The Rise and Fall of *The Rag*:
Problems for Alternative Media in a Radical Movement's Decline

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Abstract

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The Underground Press movement in the United States was the newspaper manifestation of the Sixties' student-radical principle of participatory democracy. All over the country, hundreds of alternative publications abandoned the traditional idea of "objective" journalism and devoted themselves to informing a critical generation about Civil Rights, the war in Vietnam, and government power at home and abroad. Austin, Texas was home to one of the Underground Press movement's most anarchistic, collectivistic and longest-running papers, *The Rag*. Scholars have written about *The Rag*'s early history, how it was able to emerge out of the Texas capitol and what significance it had on the local movement in the historical Sixties era. This thesis focuses on the devolution of *The Rag*, as the war in Vietnam ended and the Movement splintered into reorganized initiatives with unique goals. Why *The Rag*'s unifying media could no longer survive in the late seventies, and what strengths and weaknesses of the community developed in the years leading up to the paper's demise are the central inquiries of this thesis.

Acknowledgements

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I would like to especially thank Jeffrey Dugardyn Shero Nightbyrd for his cherished friendship and support, and for opening my eyes to this history in the first place.

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1

Introduction

No one in the ranks smiled in the YWCA the day the remaining *Rag* staff finally untacked the Che Guevara poster from the office wall. A nonfunctional telephone hung pointlessly bugged in the hall. Hundreds of people had at one time or another wandered into the *Rag* office to cut and paste inches of copy (with scissors and glue) or debate some pressing matter of the impending revolution. Stumbling in on Wednesday night copy meetings, some had stayed to become writers, artists, typists, vendors —members of the collective. Some stayed longer than others. On the final day in May 1977, Richard Croxdale received a phone call from photographer Alan Pogue, telling him that he and Jim needed a hand to take the *Rag*'s office contents down to the dumpster on 24th street. Phil Prim saved everything he could for his archives, but in the end, *The Rag* newspaper died unceremoniously. No grand finale issue celebrated its eleven years in the infamous underground press. No staff party —most of the gang had already disbanded. The previously electrified voice of the Movement fell silent in a dumpster like an old, irrelevant, torn up rag.

Dear Funnel, [1]

My goal in writing this thesis is not to "capture the essence" of the sixties or seventies in Austin. If it were, I would surely disappoint with superficial attempts to describe the characters, scenes, and conversations that have stretched and strained my imagination these two semesters.

[1] The "Funnel" was *The Rag*'s version of the traditional "Editor" title originally held by Thorne Dreyer and "Funnella" Carol Neiman. In the seventies, the Funnel title belonged to nobody in particular and was used to address the collective as a whole.

If I could only go back in time and re-live the fast-paced fury of those epic years! To know the earnest belief that revolution was on the brink, that love is the answer…do you see what I mean?

In the lyrics of John Lennon (*Plastic Ono Band)*, "The dream is over."

What remains, and what matters to me most as someone living in the succeeding time, are the experiments that you all performed with your lives, trials tested at the micro level for social change at the macro level, and any results that can be recovered from them. You might not have thought of them as trials at the time, but I do. You created a community media, *The Rag*, to empower people with information and to forge your own identities. You risked oppression, defied the law, and challenged the power structures around you. You set a high standard for boldness and creativity, one that I only hope might be attainable in "the ranks of the dissatisfied" of generations to come, including my own. Good experiments start with a question, or a goal to understand, and the gist of what you were after in those days, I think, is the same thing I am after, and many people still wonder now: Is it possible to live a harmless human life? Can we structure our society in a way that is peaceful with others and harmonious with nature?

Perhaps you grew up with the assumption that peace and ethics were built into post-World War II America, and even when confronted with the violently contradictory realities of racism and war, your hypothesis was that yes, people could co-exist in a reasonable and joyous way. And you set out to test it, coming together and attempting first to eliminate racism, then war, and then the snowballing obstacles and contradictions of self that needed to be confronted before any serious attempt at peace could succeed. If everything is connected in every realm of being, from spirituality to economics, what community and societal models do we build to guide our decisions? What are the core values behind those models? *The Rag* was a platform for your sociological questions, your political investigations, spiritual hunches, cultural critiques, and

radical visual expressions. *The Rag* was more importantly a community, rooted in a physical space, performing a group activity for a cause, giving relationships the chance to develop between likeminded dissidents.

