The 1969 ROTC Demonstration Which Would Become Known as The Chapel Incident: Vietnam Protests, ROTC, and the St. Joan of Arc Chapel

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Introduction

A paper telling a story rooted in research from the Marquette archives felt like a tall order in January. Naturally, there is a finite number of topics from which to choose in a finite selection of archival resources. I began my search for a topic by deciding I would pursue a topic no one had written about before. Between readings on colonial colleges and student development theory, I scrolled the online index of archival materials. I stumbled on a listing for The Chapel Incident of 1969. A folder with a title like that would of course capture my interest.

For my first day in the archives, I selected an almost random selection of materials to explore. When I reached the folder marked "chapel incident," my interest reached new heights. The first folder I read was in the Vice President for Finances box. Almost as much as the incident itself, the organization of archival material fascinated me and the challenge of finding a single incident documented from multiple perspectives began to make this paper feel like a treasure hunt.

In this paper I will set the scene of 1968-1969 on the national, local, and Marquette stages. I will explore what became known in the archives and administrative correspondence as The Chapel Incident of 1969.

Chicago Democratic National Convention

In 1968, the world exploded. In August, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago erupted in protests and violence. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* article reported, "a barrage of tear gas was set off by national guardsmen along a 10 block stretch…as a marching band of 5,000 attempted to storm the…Democratic national convention" (Buresh, 1968, p. 1). National guardsmen forced the group to a stretch of street where "police and guardsmen waged bloody

street battles against thousands of Vietnam war protestors" (Buresh, 1968, p. 1). Demonstrators were identified by their youth rather than their dress which ranged from ordinary to the eccentric (Buresh, 1968). According to Buresh (1968), a speaker declared democracy dead, "it was killed by Johnson, Humphrey, and Daley" (p. 1). The demonstrators in Chicago criticized the people in power which was reasonable when those powers were sent national guardsmen and police with tear gas to them. If Mayor Daley could order men in riot gear to attack protesters, what does that mean for demonstrations elsewhere in the United States?

The Milwaukee 14

On Tuesday, September 24, 1968, minutes before 6:00 P.M., 14 men entered the Brumder Building at 135 W. Wells St. On the second floor, they told Margarethe Bauer, a cleaning woman, they wanted to check some records. "They reached right in [her] apron pocket and took the keys" (Cleaning women deride protesters, 1968) to unlock and enter the selective service office. The men loaded burlap bags with selective service records and dragged the bags across the street (Kirkhorn, 1968; Patrinos, 1968). In the park now known as "Postmans Square," beneath a flagpole commemorating the World War I dead (Patrinos, 1968)**,** the men were met by a white panel truck unloading what was identified as "homemade napalm" (Patrinos, 1968). After dousing the record-filled bags, the group who would soon be known as the Milwaukee 14 set fire to over 20,000 records.

While calmly awaiting arrest, the protesters sang hymns, read from the gospels of Luke and John, and read the statement sampled in Kirkhorn's (1968) article following the incident:

> We who burn these records of our society's war machine are participants in a movement of resistance to slavery, a struggle that remains as unresolved in America as in most of the world.

> Our act concentrates on the selective service system because its relation to murder is immediate. Men are drafted – or 'volunteer' for fear of being drafted – as killers for the state. Their victims litter the planet.
>
> Today we destroy selective service system files because men need to be reminded that property is not sacred. …If anything tangible is sacred, it is the gift of life and flesh. (p. 1, 3)

The Milwaukee 14 action nestles into the context of several raids on selective service offices. Earlier in the week, protesters attempted to read a statement denouncing the war at a church service and were arrested.

As religious men, the Milwaukee 14 believed in the Gospel and the importance of acting on those beliefs. Michael Denis Cullen explained in an interview:

> You take the draft system because it is a sort of a total system. The government has decided to have certain claims upon you, claims that are, I would say, very contrary to the Gospel. It says that at eighteen years of age we want to tell you whom to kill, where to die and who the enemy is…People are dying because of that draft and people are killing because of that draft. And I guess I feel a moral responsibility to strike at that. (Moran & Serafin, 1969, p. 19)

Acting on one's morals would not be reserved for priests and graduate students as would soon become clear at Marquette University.

