

# portland state

MAGAZINE

PSU  
ON  
STRIKE

# 1970

THE YEAR THAT  
SHAPED PSU

your flag...  
your future

Facing the coronavirus challenge together P. 2



LET'S  
GET IT  
TOGETHER  
PSU  
ON  
STRIKE

*Scenes from the 1970 Viking yearbook: students and police clash during the May 1970 student strike (top), a marching striker (right); a student injured by police is helped by a friend (far right); students at a forum on campus military recruitment (bottom); an officer watches the May 1970 violence (left).*

# 1970



## THE YEAR THAT SHAPED PSU

*By Suzanne Pardington Effros*

**FIFTY YEARS** ago on May 11, graduate student Cathy Wood Wyrick was returning home to her apartment across from Lincoln Hall when she heard screaming from the Park Blocks.

She had just helped negotiate what she thought would be a peaceful end to a week-long student strike protesting the Vietnam War. But as she rushed back outside, she saw a crowd of terrified students running toward her, upset and crying. She could see police farther up the block. "You won't believe what just happened," a friend told her.

*"They attacked us."*



All year long, tension had been building at Portland State as student activists marched against the escalating war and blocked military recruiters on campus.

“The war was like a giant cloud hanging over your head every single day,” Wyrick says.

After the Ohio National Guard shot to death four unarmed protesters at Kent State, she and hundreds of other PSU students joined a national strike. They boycotted classes and barricaded the streets entering the Park Blocks—still open to traffic in those days—to create a loud and lively “liberated zone” where they camped out with tents, tarps and even TVs connected by long extension cords to neighboring apartments.

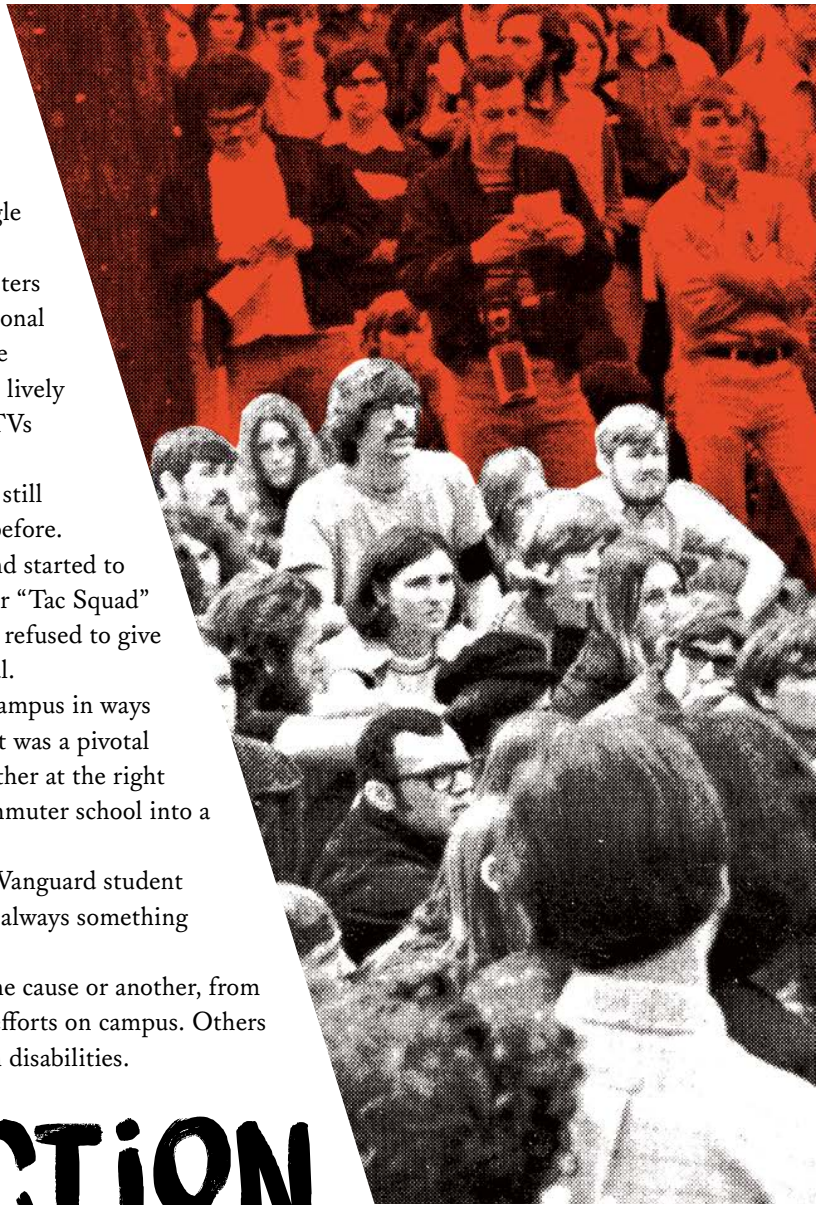
The strike deeply divided faculty and students at PSU, which was still growing into its new status as a full university, achieved just a year before.

