second occupation, which failed to impress.

*Community issues loomed large -- an apartment building on 114th Street was the scene of a second occupation a couple weeks later, in which several hundred of the newly radicalized onlookers from South Field took part and were promptly arrested (I don't recall exactly what the issue was, but housing has always been a touchy topic at Columbia). On May 22nd, sensing no movement in the administration on the issues of the strike, we went back into Hamilton (déjà vu was the rallying cry). This time the police were summoned onto campus without hesitation, and back we all went to jail (there were 1100 arrests in all). By now it was like commuting. Again, campus erupted after we left -- this time, 15-foot-high barricades were erected at the main gates and set ablaze, windows were smashed, cars crushed, crowds surged back and forth, and many heads were bashed -- most of them attached to innocent bystanders. As in the first bust, the police also did a fair amount of mischief aimed at discrediting the strikers. – Frank da Cruz's website at*

<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/history/1968.html>

Unfortunately for the organizers, nothing could match the original.

*By the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, I was fully ensconced at Columbia law school preparing for end of term exams. The law faculty decided to give us exams, which was a great disappointment. We wanted no exams at all. At least they were going to be on a pass/fail basis. As for the tenement occupation on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, it was a do-over. As I said before, a do-over never has the same impact as the first time. – Robert Auerbach*

Even still, when all was said and done, the radical youth of Columbia University got most of what they wanted.

*At Columbia, classified war research was halted, the gym was canceled, ROTC left campus, military and CIA recruiting stopped, and (not that anybody asked for it) the Senate was established.*

– Frank da Cruz's website at

<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/history/1968.html>

Sadly, all was not won. However much the radicals had hoped that what happened at



Columbia was a microcosm of what would happen in America, and the World, it didn't really turn out that way.

*Robert Kennedy, the antiwar presidential candidate, was killed in June 1968, and later that month the French uprising was "voted away" in a national referendum. Mexican students and supporters were slaughtered wholesale in October, in La Noche de Tlatelolco. Columbia antiwar rallies continued, and large Columbia contingents chartered buses for the huge demonstrations in Washington, of which there were to be far too many -- the war dragged on for another seven years. To this day, I don't know if all the antiwar activities combined had as much affect as the Vietnamese figuring out how to shoot down the American B-52s that were carpet-bombing their cities. – Frank da Cruz's website at <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/history/1968.html>*

Columbia was reformed, that was the key, and all the participants had stories to tell to their families, their children and their grandchildren as well. But most importantly, there were few regrets.

*From time to time over the past 36 years, I have thought back to that eventful year. I've thought how remarkably lucky I was that I didn't take my disempowerment too far, that I didn't get arrested or beat up or something like that. I guess you could say that my over-riding feeling over the last 36 years is that I was pretty lucky that I was able to participate in such an historic event and have it not affect the rest of my life in a negative way. That is very wimpish, I know. – Robert Auerbach*

*I was in it from beginning to end, was arrested twice, charged with multiple felonies, suspended from school for a semester, no regrets.  
- Frank da Cruz*

Ironically, these once-radicals are now the backbone of our society. They are educators, they are voters, they are still activists, or they are not.

*Look at my fellow alumni. Many have gone on to great achievements in life. Virtually all of them have gone mainstream. Of course, the nineties has been the decade noted for greed, selfishness and self-interest. The men and women who graduated with me got caught up in those values just as I did. It was hard to escape them. They all have their quote machines and they look at how their tech stocks are doing on NASDAQ. They've totally lost their protest feeling. – Robert Auerbach*

There are always the incredibles, like the story of Gus Reichbach

*Of all the law school protestors, Gus was the most radical. There was an incident where law students were milling and protesting outside the law school and they were telling the professors not to go in. Curtis Berger, a highly renowned professor said that he was going to go through, that the protest was a lot of crap. There was an engagement between Reichbach and Berger. Gus Reichbach probably cursed at him and told him to fuck off. Hey, these were the times. Curtis Berger looked Gus Reichbach in the eyes and he said "As long as I am alive, you will never become a member of the New York BAR." and Reichbach probably said (and I admit that this story has become somewhat apocryphal over time) "Go fuck yourself". Well, that was in our first year in law school. Getting admitted to the New York BAR is not easy even under the best of circumstances. It is like in a marriage ceremony where they ask whether anyone has any objections. It is the same thing with the New York BAR. Three years later, Curtis Berger submitted a statement explaining why Gus Reichbach should not be admitted. This continued for 3 to 4 more years while Gus tried to get admitted to the BAR. Curtis Berger continued to foil Gus. Finally Gus asked for help from his classmates and a group of them came to his aid. We were now well into the mid 1970's, and they met with Curtis Berger. Finally Gus got admitted. Today Gus is a senior judge of the war crime tribunals in Yugoslavia. I am very proud of him. – Robert Auerbach*

So, how and why did this happen at Columbia? I don't know, maybe it was luck

*I've often thought, why 1968? It is just like those lottery balls where the right numbers come up in the right sequence. They didn't come up in 1958 and they may not come up in 2048. They may not come up in 400 years. But they came up in 1968 because of these historical accidents of so much going on that was wrong. - Robert Auerbach*

Or maybe it wasn't

*I don't see it as luck. We were pushed. We tried and tried to get through to them in polite ways and were rebuffed at every turn. Bad things were happening and Columbia was involved in them or instigating them. You can't just let it go. – Frank da Cruz*

Originally it was important to me to find out exactly why the 60's happened. I guess I gave up. Now, I'd just like to recognize, and I hope the reader recognizes also, that the 60's was "The Little Generation That Could, and did".

