

# THEY SEIZED THE DAYS

## Columbia's '60s protests are recalled

By STEVE DITLEA

**O**N THIS DAY 25 years ago, hundreds of students at Columbia University were living, loving and protesting in five classroom and administrative buildings. They had taken over.

The first of many campus upheavals to confront the nation in the late '60s, the Columbia occupation, sparked by charges of racism and university involvement in Vietnam War-era defense contracts, continued for a week. It ended after a bloody police raid that saw 712 students and supporters arrested and 148 injured. Fourteen police officers were also hurt.

The rebellion rocked not only Columbia but the city and the country, laying down a blueprint for student rebellions that was followed with a vengeance in the spring of '69. For those who participated in the uprising, the event and its aftereffects have had a major impact on their lives.

It was "a formative experience," says Nancy Biberman, a lawyer involved in developing housing for the homeless with the Women's Housing and Economic Development Program, near Union Square.

"It was the beginning of my feminist consciousness," she recalls, though she, too, gave into the macho spirit of the time, when student leaders were predominantly male and the women treated as second-class citizens.

"I feel anger and shame about how women were treated," Biberman acknowledges. "I think of myself and ask: How could she — me — have done that?"

Raymond M. Brown, a Newark lawyer specializing in litigation, found his livelihood in the aftermath of the demonstrations. A week after police emptied campus buildings, Brown, who had been on the steering committee of the black students occupying Columbia's administration building, was attacked by police and then charged with assault.

During the two years it took to dispose of the felony indictment hanging over him, Brown was defended by his father, an attorney. Though he had not intended to follow in his father's footsteps, he found himself "getting interested in the strategies we used in dealing with the legal system."

Brown eventually went to law school in Berkeley, vowing to steer clear of student politics — only to find himself "in the middle of a student takeover of the law school within two weeks."

Now engaged in everyday



**THEN AND NOW:** This was the scene in 1968 (top) as students lined the ledge outside the office of Columbia's then-president; today (bottom, l. to r.) Judge Gus Reichbach, Prof. Lewis Cole and attorney Raymond M. Brown look back on their roles in the demonstrations.

legal confrontation with criminal justice and drug policy, he regards the events of 25 years ago as his "crucible and testing ground."

**A**MONG THE MOST noted events during the protest was the marriage of a student couple, Richard Eagan and Andrea Boroff, in one of the occupied buildings. The marriage stood the test of time, ending just a few months ago with the death of Andrea Eagan from cancer.

Her passing will put a damper on 25th anniversary events organized by campus minister the Rev. Bill Starr (who was also chaplain 25 years ago and performed the ceremony), culminating with a picnic on Saturday. A founder and organizer of the National Writer's Union, Eagan — mother of Daisy Eagan, the Tony Award-winning star of "The Secret Garden" — was one of the many Columbia demonstration participants who maintained their commitment to social causes.

"I'm proud to say we're unrepentant, somewhat older but still active," says Gus Reichbach, a civil-court judge in Brooklyn who stirred up the city judiciary system a few years ago by instituting AIDS counseling for prostitutes and others arraigned in the criminal courts in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

"We come out of a tradition

that you have to do something, not just talk about it," Reichbach says.

In the New York media's backyard, the Columbia strike was the first modern media circus, with activities skewed to the glare of TV lights. Widespread suspicion of the media also became apparent here, as participants in the events on Morningside Heights saw a huge difference between what they were experiencing and what was being reported in newspapers and on TV.

"I remember being resentful of the media for not reporting the role of black students in the forefront of the protest

movement," says Leon Denmark, executive director of the Apollo Theater Foundation, which runs the Apollo Theater in Harlem. A sophomore at the time, he was one of the occupants of Hamilton Hall.

Denmark recalls one young reporter who got it right: Ed Bradley, now of "60 Minutes" TV fame, was the only journalist to gain the confidence of the black students in the administration building.

Even those on the sidelines during the demonstrations became more politically involved. Two members of Columbia's class of '69 recently started terms in Congress:

Sen. Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) expects to be one of the most conservative legislators, while Jerrold Nadler, a Democrat representing the city's 8th Congressional District (including much of the West Side), expects to be one of the most liberal.

**T**RYING TO UNDERSTAND these already remote events, hundreds of current Columbia students will gather tonight to hear some of the leaders of the rebellion — including Daily News columnist Juan Gonzalez, who was one of the negotiators for the students.

But one professor who was a Columbia student leader then thinks students today may have a hard time understanding. "It's history now," says Lewis Cole, who teaches screenwriting at Columbia and co-authored the recently published "This Side of Glory," the story of David Hilliard, one of the founders of the Black Panther Party.

"The world has changed so much in the last five years," Cole explains. What he tries to convey to students today is the optimism inspiring student action then.

"We believed we could change things. Now people are a lot more cynical toward taking action of any kind."

(Ditlea, a frequent contributor, graduated from Columbia in 1969.)

## FACTS OF LIFE

### NOT SWEET HOME

More than a third of all Americans have witnessed domestic violence, while nearly 90% believe physical abuse of women is a serious problem. That's according to a study by the Family Violence Prevention Fund that also found that 14% of women admit to having been violently abused by a husband or boyfriend. "Domestic violence is a staggering social problem that affects every sector of American life," Esta Soler, executive direc-

tor of the fund, told a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing on the issue.

### SURVIVING CANCER

If you are diagnosed with cancer, being involved in a support group can increase your life expectancy. According to a study at Stanford University's College of Medicine, women with breast cancer who participated in group psychotherapy lived an average 18 months longer than those not in a group.