Under pressure, protesters agreed to take it all down on May 11 and started to disperse when Mayor Terry Schrunk’s Tactical Operations Platoon or “Tac Squad” came in with batons to push them out faster, beating protesters who refused to give way. Twenty-seven strikers and four officers ended up in the hospital.

The clash thrust PSU into the national spotlight and shaped the campus in ways still seen and felt 50 years later. It was the most visible event in what was a pivotal year in PSU history, thanks to students who raised their voices together at the right time and place. They helped transform the campus from a quiet commuter school into a hot spot for social change and academic opportunity.

“There was a tremendous energy,” says Joe Bernt, who edited the Vanguard student newspaper from 1969 to 70. “There was always a protest. There was always something going on. It was a very exciting time to be at Portland State.”

He remembers being bombarded with requests for coverage for one cause or another, from mothers demanding child care to the first Earth Day and recycling efforts on campus. Others pushed for more student housing and better access for students with disabilities.



# YEAR OF ACTION

## JANUARY 12

Faculty Senate approves new Black Studies certificate program, the first such program in the Pacific Northwest.



## APRIL 15

President Gregory Wolfe holds a student and faculty referendum on military recruiting after continuing unrest over their access to campus. A majority supports allowing recruiters.

## MAY 11

Classes resume and barricades are disassembled. Only a medical tent is left. About 5:40 p.m., a police special forces unit orders students to disperse and then attacks, sending 27 to the hospital.

## MAY 12

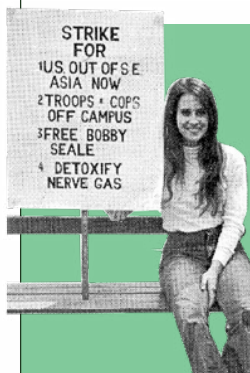
Roughly 3,500 people march from the Park Blocks to City Hall to demand an investigation of the police action. Mayor Schrunk refuses to address the protesters.

## MARCH

Masters student Art Honeyman helps teach “Relations with the Physically Handicapped” class to raise awareness of how difficult it is for students in wheelchairs to navigate campus.

## APRIL 20-24

First Earth Week (later Earth Day) takes place. The yearbook dedicates eight pages to landscape photos in honor of this “environmental teach-in.”