## Bibliographical Note:

All information was taken from one of 4 sources:

- 1) An interview with Robert Auerbach
- 2) An interview with Frank da Cruz
- 3) A website created by Frank da Cruz
- 4) John McMillian's "Youth Culture of the 60's Class"

MLA sourcing:

**Auerbach, Robert. Telephone interview. 12 July 2004.**

**da Cruz, Frank. E-mail interview. 20 July 2004.**

**Columbia University Academic Information Systems. Dept. home page. 22 Apr. 2004.**

**Columbia University. 20 July 2004**

<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/history/1968.html>

# Appendix

Including interviews with:

- Robert Auerbach
- Frank da Cruz

*This interview is with Robert Auerbach conducted by Shane Auerbach on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 2004 regarding activism in the 60's at Columbia University. Robert Auerbach, do you consent to the taping and of this interview and it being used at my discretion?*

Yes

*If you'd like to tell me a little bit about your background, I would appreciate it*

Okay. I am 58 years old. I was born on the 20th of December, 1945. The war had already ended by that point. I was born in Texas and within a few months of my birth, my parents moved back to the Bronx. Don't say "Bronx", it is "The Bronx". When my parents saved or borrowed enough money, they bought a tract house in Roslyn, Long Island. The house was a standard Levitt design. It was a typical "little box" that Peter Paul and Mary used to sing about. I'm Jewish and we grew up in the suburbs where everyone hangs out in each other's backyards. There was a path that connected several houses together. Everybody's Dad was an ex G.I. Our parents were filled with incredible optimism about the potential for the United States. It was a pretty exciting time for my parents. Did that make it a good childhood for me? Certainly not, it was a horrible childhood. I have a lot of unhappy memories about conforming and satisfying my parents' expectations. Basically, it was a childhood that I think I share with a lot of suburban Jewish children who grew up at that time. It was based upon conditional love as distinct from unconditional love. If I toed the line and did things that gained my parents appreciation and approval, I was rewarded for it with love. I really did not find my own individuality until 1968. I think that Bernadine Dohrn said it best when she said that "the events of 1968 had implications, not only for the world but for each individual who participated." Those events certainly had that effect upon me. I don't wish to belabor this point. I just want you to know that I felt totally disempowered until 1968. Thanks to Columbia and the events of 1968 I felt empowered for the first time in my life.

*What years did you spend studying at Columbia and towards what degree?*

Right, that is another thing that you should know. The most aggressive student protestors were younger than I. I came to Columbia Law School in September 1967 and I graduated in June 1970. So I came when I was 21 and I left when I was 24. Most of the hard core protestors were college kids, 17, 18 and 19 years old. At 21, I was slightly more what you would call a pre-professional, career-oriented, because I had two or three years head start over everybody else. But I was not part of the "majority coalition", as it was known.

*Before the events that unfolded at Columbia in 1968, a report was given to Grayson Kirk who was the president of Columbia at the time, and it said that student life at Columbia was at an all time low, do you agree with this statement from your experience at Columbia?*

Absolutely! The low morale was in large part due to Grayson Kirk. Student life was at an all time low. People were very unhappy. Consider the context in which we were studying at Columbia. First of all, we, guys, were scared stiff of the draft which now became quite a possibility. By 1968, so many Americans had been killed in Vietnam that they had to go to the colleges to fill the ranks. That was a really worrisome thing: That you could be drafted out of university; and that you could no longer get that deferment. I think we were also still healing from the assassination of President Kennedy 5 years before. I don't think I have a good thing to say about the early part of the 60's. Everything was wrong: the administration was corrupt; the president was leading us in a war that nobody really wanted to fight; and Grayson Kirk, did he really say that, that fuckwit, I can't believe he said that.

*It was an independent report given to Grayson Kirk*

Oh, well Grayson Kirk disregarded it none-the-less. He was the one who made us all feel so disempowered. I don't know Grayson Kirk's exact age but I would say that he was in his early 60's in 1968. I'm sure the guy is dead by now, he would be very old. Grayson Kirk had nothing in common with the students. He was so out of touch with the feelings of the students that it was just unbelievable. He was totally in the pocket of the trustees of the university. The trustees were the pillars of society and very much part of the military industrial complex of the day. Kirk was absolutely clueless as to what was happening right in front of Low Library. It was an administration building, not really a library

*I understand that there were a lot of administrative policies of Columbia University that irritated the student body as a group and you personally, I have four here, and I'm going to read these four and ask you to comment on them and then if you'd like to add to them, you're more than welcome.*

- 1) Columbia owning the area around Columbia and Morningside Park and evicting many minority tenants*
  - 2) Columbia constructing the gymnasium in Morningside Park, allowing African-American access, but only through a back door. They entitled this the Gym Crow Laws.*
  - 3) Columbia's association with Dow Chemicals, who were responsible for making war chemicals such as napalm.*
  - 4) Columbia's releasing of a class rank list so that poor grades would result in being drafted*
- Are there any issues you would like to add to this that were really angering for the Columbia student body?*

I think that once the protest started, amnesty became a big issue. Otherwise, I think you've got them all. When you say Dow Chemical. I would expand that to Columbia's relations with the army, the navy, the intelligence agencies and anyone else connected with the Vietnam War. They were fair game for abuse and protest when they came on campus. Also, let's not forget Columbia's affiliations with the IDA (Institute of Defense Analysis). This was the so called research and education arm of the government. The IDA doled out heaps of grant money to some of the key universities to engage in military related research. The IDA really got up the nose of people who opposed the military. The protesters and anti-war activists wanted Columbia to sever its ties with the IDA.

*On that topic, both president Kirk and trustee Bergman were in positions on the executive committee on the council of IDA.*

Yeah, they weren't just paying \$300 a year for annual membership. These guys were right at the top running the thing. One was the chairman of the bloody thing. It is shocking when you look

back. But look, I'm an old man, let's take one issue at a time or I'll forget them.

