Years of Upheaval, 1966-70

By Bob Cullen, CLAS 1970

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As everyone in the country is doubtless tired of hearing, the late 1960s were years of turmoil in America, particularly on its campuses. Upheaval came a little later to Charlottesville than it did to, say, New York or Berkeley. But it came. And when it did The Cavalier Daily was both an agent of change and an agency to which change happened.

I should cover the nuts and bolts first. When I first made my way to the fifth floor of Newcomb Hall in the autumn of 1966, the newspaper and its staff were physically much different than they are now. The staff, like the College of Arts and Sciences, was exclusively male. We generally wore jackets and ties to class, though we would loosen our ties and roll up our shirtsleeves when we got to the office. The offices themselves were hazy with cigarette smoke and dominated by a few tables containing old typewriters and the occasional small pot of glue. Each typewriter, it seemed, had a key or two that was permanently jammed. Copy paper overflowed from waist-high trashcans.

The newspaper was published four days a week, Tuesday through Friday. It always consisted of four tabloid-sized pages—news on the front, editorials and features on page two, sports on page three, and a mish-mash of ads, classified ads and continued stories on page four.

We were almost entirely innocent of any professional knowledge of journalism, and I suppose the paper reflected it. I recall that during the football season, we would send the sports editor to cover a Saturday game, and on Monday he would write a straightforward news account of the game for Tuesday's paper--as if none of the students had seen the game or heard it on the radio. The idea of a second-day lead or a third-day lead would never have occurred to us. I remember that there were contests for collegiate journalism awards that required submitting three consecutive issues. We often did not submit our best work because it could not be matched with two other issues that did not contain at least one glaring error—a typo in a headline, for instance.

Our copy, once edited, was carried by hand to a small, one-story building belonging to the University Press. It was between Thornton Hall and Scott Stadium and I am sure it's been demolished by now. The copy was set there on linotype machines by a couple of amiable men. One of them was called George. The other, whose proper name I believe was James Suddarth, was known as Suds. He was probably the best copy editor we had, catching innumerable errors. (Occasionally, I heard, Suds might go beyond that, deleting something he thought offensive and inserting a Smokey-the-Bear ad to fill the space. But

I was initially a sports reporter and he didn't do that with sports copy.) The paper was run off on a press in the same building.

This system remained in place until at least the spring of 1968. I remember going to that building and helping to insert a news story on the night Martin Luther King was shot.

Sometime after that—probably in the autumn of 1968—the computer age dawned at the CD. We acquired from IBM some primitive hybrids that were part computer and part electric typewriter. These machines made a tape of some kind, and the tape, when "played" in the appropriate way in a second machine, could spit out justified copy in column width on coated stock. Typefaces could be changes by putting a different metal font—the size of a golf ball—into the typewriter. When we added a light-table and a glue machine to our capital equipment, we were able to bypass the University press and produce photo-ready pages.

We took over the Corks and Curls office, which had been next door to us on Newcomb Hall's fifth floor. How this space grab was arranged I do not know, but I suspect the friendship between Charles Calhoun, the editor-in-chief in 1967-68, and John Herring, the manager of Newcomb Hall, had something to do with it. We installed some of our new IBM equipment and our light table in this room.

This machinery was considered delicate enough that it required specialists to run it. So the paper hired two young women, Leslie Rock and Kathy Brewer. Leslie was the wife of a medical student. Kathy was the wife of a law student. IBM trained them to operate our new equipment. They were, as far as I know, the first women to be involved in the CD's editorial functions. They were both probably about 23, but they seemed very old and sophisticated to us. The atmosphere in the paper's offices began to change. Staffers spent less time hanging out in the sports office reading old football brochures. They found reasons to spend time in the production room, chatting with Leslie and Kathy.

The production process changed in other ways. We began shipping our photo-ready pages to the Culpeper Star-Exponent, which took over the responsibility for printing the paper. As I recall, Suds handled the transportation, driving off in a red pickup truck and coming back before dawn with the day's papers.

Divorce from the University press enabled us to make three changes in the paper from 1968 to 1970. We immediately went to a broadsheet size, which itself added maybe 25 percent to our news hole. In 1969, I believe, we inaugurated a Monday edition. At first, this was considered such an imposition on the staff's weekends that a separate Monday staff was created. The Monday edition was a feature-oriented paper, largely put together the week before. And in the spring of 1970, we began publishing the occasional six-page weekday edition.

We expanded to six pages not because we had begun selling more ads, but because by that time the political climate as such that every day we received furious diatribes written

by students and faculty on one subject or another, often reacting violently to our editorials. We needed more space to publish them all. But I am jumping ahead of myself.

I should begin by saying that in 1966, when I joined the paper, it was in the throes of changing from a very conservative paper to what became, by the standards of the University at the time, a radical one.

How conservative was it? I recall reading an editorial in the bound volume from 1965-66. An organization that called itself the Society for the Prevention Of N-----s Getting Everything (SPONGE) had established itself on the Grounds and applied for money from the Student Activities Fund. The editorial opined that SPONGE had worthy goals and could undoubtedly make a valuable contribution to student life if it would only modify its unfortunately impolitic name.

This was probably not an atypical attitude for a fraternity boy at a Southern school at the time. And the CD was run by fraternity boys. They were adept at the sort of log-rolling required to control a staff election system that contained a rotten borough, the circulation department. The circulation manager was responsible for getting the papers into the distribution boxes each morning. Typically, he recruited a dozen pledges from his fraternity to do it. He and each of the pledges got votes in the staff elections, and they formed a decisive bloc.