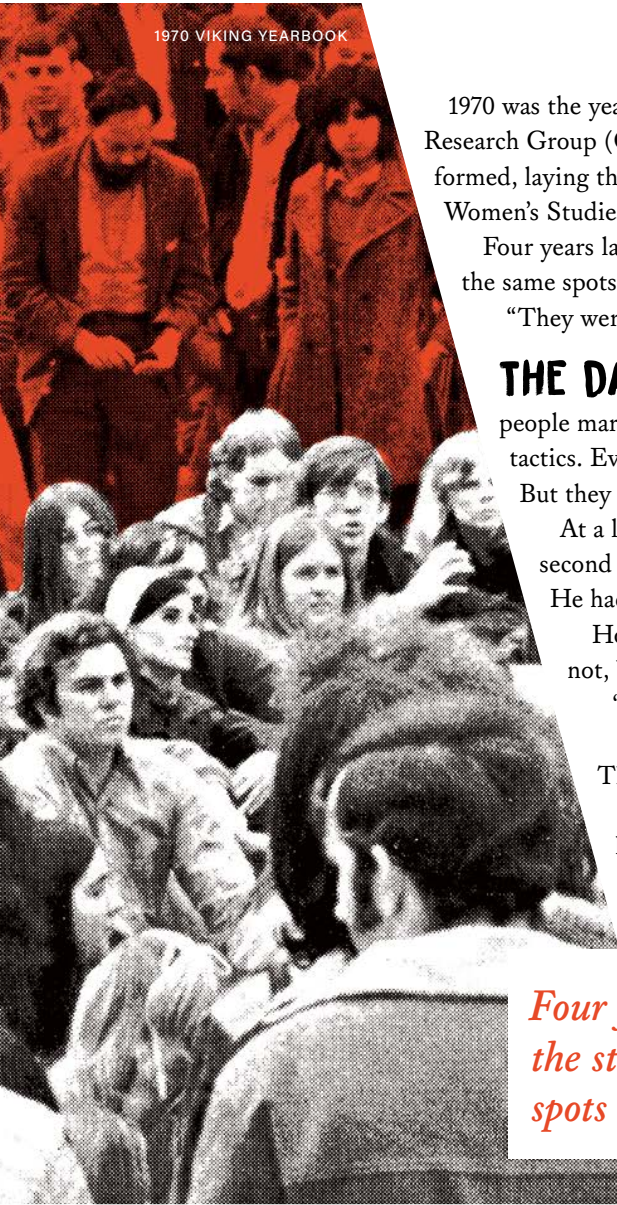
## MAY 6

During an opening rally for a student boycott of classes, a car hits a striker, breaking his leg. Strikers construct barricades from park benches to stop traffic entering the Park Blocks.



## JUNE 22

Classes begin at a new educational center—part of PSU’s new Black Studies program—in the Albina neighborhood.



1970 was the year the Gay Liberation Front held its first meeting, Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group (OSPIRG) was conceived, Black Studies officially launched and a new women's union formed, laying the groundwork for what would soon become the Women's Resource Center and Women's Studies.

Four years later, the city permanently closed the streets around the PSU Park Blocks to traffic in the same spots where students placed their barricades.

"They were generating lots of news," Bernt says, "and we were right in the middle of it."

## THE DAY AFTER

police clashed with protestors, The Oregonian reported that 3,500 people marched down Southwest Broadway from PSU to City Hall to protest the brutal police tactics. Even some of those who disagreed with the strike thought the police had gone too far. But they also worried Portland and PSU were gaining national attention for the wrong reasons.

At a large meeting of faculty and spouses, history professor David A. Horowitz, then in his second year, made a plea for donations to help cover the injured students' medical expenses. He had witnessed the police violence and felt it was gratuitous.

Horowitz was booed loudly. Some faculty members supported the strike but most did not, because they feared state leaders would cut support for the new university, he says.

"It was surprising how angry they were," he says. "I was pretty shaken."

Doug Weiskopf was one of the students on the front lines when officers charged. They clubbed him on his head and stomped on his back in heavy boots.

"We thought it was our job to make people face what was going on in Vietnam," he says. "We were predominantly middle-class white kids, and we were as middle America as it gets. We were the people they thought supported them."

*Four years after the strike, the city permanently closed the streets around the Park Blocks to traffic in the same spots where students placed their barricades.*



### SEPTEMBER

Under the leadership of W. Philip McLaurin, Black Studies offers its first classes in fall term, including "Peoples and Cultures of Africa," "Introductory Swahili" and "Afro-American Poetry."



### SEPTEMBER 17

Women organize their second "Baby In" to demand campus child care, bringing 77 children to President Wolfe's residence. The Portland State Child Care Center—now the Helen Gordon Child Development Center opens a few months later.

### NOVEMBER 18

Five members of the newly formed Portland State Gay Liberation Front speak about stereotyping and discrimination in front of a capacity crowd.