*The first is Columbia's landlord role. The second is the gymnasium. The third is the association with Dow and the IDA. The fourth is the publishing of class rank. With these four, and I would add amnesty also, but we'll get to that later. Out of these four, do you think you could rank them as the most troubling personally to you?*

Yeah but I can only speak for myself, obviously. I have to tell you that if a protestor argued about the paint color on the building not being democratic, I probably would have protested that too. What I'm trying to say is that I was desperately seeking issues to vent my frustration and disempowerment. It really didn't matter what the issue was if it gave me a chance to protest at Columbia and say: "Hey listen to me. I'm a student here. I pay tuition. Hear me and let's have some democracy". I guess the gym issue was the catalyst for what followed. The protestors went to Morningside Park and tore down the fence. That was right after they were told to leave Low Library where they presented Kirk a petition or something. That just shows what a stupid idiot he was because on one day, a petition was presented and rejected, people were arrested, a fence was torn down in the park where more people were arrested. Still on the same day, the students leave the park and occupy Hamilton Hall. This all happened in a single day. This downward spiral of events, from petition to militancy, was caused by an inept president of the University. As for the Gym in Morningside Park being a worthwhile issue on its own, that's a curly question. Honestly, Morningside Park in the '60s was nothing but a place for junkies to shoot up. It had no environmental value to either Columbia or to the residents of Harlem. It was all just symptomatic of the way that Columbia treated so disdainfully and arrogantly anyone who got in the administration's way. I was really pissed off about the Gym in Morningside Park but do I really feel that it was an issue worthy of occupying buildings? Naa. You're also right that Columbia owned a lot of the property on the upper west side and evicted tenants when they wanted to convert buildings and stuff like that. Again, it was just one issue which, standing alone, probably would not have caused the events of '68. The gym in Morningside Park was just the straw that broke the camel's back. No single issue alone would have supported what happened at Columbia in 1968. They were all symptomatic of an administration that was rotten to the core. (I'm interested, if I could turn the clock forward to the present, how the hell Columbia is going to pull off this massive land grab north of 125<sup>th</sup> street which will almost double the size of the campus. Are they going to learn any of the lessons of 1968 or are they going to go back to their old ways?) You also mentioned the class ranks that Columbia was going to report. Well, that was really disgusting. We felt that it was a total invasion of privacy. This issue affected me less as a law student. I think that the student deferment only applied to college kids. I was out of college and so, fair game for the draft. As for the IDA, that was a major issue. We got the administration where it hurt most. We were talking to people who were the age of our fathers and these people were not being upfront with us. We caught them in lies and distortions and it was the same type of shit that we got at home. Again, I'm speaking for myself. But the parallels between what my own father would do in response to discussions and arguments and what Grayson Kirk did in explaining Columbia's relationship with IDA, I mean, it was an insult to your intelligence. They were not upfront with students. Their attitude was totally dismissive. That was a really major issue. I think the IDA affiliation was probably the most important issue of the four that you mentioned.

*I'd like to go through some of the events that happened. I'll read through them and you can stop me and either add to or correct me. On April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1968 the SDS and the SAS were united for the first time as they tried to occupy the library. They were met by a few hundred jocks. It's interesting to see that "Jocks" was a popular term used in the 60's; it is always the activists against the Jocks. The protest was about 500 strong. Mark Rudd rallied the group to instead*

*damage the gymnasium because they found that they couldn't get through to the library. Do you agree with this?*

Yes I do agree with this. I have some words to say about the jocks. They pretended to represent the views of the majority of Columbia students but they didn't really. By and large, the small minority of students who supported the administration were either athletes or very right-wing type people.

*Once they got to the park, the 26<sup>th</sup> precinct was quick to impede. Mark Rudd led the group back to the sundial, from which they occupied Columbia buildings. Originally Hamilton*

I think they took a dean hostage that day too...

*They took Dean Coleman hostage but they quickly released him, do you know how long and under what circumstances they held him?*

Well this is a debatable point. Some say that he could have left any time that he wished. He wanted to stay and be a martyr. He stayed one night, I recall. Nobody was physically restraining him. On the other hand, I have heard it said that he couldn't leave and that the students were holding him hostage until the 26<sup>th</sup> precinct freed the people that they arrested earlier in the day. I'm inclined to believe the former scenario. You have to understand that this must have been as exciting for the Dean as it was for the students. It was certainly a break from a college Dean's everyday routine! I don't believe that at that early stage in the protest, that he was really handcuffed and tied to a chair and prevented from leaving. I'm inclined to believe that throughout the night there was some really robust debate of the issues with the dean. These were not terrorists. These were just Columbia students from the top of their high school classes. I think that Dean Coleman stayed on his own volition. That is my read of the situation.

*Where were you at the time? You were not occupying the building at the time were you?*

Well, actually, Morningside Park is a block away from the law school which is on 116<sup>th</sup> and Amsterdam. I didn't have a class that afternoon so, yes, I was at the demonstration with Mark Rudd. I wasn't at the earlier one at Low Library. I had class then. I was there when the fence was torn down. I did march back and into Hamilton Hall, but I didn't stay. It was like a free for all. It was very exciting to be a participant.

*With the hostage situation, I understand that you think he stayed on his own free will. But if, he was a hostage in the more traditional sense as in he was forced to stay, would you approve of that as a valid tactic to create political change?*

Oh, son, you are now asking this very complicated question about the bounds of passive resistance. When does passive resistance become more than that. In my judgment (long pause) if you didn't harm him and if you kept him for a token amount of time, which was all that he was kept, one day or so, that would not exceed the bounds of passive resistance. We tried to get the administration to hear our complaints and we were rebuffed every step of the way. I don't think this even occurred, but if the students said "Dean you can't leave until you listen to our concerns", I think that would be acceptable. The students generally liked Dean Coleman. He wasn't really the bad guy. So in answer to your question, yes, I think it was a valid tactic. I know you're going to gradually raise the heat and mention progressively more militant tactics until I surrender and say it was wrong but you haven't reached that point yet.

*Do you believe that the SAS members were both far more serious and better trained to occupy buildings?*

(Long pause) No...