Marquette, 1968-1969

During this time, Marquette was examining what it meant to be a Catholic university in a time of war. In September 1968, Yekenevicz and Houghton (1968) of the *Marquette Tribune* reported that Bob Graf and Jerry Gardner, "two Marquette students, were arrested twice this

week in a pair of incidents involving protest of the Vietnam war" (p. 1). These graduate students were "…among 14 arrested yesterday after raiding a selective service office and burning thousands of 1-A draft records" (Yekenevicz & Houghton, 1968, p. 1). Because two of the 14 protesters were Marquette students, there was a direct link between civil disobedience and the Marquette community. This energized the Marquette community, spurring students to participate in marches to support the Milwaukee 14.

The relationship between Marquette students and the local police could be characterized as strained while the Marquette student newspaper cast aspersions on police action. In September, Michael Coffman, Arthur Heitzer, and other Marquette students were distributing flyers outside the student union supporting the actions of the Milwaukee 14. A police officer drove up and approached Coffman.

“Hello, officer, may I ask what you’re doing?” Heitzer asked, approaching the police officer.

“None of your business,” the officer replied.

Heitzer identified himself as the student government president but the officer did not seem impressed. According to the Marquette Tribune, he “was rude and called it standard procedure, left and came back ten minutes later to say that Coffman had a warrant for his arrest” (Coffman arrested, 1968). As it turned out, Coffman had a year-old unpaid jaywalking ticket which he paid after his arrest and transport to the police station.

In November 1968, the Coalition for Peace approached the Associated Students of Marquette University (ASMU), which was the equivalent of a student senate, to request an investigation into Marquette’s ROTC program. They “request[ed] that this investigation

encompass all aspects of its establishment here, in regards to its academic, financial, and moral justifications" ('Coalition for Peace' asks ASMU probe into ROTC, 1968).

By February 1969, the ASMU subcommittee investigating the ROTC determined their deliberations centered on issues outside the scope of student decision making, but they concurred that further inquiry was necessary (ASMU, February 6, 1969). As they acknowledged the limited power of students, the subcommittee requested the Academic Vice President, Dr. Arthur C. Moeller, "appoint a committee with members of all the university publics (students, faculty, and administrators) and that this committee issue a public report with recommendations no later than April 15, 1969" (ASMU, February 6, 1969). Ideally, this committee would examine:

A. Academic presentation of what is taught in AROTC and NROTC courses
B. The suitability of subject matter in these courses for university academic credit
C. The issues arising from the university's apparent endorsement of an outside institution in its association with ROTC
D. The issues arising from the university's proclaimed role as a Christian university (ASMU asks Moeller to begin study of ROTC, 1969)

With the endorsement of some department heads (McDonald, 1969), it appeared the student-initiated inquiry would advance. However, Rostenkowski (1969) identifies the committee's focus on ROTC curricula which zeroes in on the first two points requested by ASMU. Moeller apologized and explained that points C. and D. were outside the scope of the academic office and should be directed to someone higher in the university (Moeller informs ASMU, 1969).

By April 1969, "progress on all four areas of the ASMU's request for a study of ROTC [was] reported" (ROTC study underway, 1969), but students were getting restless without evidence of true progress (Sweeney, Rogers, & Riordan, 1969; Sweeney, 1969). Heitzer, ASMU

president, brought theatrics and humor to the protests when he staged a skit in the union grill with a group of “guerilla theater Thespians” during which participants wielded cardboard guns and broomsticks. “Heitzer would ask his charges, 'What do you learn in your classes, boys?' The boys would lunge forward yelling 'Kill!' Heitzer praised the group saying they were 'My kind of boys. Not hippy protesters'" (Sweeney, 1969). Notably, Heitzer wrote and spoke a great deal about student voice on campus, explaining, “ASMU…has been subject to a growing spirit that, in fact, students should have some real say in how this school is run, especially in the areas that affect students most directly” (Heitzer, n.d., p. 4). Through these protests, students demanded to be heard by those administrators like Father Raynor, the university president, who considered themselves “too busy to deal with the students” (Carney, 1969).