### SEPTEMBER

The Women's Union forms to work for women's rights on campus. Nancy Hoffman, English faculty, and Nona Glazer Malbin, sociology faculty, begin designing a Women's Studies program. The first classes are offered winter term 1971.

### OCTOBER

PSU students begin organizing the grassroots advocacy organization Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group (OSPIRG)—the second in the nation when established—and set up a campus chapter to address environmental and consumer issues.



### NOVEMBER

Students create the College Resources Information Program to provide resources for students with disabilities and work to convince the University—and the state legislature—to make the campus accessible.



CRAIG HICKMAN



THE SEVENTH DAY

*Students and their children occupied the president's office and house for two "Baby-Ins." As a result, the first child care center opened on campus in 1971.*

Anti-war activists took on other environmental and social causes as well, including the proposed shipment of deadly nerve gas through Oregon and the imprisonment of Black Panther co-founder Bobby Seale. But the war “kind of sucked up all the oxygen in the room,” Weiskopf says.

Women, in particular, felt left out of leadership roles in the anti-war movement. “If women came to some of these meetings and wanted to participate, people just didn’t listen to them,” Wyrick says. “It could be blatant. Girls weren’t expected to be standing up and talking, but they were expected to take care of the food.”

Women started to speak up and fight for more rights. At PSU, one of their first issues was affordable child care, a key to enabling more women to go to college.

They held two student “Baby-Ins”: one with 15 mothers and their children in the president’s office and one with 77 children ages 2 months to 10 years at the president’s house. As a result, the first child care center opened on campus with spots for about 31 children in 1971. Today Portland State serves about 230 children each day in four centers, including the flagship Helen Gordon Child Development Center.

“That’s incredibly fast, effective action,” says Ellie Justice, former director of the Helen Gordon Center. “I think part of why it was able to happen so quickly was really about the era. It was an era of action.”

Child care was one of the first ways PSU showed early support for non-traditional students, Justice says. Since then, PSU has become the most diverse public university in Oregon. It has resource centers for women, veterans, parents, students with disabilities, and multicultural, pan-African, Pacific Islander, Asian, Asian American, Native American and LGBTQ students.

“Having an array of programs to support those students brings them to PSU and helps them succeed here,” she says.

**PORTLAND STATE** planned to mark the 50th anniversary of the strike on May 11 with a panel discussion of those who were there, but because of coronavirus health and safety restrictions, that event has been delayed until May 2021. Horowitz hopes the discussion will help students reflect on what works and what doesn’t work in activism.

There are some similarities between then and now, he says. Both are times of political unrest and rapid social change. Yet the threat of climate change, authoritarian leaders and deepening economic, educational and cultural divides are putting more pressure on today’s students.

“The situation today is so much more dire than we thought it was in 1970,” he says. “I think in many ways we are in new territory.”

Wyrick says it felt scary for students to step out of their normal routines and go on strike. She hopes to give today’s students courage by telling her story.

“Look around you, see what you can do that’s positive,” she says. “People are really going to push back against you. People are going to be hostile. Figure out how to keep going. Be brave.” ■

SUZANNE PARDINGTON EFFROS is a Portland writer and former staff member in the PSU Office of University Communications.



# SEE AND HEAR 1970

A host of resources can take you back to this turbulent time in PSU's history. Go to [pdx.edu/magazine](http://pdx.edu/magazine) to see it all and share your own story.