*Do you believe that evicting white students from Hamilton was just?*

That more than anything else was what separated me, a suburban weekend protestor, from the Mark Rudds. Honestly, I had lots of difficulty when I woke up the following day trying to understand why all these white guys were leaving Hamilton Hall. It just didn't make sense. It has to do with the evolution of the civil rights movement in the United States. I mean it started in the 1950's with Rosa Parks. It was all passive resistance under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr., who died just a few weeks before the Columbia protests. I didn't mention that before, but King's assassination definitely affected people. Anyway, back to the civil rights movement. It was all passive resistance under Martin Luther King. At University of Pittsburgh, many of my classmates went on freedom rides. They took freedom buses down to Selma Alabama. I wasn't involved personally but my best friend went down to Selma as a freedom rider. The civil rights movement was very inclusive. The blacks and whites all joined together. We held hands. We sang songs: "We shall overcome". It was just wonderful. It was my ideal vision of how people, regardless of color, should interact with each other. Sadly that all changed by the late 60s and the changes gained momentum after King's death. I'm not a civil rights historian so don't take this as the gospel. But when guys like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael came to power, these were urban northern blacks. They were very unsatisfied with the pace of the movement. They thought it should go quicker and they felt that Reverend Abernathy and King. were wimps. So, they decided that the only way to gain true equality was through militancy not through passive resistance.

*And this is essentially what happened in Hamilton Hall?*

Yes. I think so. I wasn't privy to the all night debate in Hamilton Hall. Presumably, the blacks must have said: "This is going to be the black building. You (whites) find your own building to occupy". At that point, even though I remained a strong supporter of the student protest, I kind of parted company with the Hamilton Hall black power crowd. It was rumored that if the blacks were evicted, everyone from Harlem would come up and burn the university to the ground. Some of these rumors may have been planted by the administration so you have to be very careful. There was a lot of spin going on. It was rumored that there were guns in Hamilton Hall. Basically, I couldn't understand why black people would want to get rid of the white people. I mean we were all fellow students, fellow activists. It just went against my grain, and I think it went against the grain of a lot of Northern white Jewish suburban type people and our view of the world.

*The SDS then marched over to Low Library and occupied it while also taking control of Kirk's office. To the best of your knowledge, what did they find in Kirk's office?*

That is a good question. They rifled through his files. The students were looking for a smoking gun. They didn't find the gun, but they found the smoke.....reportedly.

*Well even if they had found the gun, selling it to the media would have been a very different story, with Sulzberger close with NY Times.*

That's right. The protesters got more sympathetic coverage from the other New York City



newspapers.

*Coincidentally, I talk to you now from Sulzberger Hall at Barnard College.*

That is a laugh. But you know Mark Rudd might say that they found a lot of evidence and just couldn't get it published.

*Well, some of the stuff I heard of was cigars and pornographic magazines as well as correspondence with the IDA and Dow Chemicals.*

Yeah, but Shane, I have to stop you there and just ask you not to come into my office and rifle through my files. Don't look on my computer either. You might find porn or other stuff that I wouldn't want you, my son, to see. If you are looking where you shouldn't be looking, you may find stuff that you shouldn't see. That applies to your Dad as much as it applies to Grayson Kirk or yourself. We are all human beings and entitled to our privacy. Just because I'm 58 years old doesn't mean that you should put me on a pedestal, nor should we put Grayson Kirk on a pedestal. We're just human beings.

*Over the next week students occupied Fayerweather, Mathematics, Avery as well as Low Library and Hamilton Hall. You never participated in an occupation of one of these buildings besides when you went into Hamilton. How long did you spend in Hamilton?*

Oh, just a couple of hours, Shane, that is the honest truth. I tend to exaggerate and say I stayed all night but after the first day things became very structured. There were rings of people surrounding these buildings, like the jocks, the moral coalition, whatever. You even had a ring of faculty to keep the jocks away from the protestors. It wasn't easy to gain access to these buildings. You just couldn't come and go as you pleased. That is why food had to be thrown in.

*To the best of your knowledge, with the two hours you spent in Hamilton, and you probably followed events closely enough even when you weren't in the building, what was the mood like in the building and how did they pass the long hours?*

The long hours passed like minutes. We were singing and chanting. We were having alternative classroom discussions. The excitement and electricity in the place was palpable. It was just awesome. It was probably the most exciting thing that happened in my life.

*What about the day I was born?*

That was less exciting, and the day that you were conceived was a real day of mourning.

*Do you believe it was fool-hardy that they occupied the buildings or do you think it was justified?*

Look, one of the most exciting things about the student uprising was that none of us, I repeat none of us, was following any script! This is a lesson in life. Every attempt to repeat an earlier event usually ends in disappointment. Alien 4 is not as good as Alien 3, that sort of thing. We didn't know what we were doing until the moment we did it. We didn't follow any script. Mark Rudd didn't even have a script. He couldn't get into Low library. He probably thought to himself: "Now what do I do with this mob of screaming protestors?" He couldn't just say to them "Well, I will see you all tomorrow". My point is that Mark Rudd had to think fast on his feet without a script. He didn't pull out from his back pocket a plan B or a plan C. The same with the occupation of Hamilton Hall. We didn't have a script, so everything was new, a case of first impression.

There is no time to put your feet up on the desk when you're creating history at the same time as you are living it.

*This situation is very comparable to what happened at Berkeley, would you not agree?*

Well, I love Berkeley, and I wish you would consider it for yourself. It is such a kick ass school. It is better than Stanford. Berkeley is where the free speech movement took root. Berkeley was the breeding ground for what later happened at Columbia.

*The circumstances were very similar though. There is really a formula for how activism happens. Was there a true clarity as to what issues led to the occupation of the buildings?*

Yes, there was a true clarity. Don't try to entrap your father. The media was grasping for stories to explain what was happening and why. The protestors even had a steering committee, an ad-hoc democratic process of sorts. The people who were occupying the buildings knew too well that they had to come out with policy statements. They had to come up with some pretty cogent explanations for what they were doing. They came out with very clear position papers explaining why they were doing what they were doing and what redresses had to be made to stop them from doing it. There was no confusion. If Grayson Kirk didn't get the message then it was because he had Alzheimer's or something. It wasn't because the students weren't communicating the message.