April 22, 1969

Tuesday, April 22, 1969 began like any other spring day at Marquette University. Classes were in session, and Father Raynor (1969) sent a memo to Moeller directing him to “appoint a committee of faculty, administrators, and students to address itself to points c. and d. raised by the ASMU sub-committee investigating ROTC.” This marks two months passing since the formation of the ASMU sub-committee and six months since the original Coalition for Peace request.

At the school gym, the university’s ROTC planned to hold an inspection. At noon, students marched from the St. Joan of Arc Chapel to the gym. They tried the doors and were refused entrance by security guards. Instead, the students stood in front of the door to the gym and were warned that they should disperse. One student, Richard Oulahan sat in front of the doors and attempted to force his way into the building, grappling with Father Sheridan and the security guards in the process.

Father Sheridan extricated himself from the fray long enough to shout, “You, you’re suspended!”

Arthur Heitzer, student body president, approached Father Sheridan and asked why he had “picked Coffman in particular to the exclusion of the other students on the stairs.”

“He refused to stop blocking the door,” Father Sheridan said.

“You’re trying to get rid of the leadership element of the demonstration,” Heitzer accused. “Why haven’t I been suspended?”

“I did not witness you blocking the door,” Father Sheridan said. “Do you want to be suspended, Art?”

“What’s the difference between Coffman and everyone else here?” Heitzer asked.

“I don’t know the names of the others, but if I did, they would have been suspended too,” Father Sheridan said (Lindt, 1969, p. 4).

The students dispersed. “Members of the Anti-ROTC Coalition attended the mass [in the St. Joan of Arc Chapel] celebrated by Father Patrick Burns, SJ, assistant professor of theology. After mass, the students asked him to get word to Fr. Raynor that they wanted to meet with him” (Riordan, 1969, p. 4) to discuss issues related to the ROTC program. According to Riordan (1969), "the statement demanded a dialogue with 'the man whose name is on the Defense Contract' and said that the students were occupying the chapel until 'the channels of communication are opened'" (p. 4).

Father Gebhard, the custodian for the St. Joan of Arc Chapel, entered the building after students had gathered. It is possible he was clearing up after the celebration of mass. He was welcoming to the students, letting them know that they could stay but he would prefer if they kept the chapel door open. He also said he would not declare the Chapel closed at 7:00 P.M., but

“as long as the Chapel is open, someone must be in charge, so you are in charge and responsible for its safekeeping” (Tlachac, 1969). “He said that he noticed a piece of wood propped up against a screwdriver stuck in the keyhole of a door. He said that he gave them a key ‘to show how they could accomplish the same thing without destroying the whole world’” (Riordan, 1969, p. 4), and afterward, this key hand-off would be interpreted by the students as permission to remain in the chapel.

> According to an article published after the demonstration, Heitzer (1969) noted:
>
> The liberation of the chapel, (renamed after the slain Columbian priest-guerrilla, Camillo Torres) was both a symbolic and tactical victory. It reinforced the contradiction between the professed 'intellectual and moral excellence' of the school and its businesslike lack of concern for human values, concerning both its own students and the deprived peoples of this city and world. (p. 3)

If the students intended to make an impact on the Marquette consciousness, taking control of a building in the literal and symbolic center of the university was the way to do it. Though the chapel was new to campus, it held a great deal of history linking it to the Catholic faith.

The usual Chapel closing time came and went. By 9:00 P.M., central administration representatives gathered and “stated that a decision had been reached to remove the students from the Chapel. (No personnel from the Office of Student Affairs were consulted.) The only missing ingredient was ‘when’” (Coordinating Committee, Chapel and Gym Incidents, 1969). "The police arrived while administrators were still discussing what to do about the protesters in the chapel, who had told the news media” (Bomb scare in chapel, 1969, p. 1) they were determined to remain until Raynor met with them.