Scholars have already written theses and books about or mentioning *The Rag*, focusing on the evolution of its role within the grand experiment for peace and social justice in Austin. In her master's thesis, Susan Olan provides an overview of the *Rag* history through interviews with six *Rag* contributors, three from the first half of its publication period (1966-1971) and three from its later years (1971-1977).[2] Beverly Burr frequently references *Rag* articles and interviews with contributors in her comprehensive history of student activism at UT from 1960-1988.[3] Beyond UT, professional scholars of alternative media such as Laurence Leamer have investigated the unique organizational structure of *The Rag* collective within a national political movement, and the literature continues to grow. John McMillian has recently included in his published dissertation an account of *The Rag* in comparison to other Underground papers in the historical sixties period; he writes, "*The Rag* was established by youths whose tastes, attitudes, and ideas marked them as outsiders in their own community; in turn, their paper helped to embolden and unify the underground cliques and coteries from which it grew."[4] Doug Rossinow considered *The Rag* in a deeper, more localized political analysis, connecting *The Rag* and Austin's New Left to the history of radicalism in conservative parts of the country in comparison to the "cultural elite" radicalism of the West Coast, Ann Arbor, and New York.[5] The diversity and growth of this literature suggests that the subject matter appeals to a wide variety of people:

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[2] Olan, Susan. *The Rag: A Study in Underground Journalism*. Masters Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin. August 1981. Available through UT Watch online at http://www.utwatch.org/archives/ragthesis.html.
[3] Burr, Beverly. *A History of Student Activism at the University of Texas at Austin (1960-88)*. Plan II Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin. Spring 1988. Available through UT Watch online at http://www.utwatch.org/archives/burr/index.html.
[4] McMillian, John. *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. p.54
[5] Rossinow, Doug. *The Politics of Authenticity.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. p.10

students of media and demographic politics, historians, and anyone curious about local Austin legend. Since I live in Austin and have access to read *The Rag* issues and talk to several of its contributors, and because I too, like *The Rag* staff, hope to contribute something of positive social and ecological impact to this ever-evolving, imperfect democracy, I now consider myself a combination of the three, in part.

Although few scholars have written specifically about how *The Rag* ended, for me, this is perhaps the most telling period of its life, because it delineates the limits of a grassroots effort that created a strong initial response and developed its strength over a period, but ultimately fizzled out. Like good scientists, we learn from failures too. The goal of this thesis is to investigate why the *Rag* community stopped publishing the paper in 1977, examining first the strengths of the community in the years leading up to its dissolution. Secondly, three categories of explanations address why *The Rag* lost whatever energy it had before: a decline of political unity, systematic opposition by the surrounding culture and power institutions, and an unsustainable economic or "business" model.

Ultimately, *The Rag* went out of print because it was an alternative media intrinsically bonded to the local and national political movement from which it emerged. It sprang from a community of individuals, helped that community evolve over several generations, and then disappeared when that community dissolved. As with all media of the past, attributes of it are carried on to new life and others are left behind as both technology and society evolve. My goal is to extract those properties from the *Rag* history that might be useful in another life, another context, under the hypothesis that some spirit of *The Rag* might be timeless in an evolving society.

2

1966: A Legendary Birth

As the situation escalated in Vietnam, forty-some-odd students staged a sit-in at LBJ's ranch in April 1965, before many people in the South knew about or were widely questioning the war.[6] The fact that a pro-active, anti-war anomaly existed in Austin before anywhere else in the South comes as no surprise. Austin culture and politics had a history of tolerance and even a proclivity for political contrarians to express themselves in political forums for debate as well as artistic mediums.[7] Students at UT in particular were also self-organized at a high level long before Civil Rights and war protests emerged. There were spelunkers and theatre groups and spirit organizations, and nearly everyone intermingled at a restaurant in the Student Union called "The Chuckwagon." An unusually high concentration of student-driven and student-organized community at UT facilitated the organization of a political movement in response to segregation and the draft.[8] The movement lacked a unifying voice, however, and a catalytic event was necessary to bring the right resources together to create it. Just one month after Charles Whitman fired his sniper at students from the observation deck of the UT tower, a Young Republican named John Economidy became editor of *The Daily Texan* and created the final conditions necessary for *The Rag* to be born.