*Then on April 30<sup>th</sup>, Kirk ordered the police to forcibly remove the protestors from the buildings and in the process over 700 were arrested, almost 150 were injured by police violence, and there were just under 400 complaints filed of police brutality. Many of those arrested were not participating in the occupation, they were just watching from South Lawn, would you say there was a lot of injustice in the way the police handled it?*

Oh, it was total injustice; it was probably one of the worst police actions in the annals of New York City's history. There have been some pretty bad police actions in this town too. The 26<sup>th</sup> precinct is still not well liked at Columbia. On that night of the 30<sup>th</sup>, I think it was 2 in the morning, I was sound asleep in McBain Hall which is on 113<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway. The noise and screams from Broadway woke me up. You could hear that something was afoot. You could hear the screams even 3 blocks south of where the buildings were being occupied. People were emptying out of the dormitories onto Broadway. I followed. It was as if an occupying army was taking over the upper west side. There were no police cars, only mounted police officers on huge horses and German Shepherd dogs which were really snarly, very frightening. Nobody would dare step in front of a mounted police officer. That was on Broadway. Meanwhile back on the campus, each individual cop was defining the amount of force necessary to restrain a protestor. They were tough cops from Staten Island and Queens. It was as much a class conflict as anything. Take for example an Irish cop from Staten Island. His son probably wasn't going to college. His son might be learning a trade, to become a carpenter or plumber. He didn't have a lot of money. He must have looked at the long haired protestor with a mixture of loathing and envy. Many of us came from comparatively well off families. From a cop's perspective, we were living the good life, but complaining nonetheless. Many of us were Jewish. You can put the missing pieces together. Let's just say that the chemistry was pretty bad between the cops and the protestors. There was a lot of seething prejudice that was expressed in terms of police brutality the night of the bust.

*For the record, when Robert Auerbach says a German shepherd is snarly, he means it as he is possibly the most avid dog lover in the southern hemisphere.*

That's a fact. When I go down to Foodtown in Browns Bay, the dogs are all tied up in front of the store. The dogs all stand in line as I pet each one individually, every time I go there. It's the best part of supermarket shopping.

*When the university reopened on May 6<sup>th</sup>, many students and faculty boycotted the classes, was this prevalent in the graduate school also, did you boycott your classes?*

The strike kind of fizzled. Nobody called an end to the strike. To strike or not to strike was a personal decision for each individual student to make. Gradually people started going back to school. The first few days in the law school were devoted not to classes but to discussions of the preceding days' events and their implications. So they kind of teased us back to school: "Come on back to school. We're talking about interesting stuff. You'll feel comfortable here."

*How many days did you cut class, personally?*

Three days.

*To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of students boycotted at all?*

I would guess that the percentage of students that boycotted at the law school was between 3% and 7%. At Columbia College, it might have been 10% to 15% or 10% to 20%.

*What percentage of faculty boycotted?*

I don't think that many teachers continued to boycott classes, although there were some.

*Did you attend alternative classes on South Lawn while the boycott was imposed?*

I attended them. They were kind of drop in/drop out sessions where no-one was taking attendance. I attended classes that interested me. Some of the classes were just a little over the top. I also looked for a pretty Barnard girl to sit next to. I mean people attended these classes for all different sorts of reasons.

*Did these meetings have any educational value or were they just platforms for dogma and propaganda?*

I would say they were ninety percent dogma and propaganda and 10 percent educational. Many of the people who conducted these alternative classes didn't really know how to teach. They didn't work from a curriculum. They just used the meetings as a platform to espouse their left wing ideologies. That is not to say that no learning occurred. A common refrain was: If you don't believe me, read this book by so and so. I might be sufficiently motivated to go to the book store and buy the book. So it wasn't a complete waste of time

*Did you attend the free concert of The Grateful Dead?*

You bet I did. It was great!

*Are you a dead head?*

I might have been I guess. The music of the 60's was just awesome, particularly with the Beatles

and wave after wave of other great groups.

*What was the general feeling on campus during this period, during the boycott?*

There was no celebration as there might be at the ending of something. Spring arrived. There was graduation. People walked out of the graduation ceremony. I would say that the feelings were mixed. For many of us, it was an anti-climax, coming after the intense excitement of that 3 week period. Things returned to normal. Each of us had to confront the same personal issues that existed before the protest. It was hard to do. I guess we felt some satisfaction in getting the administration to acknowledge their ties with IDA and to sever them. A lot of damage was done to the university, which was in the midst of a big fundraising campaign. It's hard to raise money when students are occupying campus buildings. I don't think Columbia operated in a budget surplus until the end of the 1970s. It was really a devastating period for the university.

*Do you feel as an activist that you really achieved something?*

That is a good question. Let me think about that (long pause). The answer is a qualified yes. Columbia was definitely a different place after the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1968. I mean Grayson Kirk had to go as well as that guy Truman. I feel that we accomplished heaps at Columbia. On the other hand, the war in Vietnam raged on and the wider issues of society were just as bad as ever.

*On May 17<sup>th</sup> the strike ended as Columbia students and community groups occupied a lower-income Columbia community that had been marked for destruction. Do you think that this occupation was successful?*

Wasn't it true that they were arrested?

*Within hours of its commencement*

By the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, I was fully ensconced at Columbia law school preparing for end of term exams. The law faculty decided to give us exams, which was a great disappointment. We wanted no exams at all. At least they were going to be on a pass/fail basis. As for the tenement occupation on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, it was a do-over. As I said before, a do-over never has the same impact as the first time.

*Do you think that the police had become savvier in dealing with the Columbia activists?*

Absolutely, I think they were really dressed down by the commissioner because of their conduct during the bust. Of course getting rid of a dozen or so protestors in one tenement is a much easier police action than dealing with thousands of angry students in the middle of the night.

