

Berkeley! (1)

Special to the *Fifth Estate*

Thomas Nixon

BERKELEY—"I'd shoot a pig first," the young man said.

Standing face to face with his olive drab uniform, his gas grenades and his M-1, a street girl—wonderful colors flowing from every curve on her body—had been talking to him for most of the afternoon.

The People's Park, touching and being touched, lives of love and freedom—she'd covered it all.

Only the final, razor-edged question remained. She hesitated but it had to be asked. When the Guardsman responded, it was from the center of a new being.

"I couldn't shoot you," he replied, his eyes flashing with the energy of liberation.

"I couldn't shoot any of these people." "I'd shoot a pig first," he said.

On May 17 the National Guard was called into Berkeley by virtue of Governor Reagan's declared "State of Emergency."

To Reagan, the very existence of Berkeley is an emergency. The current situation is an extension of the crisis from last quarter's strike at the University of California.

The number of Guardsmen in Berkeley is, according to an Army spokesman, classified information, but current estimates run around 2,000.

The Guard's presence brought a balm of relief to bleeding, battle-scarred Berkeley.

During a "State of Emergency" the city's top pig commander is Alameda County Sheriff Frank Madigan. On May 16 he and his deputies released their crazed pig energy on the community. Brothers and sisters fell in the streets as 20 gauge shotguns drove double buckshot the size of goat turds into their bodies.

Torturous wounds, incapacity, blindness and death was the response to the flowers, trees and swingset. Madigan said that he had "reason to believe that radicals had developed an antidote for teargas."

Then, in rolled the Guard. They aren't very colorful but they aren't very mean either. One of their camps is in the People's Park.

As the only persons allowed on park land, they've been looking after things by watering the plants that still remain out of their canteens.

As one Guardsman explained "A man doesn't want to watch living things die after they've been planted."

From the day that the Guard hit the streets people began to talk to them, began to try and make them feel their humanity. Long-haired evangelists spoke to clusters of Guardsmen about our lives and our park.

The soldiers listened and asked questions that had collected in their minds. The answers challenged the roots of their lives, but they didn't back off.

They were given leaflets by smiling free people and they read them intently. Leaflets that began "To our cousins in the Army" and ended: "Our beef is with the Regents and the cops. We don't want to fight you. If you are called upon to fight us, don't fight hard."

The results of the contact began to show clearly on Sunday, May 18. People gathered for a vigil at Herrick Hospital, in which James Rector lay dying and numerous other brothers lay wounded.

The crowd, arrayed in the bright but ragged battle fatigues of free men assembled in a nearby vacant lot, being unable to reach the hospital because of a cordon of Guardsmen.

The people took possession of the new land, erecting a sign proclaiming it “People’s Park No. 2” and began planting bushes and flowers.

As the work continued, Guardsmen began to ring the park on three sides. “Disperse” was the order, but when it got down to it, a line of Guardsmen refused to don their gas masks and one soldier simply turned and walked away. No one was gassed.

On the following Tuesday the Army had to cart another renegade away as he threw down his helmet and rifle in the face of a memorial for dead brother James Rector. After snatching away the soldier, name of Reliciano, the Army denied any knowledge of the incident.

A bit later the same day a convoy of olive drab trucks came rolling down Dwight Way at the edge of the UC campus. People, gathered on the sidewalks, signaled the GIs with the “V.”

In the fourth truck a “V” shot up. The man’s arm was quickly pulled down but his other hand came up in a “V,” and that too was pulled down. Three Guardsmen finally had to dump the dude to the floor of the truck and sit on him! A cheer went up from the crowd—another brother had come home!

Today as I walked around Berkeley, people were once more out in force talking to the Guardsmen. On one corner a soldier was giving an impromptu street lecture on the various types of gas grenades being used. He explained each, its effects, and what to do if gassed.

Other soldiers could be seen at their posts reading underground papers. When asked what he was reading, one Guardsman displayed the cover of *Outcry*, a free paper published by the UC-Berkeley radical student union.

As he held up the paper, he raised his other hand in a clenched fist and gave out a righteous “right on.”

The commanders have to keep moving the Guardsmen around; their orders are constantly being “misinterpreted.” But after all, what have they got to offer?

Regis Debray says that the men in uniform are the first victims in any revolution. Out here in Berkeley they’re dropping out fast, and from behind the helmet-shaded eyes a new light is shining.

Power to the People.

—Thomas Nixon, White Panther

5/22/69

fifth Estate

Thomas Nixon
Berkeley! (1)
Special to the *Fifth Estate*

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/80-may-29-june-11-1969/berkeley-2>
Fifth Estate #80, May 29-June 11, 1969

[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fifthestate.org)