Kaye Northcott wrote a front-page article on Vol. 1, No. 1 of *The Rag* entitled, "Gen. John Economidy: The First 100 Days." Northcott had been prior editor of the *Daily Texan*, recently defeated in the election by Economidy, who was a pro-war R.O.T.C. student with a staunchly conservative platform. Economidy proclaimed, "No more female editors!" as one of

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[6] Interview by the Author with Jeff Shero 8-15-2011
[7] Orum, Anthony. *Power, Money, and the People*: *The Making of Modern Austin*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002.
[8] Interview by the Author with Thorne Dreyer 10-16-2011

his campaign slogans, and would occasionally announce, "General John is here!" as he entered the *Texan* staffroom.[9] The local chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and sympathizers outside of the University felt the need for a newspaper that reflected their sensibility toward the struggles of black students and the Vietnamese, not to mention an increasing population of youth who wanted to do drugs and have sex, all of whom they saw as unjustly oppressed by a backwards military culture that seemed to manifest itself for a few months in "General" John Economidy. Thanks to the newly accessible and cheap offset press technology, Carol Neiman, Thorne Dreyer, Judy and Dennis Fitzgerald, Larry and Nancy Freudiger, George and Mariann Vizard and others got together to make and print *The Rag*.

Larry Freudiger printed the first twelve issues of *The Rag* on 8 ½ x 11" sheets of newspaper, folded into magazines and filled with unconventional articles and illustrations. Fifteen hundred copies sold that first day when George Vizard verbally dueled a cop while defending his right to peddle the newly printed *Rag* in the West Mall.[10] The original product had a somewhat crude, laid back feeling to it. The offset press allowed artists to draw pictures and text around the typed columns, so the logo, headlines, and advertisements utilized a wealth of psychedelic capabilities. Fat letters fused out of hand-drawn reptiles spelled "THE RAG" like something scrawled by inhabitants of a Yellow Submarine. Jeff Shero called it a "symbol of fertility."[11]

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[9] *The Rag* Vol. 1, No. 1, The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
[10] George Vizard, *The Rag*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (Nov. 10, 1966), The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
[11] Interview by the Author with Jeff Shero 10-15-2011

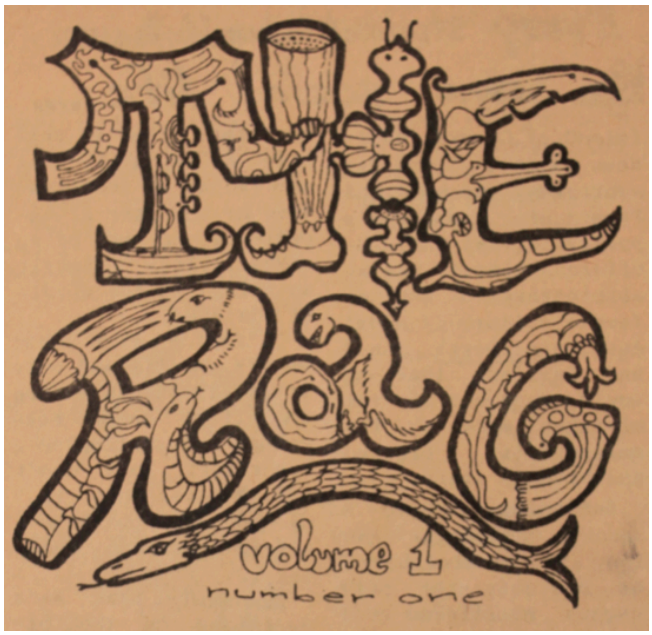

Figure 1.1 The logo used in Volumes 1-2 of *The Rag.*

The Rag established itself early on as one of the most anti-hierarchical papers of the Underground Press, which was rapidly becoming a national media phenomenon in cities like Berkley, San Francisco, New York, Ann Arbor, and East Lansing, Michigan.[12] Instead of an editor, *The Rag* team chose to have a "Funnel" and "Funnella." Jeff Shero explains that compiling *The Rag* was like everybody "pouring crap in the funnel," and instead of a system of editors and writers they were "some kind of anarchic collective, but 'collective' is too serious of a word."[13] In terms of its group structure, *The Rag* may have been informal, fun, and open to participation by anyone with shared principles who was willing to do the work, but its political motives could not have been more serious.