## Self-guided Walking Tour

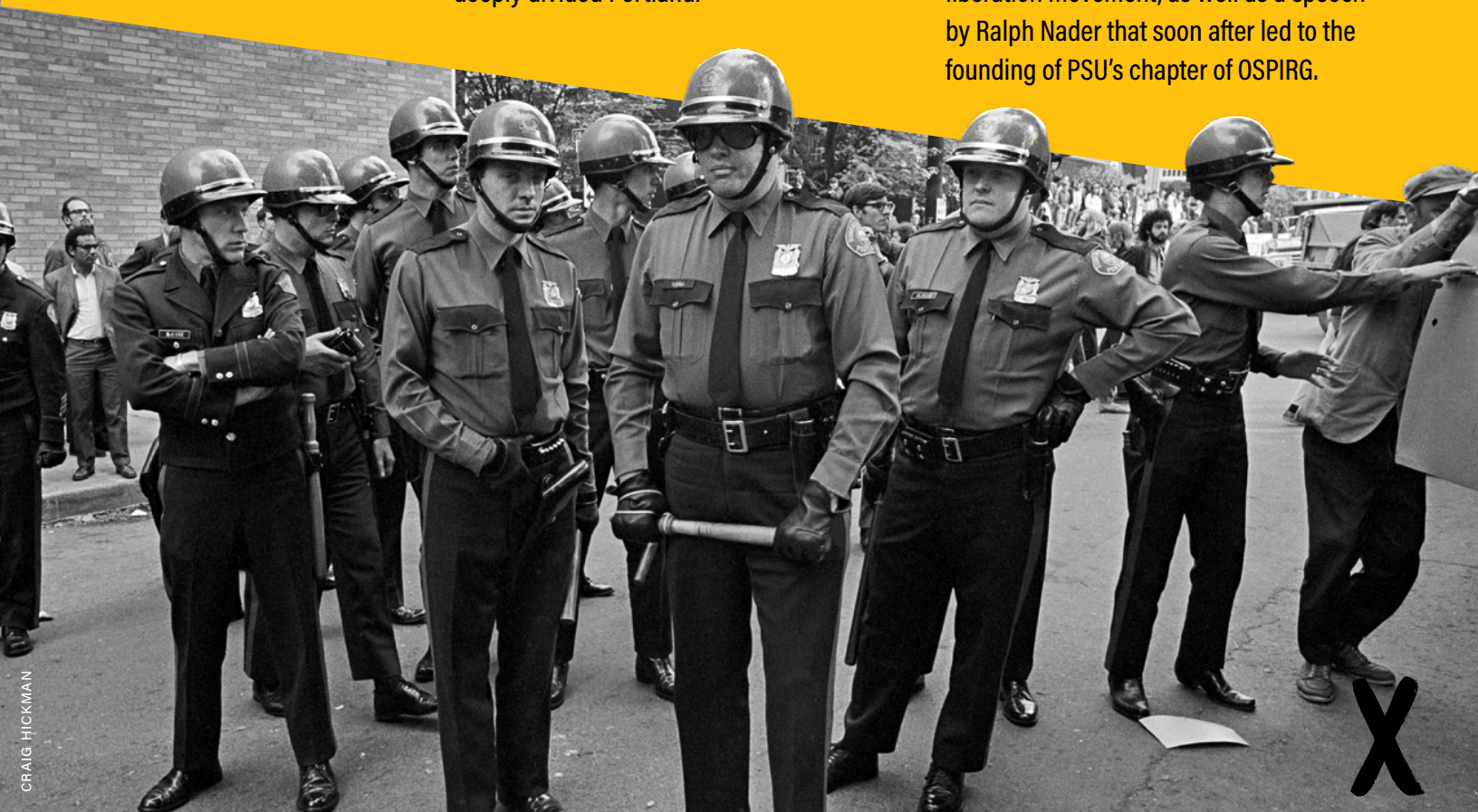
See PSU with new eyes on this self-guided walking tour of student strike landmarks, created by the Portland State University Archives.

## The Student Strike on Film

Student filmmakers from Portland State University's Center for the Moving Image grabbed their cameras and waded into the chaos of the 1970 campus strike. The result was a 30-minute documentary, *The Seventh Day*, that captured the high emotions and violence that ensued in a deeply divided Portland.

## Voices of the Times

The Portland State Library's Oregon Public Speakers Collection includes speeches, interviews, panel discussions, and readings hosted by the university. In 1970, that included a contentious forum about military recruiting on campus, talks about black cultural awareness and the women's liberation movement, as well as a speech by Ralph Nader that soon after led to the founding of PSU's chapter of OSPIRG.



CRAIG HICKMAN