Elsewhere in Milwaukee, the fire department phone rang at 11:22pm. According to the Milwaukee fire department chief dispatcher, “a man called…and said that a bomb would go off in the chapel” (Bomb scare in chapel, 1969, p.1). Fire fighters snapped into action, suiting up and hurrying to Marquette.

Inside the chapel, the student demonstrators talked amongst themselves. For some, this was their first demonstration and they expressed concern about being arrested even in “connection with the chapel’s ‘symbolic action’” (Bomb scare in chapel, 1969, p. 3) since “Heitzer had informed those inside by walkie-talkie that many Milwaukee police were in the campus area. He also informed the person on the receiving end when police arrived at the chapel" (Riordan, 1969, p. 4).

By the time word reached the police about the threatened bomb in the chapel, conflicting accounts reported what happened. While the police said “the protesters were warned three times by bullhorn that there was a bomb threat,” “Heitzer, who was outside the chapel, said that he heard only one warning from the police…made at the same time that the police began battering the back door of the chapel” (Bomb scare in chapel, 1969, p. 3). The police arrested 68 students, “all but about 10 of [whom] went limp and had to be carried out” (68 arrested at MU, 1969). Bond was set at $50 and most students were kept overnight unless they lived locally. “Father Michael Sheridan, dean of men, said Thursday morning that university action concerning the arrested students ‘is being discussed in the dean of students’ office’” (Trial date set for 70 arrested, 1969, p. 2), so student conduct procedure would move forward in addition to the civil case.

The Aftermath

When the bomb threat was called in and it became necessary to preserve the safety of students and a historical landmark, the conversation stopped being about ROTC. The moment the students were removed from the chapel, the conversation started being about student conduct, student unrest, and the appropriateness of student demonstrations. The *Marquette Tribune* issue recounting the chapel demonstration and the immediate fallout acknowledges some "progress on points three and four of the ASMU request" (Raynor seeking group to study ROTC issues, 1969) even so, members of the ASMU subcommittee on ROTC believed "the study, besides being too slow, has been hampered by the university's failure to take a neutral position, changing university rationale and the deemphasis being placed on point two of the ASMU request concerning academic presentation of ROTC classes" (Committee members attack progress of ROTC study, 1969).

Raynor explained the Milwaukee police's role in the chapel demonstration by saying, "the University's security staff is neither intended nor equipped to assure against every form of disorderly, dangerous, or disruptive activity on campus…[so] the University…necessarily and properly relies upon the assistance and protection of established community agencies, including, of course, the police" (Raynor reviews chapel incident, 1969, p. 1, 8). Naturally, a university should have a cordial relationship with the local police.

Undoubtedly remembering the police action during the summer's Democratic National Convention, students such as Heitzer were skeptical about the administration's professed relationship with the police. In an article published in a University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee independent paper, Heitzer (1969) wrote:

> One would think then that the school would be angry at police for raiding an MU building without informing its 'owners' before the act. If, on the other hand, the school or some

> representative of it was aware of this bomb threat, it would have been a comfortable ploy to arrest the students, without the school having ever called the police or made a complaint. (p. 7)

To this day, no one knows for certain who placed the bomb threat report. Speculation during the time suggested counter-protesters or the university administration itself. Either option could fit but equally sound like conspiracy theories. As a student affairs professional, it is interesting to consider the administration possibility as a convenient, if sneaky, method of skirting freedom of speech violations and removing students from a highly visible campus building in a public manner which might discourage similar demonstrations.