*Then the school took disciplinary action on the strike leaders*

After all is said and done, nobody really got expelled, at least not to my knowledge. I do have one story about Gus Reichbach to tell you. Also, there's this other guy, you could go across the street right now and meet him. He works for the library at Columbia. He has written the definitive history of the revolt of 1968. If you can't get Mark Rudd for an interview, maybe you should try him. But I must tell you this story of Gus Reichbach. Gus Reichbach was in my class and he was a great guy. Without a doubt Gus was the most radical of any student in the law school.

*Was Mark Rudd in the Law school?*

No

*Who was more radical, Mark Rudd or Gus Reichbach?*

Mark Rudd was. Of all the law school protestors, Gus was the most radical. There was an incident where law students were milling and protesting outside the law school and they were telling the professors not to go in. Curtis Berger, a highly renowned professor said that he was going to go through, that the protest was a lot of crap. There was an engagement between Reichbach and Berger. Gus Reichbach probably cursed at him and told him to fuck off. Hey, these were the times. Curtis Berger looked Gus Reichbach in the eyes and he said “As long as I am alive, you will never become a member of the New York BAR.” and Reichbach probably said (and I admit that this story has become somewhat apocryphal over time) “Go fuck yourself”. Well, that was in our first year in law school. Getting admitted to the New York BAR is not easy even under the best of circumstances. It is like in a marriage ceremony where they ask whether anyone has any objections. It is the same thing with the New York BAR. Three years later, Curtis Berger submitted a statement explaining why Gus Reichbach should not be admitted. This continued for 3 to 4 more years while Gus tried to get admitted to the BAR. Curtis Berger continued to foil Gus. Finally Gus asked for help from his classmates and a group of them came to his aid. We were now well into the mid 1970’s, and they met with Curtis Berger. Finally Gus got admitted. Today Gus is a senior judge of the war crime tribunals in Yugoslavia. I am very proud of him.

*When the police took the students out of Hamilton Hall, the second time, they were faced with a much more militant group, 17 police were injured. Do you believe that a more militant approach was an intelligent step for the activists to make?*

The script had already been written and people were just re-enacting it, and they were messing it up.

*On June 4<sup>th</sup>, graduation day, several hundred seniors walked out of the graduation ceremony and held what they called a counter-commencement. Do you think that this was an effective symbolic gesture?*

Yes I did. I think that everyone would agree, even the Jocks. Walking out of an event is a traditional form of protest. It is an effective symbolic gesture.

*Who was the spiritual leader of the Columbia Rebellion?*

Mark Rudd

*What was your opinion of him?*

I had a very positive opinion of Mark during his time at Columbia. I lost touch with him after he left Columbia and I would certainly disassociate myself from his more radical acts post-Columbia.

*What is your response to people who think he is obnoxious?*

(long pause) That is just a put down. I don’t know why anyone would say that about him. Mark Rudd had excellent communication skills. That is one of the most important qualities that a

revolutionary must have. You could have a lot of people that are great thinkers and have all the answers but if they can't communicate and connect with the crowd, they will not achieve anything for the movement. Mark connected with the crowd. Take my word for it. I was in that crowd. I don't think that Mark was a megalomaniac. He never demanded absolute power and control. The protest was effective because of the steering committee and the quasi-democratic institution that was created. Mark didn't say "hey this is my movement, bugger off". He basically ceded power to a democratic body but remained one of its spokesmen. So I think he deserves a lot of respect.

*Was he smart? Was he charismatic? Was he truly passionate about the cause, or just protesting for protest sakes?*

Yes, Yes, and he must have been truly passionate about the cause.

*Were you truly passionate about the cause? How much of it was sitting next to that pretty girl from Barnard and how much of it was that you were truly passionate?*

Look. You may see this as weakness in me. I don't deny it. First of all, I was older than the average protestor. I had already graduated from college and was career oriented. You might say I was pre-professional. It didn't take much convincing to protest because I still felt disempowered in other aspects of my life. But really, to have an effective movement you need two things: charismatic leaders, and followers. Don't think any less of me, but I was in every sense a follower.

*If not for leaders like Mark Rudd and Gus Reichbach, would you have initiated your own act of rebellion?*

No. By the age of 21, I had pretty well hung up my protest shoes. I was pretty much out of that.

*Do you think most of the activists were like you or were most like Mark Rudd?*

I think that they were mostly like me. Look at my fellow alumni. Many have gone on to great achievements in life. Virtually all of them have gone mainstream. Of course, the nineties has been the decade noted for greed, selfishness and self-interest. The men and women who graduated with me got caught up in those values just as I did. It was hard to escape them. They all have their quote machines and they look at how their tech stocks are doing on NASDAQ. They've totally lost their protest feeling.

*How did your views differ from other activists?*

My views differed most on the black issue. I just had a lot of difficulty understanding where these urban blacks were coming from with their Black Power movement.

*So your gripe was with black militancy, not with black civil rights?*

That's right. I was very pro black civil rights of the Martin Luther King type, the inclusive, the "we shall overcome", the hand holding and the voter registration. It was the black militancy where I parted company.

*Was there a large scope of opinions that were argued within the group or were they fundamentally united?*

The group argued endlessly about tactics and strategies, but there was near unanimous agreement about the goals. That's why the protest succeeded where others fizzled out.

*Was the majority of the school supporting the activism?*

I believe that the polls of the day showed that the majority, perhaps around 65%, supported the protest.

*With the benefit of hindsight, what role would you have liked to play in the Columbia protest of 1968? Do you have any regrets about what you did do or what you didn't do?*

Let me reflect on that question for a moment. (Pause) From time to time over the past 36 years, I have thought back to that eventful year. I've thought how remarkably lucky I was that I didn't take my disempowerment too far, that I didn't get arrested or beat up or something like that. I guess you could say that my over-riding feeling over the last 36 years is that I was pretty lucky that I was able to participate in such an historic event and have it not affect the rest of my life in a negative way. That is very wimpish, I know

*It's honest though. I have whole list of events that happened in 1968. First of all, it was the election year when Lyndon Johnson withdrew, there was the riot in Chicago. There were the two assassinations of both Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy. There was the Weatherman's "Days of Rage" campaign busting windows all over the place. Nixon was running for president on the policy that he would bring "law and order" back to the U.S. There was the Tet offensive in Vietnam which showed the strength of the Vietnamese military. There was the Mei Lai Massacre; however that was not revealed until later. Also with the rise of black militancy and the decline of Martin Luther King Jr.'s non-violent campaigns. With all of this, would you say that 1968 was the apex of 1960's activism?*

Yes definitely. So much happened in 1968. It was like...each day brought a new development. I remember fully the Democratic Convention. We were all in favor of this candidate, Gene McCarthy, but he was pipped by Hubert Humphrey.