Early *Rag* staffers were nearly all members of the SDS, which was the first chapter of the national organization in the South and grew into one of the largest chapters in the country.[14] Early SDS and *Rag* members participated in the Civil Rights movement and reported all events,

[12] McMillian p31
[13] Interview by the Author with Jeff Shero 10-15-2011
[14] McMillian p.53

local and national, as they saw them, abandoning pretenses of objectivity. This included writing aggressive responses to articles printed by *The Daily Texan,* which had attempted to downplay the importance of the radical activism since Economidy took power. Freudiger asserted in response to one such advocation, "This time Economidy has gone too far. In the *Texan* Editorials column on November 1st he published an attack on SNCC and Stokely Carmichael which cannot go unanswered…Even if one agrees with Economidy's analysis of SNCC's 'demagoguery', it must seem a little difficult to believe that 14,000 students would turn out and cheer a man whose 'demagoguery has had a fair hearing...(and) now deserves a decent burial.'"[15]

Rag issues openly advertised SDS meetings, creating a continuum between conversations that they started in print and debates held at the YMCA on Guadalupe Street.[16] Thus, purpose of the media from its origins was to serve the SDS community and promote a democratic discussion of national political issues, all opinions welcome. The third *Rag* issue announced:

> Students for a Democratic Society has established a Speaker's Bureau. It's [*sic*] purpose is to increase communication between sds and the university community. Speakers on a large variety of topics will be available to student and non-student organizations, be they political, religious, social. Clubs desiring speakers and individuals who consider themselves qualified to speak on any topic should write Robert Pardun, Box 8519, Univ. Sta., Austin.[17]

The Rag manifested the SDS principle of "participatory democracy," which makes sense given that it *was* SDS, and the people who published *The Rag* had voices in the movement on a

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[15] Freudiger, Larry. *The Rag* Vol. 1 No. 4, (Nov. 7, 1966).
[16] The YMCA was located on Guadalupe St. and 22nd Streets in a building that was torn down in the seventies and replaced with office space. The 'Y' was *the* student center for protest activity and political debate throughout the sixties and 1970s. The University embarked on a campaign in the seventies to alter campus architecture such that it would be less conducive to student organizing, filling in the West Mall with blocks of landscaping and a fountain that rarely functions. The old 'Y' lot currently houses The Church of Scientology, an organization wholly disconnected from student life.
[17] *The Rag* Vol. 1 No. 3 The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

national scale. *Rag* staffers Robert Pardun and Greg Calvert had been national officers of SDS. Carol Neiman eventually became the national editor of *New Left Notes*, the SDS newsletter, and Jeff Shero had been elected national vice-president of SDS in 1965.[18] Politically, SDS was a huge conglomerate of factions whose common platform consisted of values rather than programs for change.[19] *The Rag* was originally like that: a host of voices that encouraged debate and reported activities from a radical perspective, meaning one that challenged the existent social, political, and economic systems in the United States and their underlying philosophical assumptions.[20] It declared that the war was morally wrong. It listed ways that people could dodge the draft. As a testament to its democratic nature, *The Rag* also printed criticisms of itself, in "Letters to the Funnel" and articles such as Paul Deglau's "Disagreements With the New Left." Deglau wrote, "Student radicals, I have lost my faith in you."[21] *The Rag* strove to build up its political validity and confronted criticism as part of the democratic process of doing so. Austin also always had a distinction of producing quality information because of members' national involvement and the fact that many of them happened to have experience in journalism and debate prior to becoming political activists. Notable SDS thinkers were there, periodically skipping class to travel to other centers of the movement, and writing for *The Rag*:

> So much of SDS, just like the Underground Press, was centered on the coasts, especially in New York, and a lot of them were sort of 'red diaper babies.' Their parents had been commies. They had grown up in academic communities - they were graduate students or whatever. But in Austin, even though some of the people were graduate students or were

[18] Interview by the Author with Thorne Dreyer 11-15-2011
[19] Interview by the Author with Jeff Shero 10-15-2011
[20] You may wonder what I mean by "philosophical assumptions." For example, that any social or economic structure is "natural" is a philosophical assumption because it relies on assumptions about what human nature is, and what reality for humans is most "natural." A radical view would suggest that humankind displays an adaptable variety of opposite and contradictory behaviors that differ from individual to individual and from group to group, and so any social system built on an ideological understanding of human nature, capitalism for example, is subject to re-evaluation.
[21] *The Rag* Vol. 1 No. 3 p. 8

> in school, there was what they call 'prairie power,' an anarchist trend within SDS, there was always this sort of more roots-oriented and less academic and less removed and theoretical sort of thing. And I just think there were also some really substantial minds here. Maybe because we were isolated. Maybe because we were sort of a pocket. Maybe because we didn't have – even though we ended up interacting with people from all over the country – maybe we were a source of independent thought because it was this isolated center.[22]