The aforementioned Charles Calhoun was a Kappa Sigma, and so was the circulation manager. (His name was Carl Gibson, and he became a Marine officer and was killed in Vietnam in, I believe, the spring of 1969. I remember being shaken by three deaths during those days—King's, Robert Kennedy's and Carl Gibson's.) After I joined the paper, I joined Kappa Sigma as well. So did other staffers. The circulation department remained a Kappa Sigma fiefdom for a number of years and helped elect me and several others to the junior board and the managing board.

But as Bob Dylan told us, the times they were a-changing. They played his records on Rugby Road as well as in Haight-Ashbury. Our editorial posture changed along with the times. At some point—I am not sure when—we came out against the war in Vietnam. As time went on, our opposition got more strident. I remember a small furor when one of my classmates, Paul Larsen, published a not-unsympathetic interview with an anonymous Charlottesville marijuana dealer. We began to criticize the administration for failing to admit more than a handful of black students each year. We criticized the all-white fraternity system as one of the elements that prevented the University from recruiting any black athletes.

Oddly, the one major issue that we never seemed too cognizant of was coeducation. Despite the presence of Ms. Rock and Ms. Brewer, the paper did not, as I recall, make much of an issue of the fact that half the students in the state were ineligible for admission to its university's core school. When the University decided to admit women to the College, beginning in the autumn of 1970, it was a decision made by administrative

fiat, albeit under the threat of litigation, not because of agitation from the paper or the masses.

The paper was blissfully unenlightened about feminism in general. I recall that one of the staples of our national advertising budget was something called the Evelyn Wood Reading Dynamics Institute. It regularly placed big ads that featured a photo of a fetching, recumbent girl in a very short skirt. She was smiling and she had a book somewhere in front of her, but it didn't look as if she was smiling because she could read 800 words a minute. These ads irritated some of the pioneering feminists at the University, who were enrolled in the graduate school or the education school. They protested by ripping the offending page out of the paper and scrawling across it in red marker, "The CD is sexist." Sometime in the early morning hours, they taped the marked-up pages to the doors of our offices. They even taped one to the door of my office that said, "Bob Cullen is sexist." It took me a while to realize they did not mean I was handsome and attractive.

But we were *au courant* with the rest of the moderately liberal trends in American thought. In the Orientation Issue of 1969, I recall, we editorially gave first-year students two sentences of blunt advice about fraternities: "Don't rush. Don't pledge."

Writing that was enough to sever my remaining ties to Kappa Sigma. By that time, I must confess, I was a fourth-year student and had exhausted the usefulness of its bloc of votes in the staff elections. I had become the editor, which in 1969-70 was the position responsible for writing editorials. The job that used to be editor-in-chief was called publisher that year, and it was held by Chuck Hite. The nomenclature was clumsy, and it was changed a few years later.

Such editorials, by whomever they were written, did not please the people who ran the University. In the winter of 1969-70, Chuck and I were invited to appear before the Board of Visitors to explain ourselves. We put on jackets and ties for the occasion, though by this time we had taken to wearing jeans to the office and to class. We were ushered into the board's meeting room, which was then in Pavilion VIII, the Rotunda restoration being some years off. The rector, a crusty old Virginian named Frank Rogers, glowered at us from the other end of a long, polished table.

"Mr. Cullen, where are you from?" he asked me. It sounded like "Mistuh Cullen, wheah ah yew from?"

"New Jersey," I replied. I was tempted to say "Joisey," but I refrained.

"And where did you go to prep school?" Mr. Rogers continued.

"I didn't," I said, in a righteous, proletarian voice. "I went to high school."

His face reddened. He turned to Chuck.

“Mr. Hite, what do you perceive as your duty to the University?”

Chuck was slightly taken aback by the question. “Well, uh, I guess to put out the best paper we can,” he said.

He turned to me again. “And what do you perceive as your duty to the state of Virginia?”

Now I was taken aback. “About the same,” I said.

Now he addressed both of us. His voice was rising. “And what do you perceive as your duty to the United States of America?”

Chuck managed to say something in reply. I cannot remember exactly what it was.

Mr. Rogers’ eyebrows were twitching. “Do you believe it is consistent with all of these duties,” he thundered, “to refer to the president of the United States as…”

Here he hesitated in evident disgust. Duty alone, I imagine, made him press on with his question.

“…As `Tricky Dick?’ “

Chuck said something about the long tradition of irreverent editorial commentary in America. But in retrospect, I suspect that this was a Rubicon moment for the CD. The Board of Visitors was not happy with the paper and it determined to rein it in.

A few weeks later, I got a visit from Doug Hixson, a classmate of mine who was also vice president of the College. He reminded me that somewhere in the University’s by-laws it was written that the vice presidents of the various schools made up a board that had some vague supervisory power over student publications. This board had been moribund throughout my time on the CD. As far as I knew it had never met.

Hixson suggested that we ought to set up a friendly meeting between the CD managing board and this publications board to discuss ways the vice presidents could fulfill their supervisory role.

I responded that I had nothing against friendly meetings, but I could not imagine circumstances in which the CD would permit this board to influence its editorial decisions.

And there, as far as I knew, the matter ended. Hixson and I graduated a few months later and there never was a meeting.

But of course the matter didn’t end there. It was only beginning.