*Were drugs prominent in 1968?*

If you are suggesting that drugs were in some way fueling the protest, that's rubbish. The drugs then and the drugs today are not responsible for historical events. I smoked pot at Columbia and it was quite prevalent....but I didn't inhale!

*Were drugs such as LSD and Acid prevalent at Columbia?*

No, not at all. The dangers of LSD and Acid were well known by then and people were very reluctant to use them.

*These questions, I would like two answers from you. I will read a statement to you and I want you to say whether you agree now, and whether you would have agreed at the time?*

Okay.

*As the racial crisis deepens, so will the campus crisis.*

Yes, and Yes.

*The student protest is not just an offshoot of the black protest; it is based on authentic opposition to the middle class world of manipulation, channeling and careerism.*

Yes plus, yes plus.

*The students are in opposition to the fundamental institutions of society.*

That is outrageous. It just makes me want to piss into the phone. No, and No.

*Columbia opened a new tactical stage in the resistance movement.*

At the time I thought it did, but not now.

*The students had fun, they sang, and danced, and wise cracked, but there was continual tension.*

Yes and Yes.

*There was no question of their constant awareness of the seriousness of their actions.*

Looking back, I doubt that the protestors had a constant awareness of the seriousness of our actions. Perhaps some did. As I said before, the actions was completely unscripted.

*The Columbia students were taking an internationalist and revolutionary view of themselves in opposition to the imperialism of the very institutions in which they have been groomed and educated.*

Yes and Yes. These people were on the phone to Mexico and Paris. It was an international student movement. Prague followed shortly afterwards.

*The demands of Black students for cultural recognition rather than paternalistic tolerance and radical white students' awareness of the sinister para-military activities, carried on in secret by the faculty on many campuses, are hardly confined to Columbia.*

Yes and Yes.

*Columbia's problem is America's problem in miniature.*

Columbia was a microcosm. Yes, it was all about empowerment.

*Support from outside the university communities can be counted on in many large cities.*

Yes but support from without is neither as reliable nor effective as support from within.

*A crisis is foreseeable that will be too massive for police to contain; it can happen.*

I don't think I ever believed that. If you have a 5 alarm fire, you bring in more fire trucks. The police could have brought in the National Guard. I never had the feeling that we were too big to fail.



*All of those quotes were from one activist. Can you guess who it was?*

Mark Rudd?

*No, it was Tom Hayden.*

Truly? He married Jane Fonda.

*Continuing, striking students are responding to the totality of the conditions of our society, not just one small part of it. And I'm guessing your answer is yes, yes*

That it is, yes, yes.

*We see our task, first as identifying for ourselves the nature of our society – who controls it, and for what ends – and secondly developing ways in which to transform it .*

That sounds like Bernadine Dohrn.

*I'm not sure about that, it may well be.*

The thing about Columbia is that it wasn't just external, it was internal, Things were going on in each one of us as human beings at the same time as things were going on collectively.

*The last statement: Only through struggle can we create a free human society.*

That's absolutely correct. Everything in life is a struggle. You have to struggle. Get used to it.

*Would you like to say any last words?*

My closing.....

*If you are going to do a closing, tell me why activism was so prevalent in Columbia in the 60's*

Because the country sucked. Everything was going wrong in the country: the way our parents were bringing us up, the lies and deceit of our government, the way the administration handled the entire student body as mere pawns of the military industrial establishment, it all sucked. I've often thought, why 1968? It is just like those lottery balls where the right numbers come up in the right sequence. They didn't come up in 1958 and they may not come up in 2048. They may not come up in 400 years. But they came up in 1968 because of these historical accidents of so much going on that was wrong....the assassination of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King, the loss of leadership. Lyndon Johnson was just a total buffoon. It all sprang from individuals. The way we were brought up as the post war baby boom and the way our parents treated us and their perspective on life. I mean you could almost give a psycho-analytical analysis to 1968, as much as you could a political one. For me, it was the first time in my life that I felt truly empowered, from my parents, from the government, from the administration. It just felt wonderful. Sadly, I've slipped back as I've grown older. But I will always remember 1968 as the year I became empowered. All people should feel empowered. I'll leave it at that.

## Interview with Frank da Cruz

Frank da Cruz  
Shane Auerbach

*I'm studying the events on a personal level rather than an overview type paper that would be very factual. I'm trying to investigate why it happened then and there at Columbia. Right now, I think the recipe I have is:*

- 1) *Thousands of disempowered youth*
- 2) *One out of touch university president*

The entire administration was out of touch.

- 3) *Many issues which individually would be insignificant*

The war in Viet Nam and our relations with Harlem, as symbolized by the Gym.

- 4) *A lot of luck*

I don't see it as luck. We were pushed. We tried and tried to get through to them in polite ways and were rebuffed at every turn. Bad things were happening and Columbia was involved in them or instigating them. You can't just let it go.

*So if you could help me answer that question, or give me your opinion on it, I'd appreciate it. Thanks so much for helping me with this, I really am grateful.*

OK, here goes.

*Do you have any objections to me using the contents of this interview in an essay on the subject?*

No objections. I'd like to see a copy when you're finished.