As the Movement grew, the Underground Press tempered the isolation of *The Rag* and its readership. The Liberation News Service and the Underground Press Syndicate maintained an information network for communities and papers like *The Rag* all over America by distributing mailings of Underground newspapers. The wall of the YMCA basement --where *The Rag* opened its first office to the public-- was covered with clippings of news articles from all over the country, and issue after issue would be passed around and read by whoever floated through the meeting space. As an unintended consequence, regular visitors of the *Rag* office comprised the hyper-informed heart of the movement in Austin, plugged into anti-war communities and trading their own content, such as Gibert Shelton's "Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers" comic, nation-wide.[23]

The Rag always maintained a local emphasis, however, and rooted itself strongly in the Austin community. Campus news went to print next to news about Stokely Carmichael or the draft. Nearly every issue featured an advertisement by some local band: "Conqueroos! Light, Music, Love at the 11th Door, 11th and Red River!"[24] They threw benefit concerts, promoted local theatre, and planned events and protests of their own. In a spirited exercise of liberty, *The*

[22] Interview by the Author with Thorne Dreyer 11-15-2011
[23] McMillian p.126
[24] *The Rag* Vol. 1 No. 2 p.8

Rag planned "Gentle Thursday," a day when everyone was supposed to go to UT's South Mall and do, well, whatever they wanted to do. That was genuinely radical at the time. Before "Gentle Thursday," Jeff Shero says, nobody stepped on the South lawn, much less hang out there with their dogs and children playing folk songs. Local events like Gentle Thursday were planned, attended, and reported on by *Rag* staffers, so *The Rag* grew out of its community and catalyzed it to evolve as well. They also managed to make readers laugh in the process. Thus, a generation of disillusioned Austin baby-boomers welcomed a proud new voice that was electrified with passion and wit.

The most important function of *The Rag* was to form connections between radical people and ideas. Thorne Dreyer wrote in a 1970 article, "The Movement and the New Media," that the core corruption of mainstream media was the lack of connection it portrayed between events economical, political, and social: "The [mainstream] press has succeeded in fragmenting the consciousness of its audience. A strike of black students at a New York college, a transit workers' strike in Chicago and a drawn out, inflationary war in Southeast Asia are inter-related events, but this perspective isn't part of the American consciousness."[25] To the contrary, the SDS and *Rag* understanding was that everything was and is connected on some level (a valid belief, even if it stemmed from experience on psychedelics).[26] Corrupt actions of different forms derive from corrupt values of common form. Because they saw society's problem rooted in a fundamentally backwards paradigm, the main focus of the paper was to "Question Authority," to provoke readers to think for themselves about what it means to have respect for human life and

[25] Dreyer, Thorne. "The Movement and the New Media" March 1, 1969. Liberation News Service. Available online here < http://www.nuevoanden.com/rag/newmedia.html>.
[26] Interview by the Author with Thorne Dreyer 11-15-2011 According to Thorne, people in Austin were experimenting with psychedelic drugs (peyote) long before people were doing acid in San Francisco.

nature amidst all the changes taking place.[27] Because of the shared principles of everyone involved and the interactive (labor-intensive) nature of the medium itself, the *Rag* and the community that created it entered into an inextricable relationship of mutual re-enforcement that was to continue throughout the paper's lifetime: the community grew the media, and the media, in turn, grew the community.

As "The Movement" entered the next decade and students became interested in an expanding field of social and political issues, *The Rag* evolved to meet new challenges, and new generations of staffers took over the project. By 1968, most of the original SDS leaders had moved on, but they had set into motion a group structure and work ethic that remained until the last *Rag* issue went to print. Without their leadership and the values of open communication, democratic copy meetings, as well as their decision to print political news and cultural content together, *The Rag* may not have made the impact that it did later on.