Though Raynor ordinarily preferred to work through the student government for most concerns, he attended a meeting with 800 students in the union grill, explaining that he was invited by ASMU and he was present because the meeting was "orderly and the discussion reasonable" (Raynor talks on issues to 800, 1969, p. 4). Students read their statement addressing the manner of police action during the chapel demonstration while it "emphasized that students must know if Father Raynor was aware of the police tactics. If he was, it called for an apology from him. If he was not, it demanded that Father Raynor deplore the police tactics" (Coordinating Committee, Anti-ROTC Demonstrations 1969, 1969). Raynor did not seem inclined to commit on that matter, but in a statement later in the week, he admitted, "we requested the police to stand ready to assist us in terminating this seizure and detention of this place of worship" (Raynor, April 29, 1969).

By mid-May, the academic year was winding down and the student disciplinary process went into effect for the students involved in the gym and chapel demonstrations. Warren G. Bovee who was the Chairman of the Committee on Faculty, write a letter to express his concern

about the timing and appropriateness of the conduct proceedings, explaining that there were "many mitigating circumstances associated with the student occupation of the Chapel. I think we were of the opinion that, if the procedure would be initiated promptly…the resulting recommendation would be a very minor sanction or none at all" (Bovee, 1969). He wrote that at this point in the year, students would be unable to defend themselves or experience an undue burden by necessitating presence at a hearing over the summer (Bovee, 1969). Luckily, Bovee's concerns were heard when the committee met and determined, "this committee likewise may not agree with the students' methodology, but procedural irregularities existed which make it difficult to judge the full extent of this case, or to justify any disciplinary action" (Faculty-Student Conduct Committee, 1969). Ultimately, the committee unanimously found "a violation of University policy was not committed by the above named students on the evening of April 22…[and] we suggest that these findings would apply to all students who were involved in the Chapel incident" (Faculty-Student Conduct Committee, 1969).

The investigation into the ROTC was given a compressed timeline "the contents of [the] report in no way represent an exhaustive enterprise. Rather, they represent what was possible to accomplish in two weeks" (To: Chairman, Committee on Faculty, 1969). Overall, the committee failed to find "explicit endorsement of governmental or military policy given by the University through its contracts with NROTC and AROTC…[though] MU does endorse the NROTC program by saying 'Marquette University will endeavor to promote and further the objects" (To: Chairman, Committee on Faculty, 1969) on behalf of NROTC's establishing principles.

In time for the new 1969-1970 academic year to commence, Student Affairs revised the demonstration policy first by acknowledging two sets of rights: university community members' right to pursue their academic goals and university community members' sometimes competing right to "freely communicate, by lawful demonstration and protest" (Student Affairs, 1969). The policy identifies "interference with processes or procedures of instruction…or other activities authorized to be conducted in University facilities, violation of established closing hours, or obstruction of authorized access to, use of, or egress from University facilities" (Student Affairs, 1969) as acts warranting suspension or expulsion. Clearly, this line responds to the gym demonstration (interference with processes and obstruction of access) and the chapel demonstration (violation of established closing hours). The revision concludes circumstances may cause a "University person in authority…[to] judge that the demonstration has passed proper bounds, [and] he shall communicate to the demonstrators insofar as feasible that this is his judgement…requir[ing] that the demonstration be modified on stated conditions or promptly terminated" (Student Affairs, 1969) which would give university personnel the discretion to decide the appropriateness of a demonstration.

Conclusion

This conversation about appropriate demonstrations is still happening today as the Marquette Tribune of 2019 and 2020 reports on the demonstration policy updates in the recent years. However, there are some lessons to be learned from the chapel demonstration in 1969: administrators have an obligation to seriously consider if not address student concerns. Though Raynor staunchly adhered to bureaucratic methods of communication with students and lower administrators, he did establish committees to seriously interrogate the ROTC. In light of protestor relationships with police authority, the situation with the bomb scare could have been

handled differently. As student affairs professionals consider the relationship of peoples of color with police, we have potential to take a different approach. It is a well-known fact that questioning authority causes those authorities to get defensive, but we can do differently by applauding student bravery and exercising our own humility. Ultimately, I am inclined to agree with Heitzer (n.d.) when he writes there is, “a growing spirit that, in fact, [that] students should have some real say in how this school is run, especially in the areas that affect students most directly" (p. 4).

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