*Can you give me a background of your childhood and adolescence, focusing on any aspect of the two that may have contributed to your later actions? An over-controlling father maybe? Something to that effect.*

I was an Army brat, and then I was in the Army, prior to coming to Columbia. Although I was stationed in Germany, not Viet Nam, I was well aware of the human toll of the Viet Nam war, both on American soldiers and on the Vietnamese people. It was also during my Army tour that the United States invaded the Dominican Republic, which, even at my tender age, really shocked me. It was very clear to me that I was in the Army of the bad guys, not the good guys.

Unlike now, every male 18-26 was either in the Army or struggling to stay out of it, and had many friends who were drafted after high school and sent to Viet Nam. By 1968, the war had been going full blast for several years, so most of us had friends who had already come back completely screwed up, disillusioned if not psychotic. And then there were the ones who did not come back.

The same thing is happening now, of course, but we don't notice quite so much because the kind of people who go to war are no longer the same kind of people who go to Columbia.

*What years did you spend studying at Columbia and towards what degree?*

1966-70, BS or BA (I forget which) from GS.  
1972-77, MA, SEAS.

Worked my way through both degrees, with some small assistance from the GI Bill.

*Before the events that unfolded at Columbia in 1968, a report was given to Grayson Kirk who was the president of Columbia at the time, and it said that student life at Columbia was at an all time low, do you agree with this statement from your experience at Columbia?*

Not me, I thought it was great. Not so much because of Columbia but because we were in the City and could go to the Apollo theater every weekend and see all the great names from Motown, Stax, etc. Also because in those days, every student could afford an apartment. Heck, I was paying 35 dollars a month. The Black liberation movement was in progress, the Young Lords, etc. Most (or at least a LOT of) Columbia students were involved in community action projects, and there was constant antiwar activity. It was a really exciting time. Well, that sounds airheaded, given the horrible stuff that was happening, but compared to now when horrible stuff still happens and nobody lifts a finger, it was exciting because we felt like we could have an effect. Also I have to say that there were a lot of socially conscious faculty, including many Marxists. I know there are still some socially conscious faculty (some of them veterans of 1968) but most students today think they are some kind of throwback.

In another way, however, student life WAS at an all time low in 1967-68, what with the administration's policy on reporting class rank to the draft board (getting bad grades could get you killed), siding with big business and big government on every issue, and refusing to listen to students about anything. This didn't make students depressed or anything, just angry.

Obviously there were also conservative and/or right-wing students on campus too, and they were fine with all that. They were a minority then. In those days, Columbia was a pretty strange school to choose if you were conservative, puritanical, or racist.

*When they took Dean Coleman hostage but they quickly released him, do*

*you know how long and under what circumstances they held him? Do you believe that this was justified or outside the realm of legitimate peaceful protest?*

I was there, right outside his office in the Hamilton lobby, I remember him being locked in, but I didn't know much about the circumstances. But see my web page, the comment from Ed Kent about this, to the effect that it was all staged:

<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/history/1968.html#kent>

I left Hamilton before Dean Coleman did, so I have no first-hand information about how he got out.

The idea of "legitimate peaceful protest" bears some scrutiny. If it's not peaceful, that doesn't necessarily mean it's not legitimate. You have to remember how many people were dying every day because of us. Peaceful protest had been going on for years to no effect. At some point, human life has got to be more important than etiquette. (This comment is not directed at the Dean Coleman incident, but applies in general. Anyway, did you know that a few years later, Dean Coleman was shot multiple times by a deranged student in the very same office?)

*Were you involved in the occupation of any buildings? If so, can you describe your experience? if not, can you explain where you were and how the building occupations effected you, if at all.*

This is the topic of my web page:

<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/history/1968.html>

*Do you believe that evicting white students from Hamilton was just?*

At the time, it was just how it had to be. You have to remember that Columbia was, for all practical purposes, lily-white until just a couple years before. Black students needed to have their own voice.

*Can you give an approximation as to what the mood was like within the occupied buildings?*

See my Web page.

*When students began to boycott the classes, what percentage of students boycotted? And faculty?*

No direct knowledge; I don't think anybody knows. Note that:

Most buildings were blocked by militant picket lines that few would cross. Some professors conducted classes in their apartments. Some professors conducted classes on the lawn; some of these were "liberation classes", others were regular classes --

you couldn't always tell by looking.

*What was the general feeling on campus during this period, during the boycott?*

I have to say, it was fun. In the liberation classes, you finally felt as if your college education was confronting the real issues of the world, rather a lot of "irrelevant" abstractions of "old white guy" culture, and it was because of what WE did. The Grateful Dead gave a concert on South Field. A lot of famous visitors came for rallies, speeches, teach-ins, etc. We branched out to other campuses, like CUNY uptown, had big marches all over the place, made lots of noise. For a time, the barrier between Harlem and the Acropolis seemed to melt away.

*Who was the spiritual leader of the Columbia Rebellion? What was your opinion of him/her?*

The Columbia Rebellion was not led by anybody. The media focused on certain people who could be counted on for colorful sound bites, but the real "business" of the rebellion took place in endless meetings where consensus was reached through open and (perhaps surprisingly) orderly discussion. There was a Strike Coordinating Committee, in which representatives of each occupied building formulated "policy" based on decisions made in each building with, I suppose, some leeway for settling disputes. I wasn't on the committee so I don't know exactly how it worked.

Spiritually, perhaps Malcolm X, Dr. King, Angela Davis, the Panthers, the Young Lords.

*With the benefit of hindsight, what role would you have liked to play in the Columbia protest of 1968? Do you have any regrets about what you did do or what you didn't do?*

I was in it from beginning to end, was arrested twice, charged with multiple felonies, suspended from school for a semester, no regrets. Columbia wasn't exactly "fixed" (the Senate was not OUR idea) but at least now it was facing reality, and we moved on to confront the government more directly in a variety of ways ranging from peace candidates, to huge demonstrations and strikes, to various forms of direct action.

You can read my 1968 epilog here:

[http://c250.columbia.edu/c250\\_perspectives/write\\_history/282.html](http://c250.columbia.edu/c250_perspectives/write_history/282.html)

And I highly recommend Mark Naison's book, *White Boy* (see References at the end of my web page).

- Frank