[27] Interview by the Author with Jeff Shero 10-15-2011

3

Strengths of *The Rag*: 1969-1975

In the spring of 1969, SDS held its National Conference at the University of Texas at Austin in the Catholic Student Center. The national movement had reached unprecedented heights of energy since the summer of 1968 as both counterculture and radical politics morphed into the identity of American youth. The politics grew increasingly divided as several factions of SDS developed rigid ideological approaches to what many believed was the impending revolution and the potential to restructure American society from the bottom up. "We honestly thought we were part of a revolution," Thorne says.[28] The Kent State Massacre and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy had intensified the belief that ideological warfare was taking place and that major changes were going to result. In Austin, a "monster march" of 10,000 participants against the war started in front of the UT Tower and moved toward the capitol and down Congress Avenue.[29] Planning for the march took place in the basement office of *The Rag*, which subsequently covered the event. Bill Meacham recalls that they printed thousands of extra copies of the issue about the march (which he describes as having 40,000 participants) and distributed half of them on the Monday after they went to print. Tuesday morning when the staff entered the office they found that someone had broken into the basement and stolen the remaining *Rags*.[30] Either the robbers knew the commercial value the papers had after such an event, or they were "patriots" who wanted to destroy anti-war propaganda.

The Rag and its office space remained a powerful place for voices in the local anti-war movement until the end of the draft in 1973. Although most people agreed that stopping the war

[28] Interview by the Author with Thorne Dreyer 10-16-2011
[29] Burr, Beverly p.40
[30] Interview with Bill Meacham at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas.

was the most pressing issue, the *Rag* community seeded discussion for all issues that the Movement encompassed, from Latin American military coups to alternative lifestyles and rock music. The more powerful the Movement grew, the more active and vivacious copy meetings and debates became. Despite intensifying political debates, an expansion of issues coming to the surface from atrocities committed all over the globe, and a counterculture that was beginning to go mainstream, the process of compiling *The Rag* required its group consensus to be moving in the same general direction. Individuals contributed to their area of expertise, such as Philip Russell, who specialized in Mexican history and politics, or Skye, the turquoise-adorned hippie who reported on local bands.[31] Everyone wrote their articles independently, voted on them and decided as a group what ultimately went to print. There were leaders in the collective who usually got their way, and prior to the 1970s, there was a division of labor. Some people wanted to be writers and to leave the laborious layout process to less "intellectual" members of the group. The *Rag* maintained the belief, however, that they were an anarchistic collective, living out the notions of "participatory democracy" in an anti-hierarchical fashion with respect for each other's opinions, just as SDS had espoused in talk and in writing.

The characteristic strengths of *The Rag* in the seventies reflect a shift away from the SDS national movement rhetoric toward active organizing around local and personal issues. Small groups of activists produced waves of new political consciousness that propagated through the *Rag*, which was their primary vehicle for distributing printed information to the larger community. The most prominent new movements to occur in Austin as the anti-war movement still raged countrywide were the Women's movement, greater involvement in local electoral politics, and the creation of alternative institutions such as schools and co-operatives. Leaders in

[31] Interview by the Author with Glenn Scott 1-28-2012

all three of these movements worked on *The Rag* staff and connected with people through its extended community.

The Women's Movement

During this time, a growing movement propagated through the *Rag* community where it transformed individuals at both a political and a deeply personal level. The Women's Liberation Movement had begun to percolate years earlier in the circumferences of *machismo* circles in SDS, and it awakened to a similar tone in Austin around the spring of 1969. In the *Rag*, despite the atmosphere of openness in copy meetings and the fact that several leading members of the group from the very beginning were female, the reality of its production still at that time reflected the gender-segregated paradigm of traditional journalism. Women comprised the labor class, staying in the office all night typing, justifying-left, and retyping articles for layout. Most of the writers and leaders of the group were males, some with rather large egos and the airs of journalistic heroes like Clark Kent, or Norman Mailer. Kate Braun can remember an evening in 1968 when one such "honcho," as she called him and others, entered with a pressing political matter to argue about and screamed, "Don't type!!" demanding silence as he battled it out with another honcho. Resentment grew in the *Rag* as elsewhere in the country as these women, who had been fighting for social justice for African Americans and Vietnamese, started to realize that their culture had conditioned males to treat them as second-class citizens too. They started to see analogs between attitudes toward women and those talked about in discussions about racism. Kate recalls that dissenting conversations began to simmer in the office "when the honchos

weren't around…Comments would be made, and the question of 'women's work' would come up from time to time." [32]

The early *Rag*, prior to 1969, would occasionally print nude photographs of women to increase circulation when sales were low. Sharon Shelton describes in a memoir written for the Rag Reunion in 2005 how nude covers and the unspoken separation of "women's work" made the emerging feminist issues real and personal for her:

> …During one of our low sales periods, we were discussing who would be the nude that would be on the front page, and someone said, "What about you, Sharon? You haven't been the nude."
>
> Well, I hadn't been the nude, but something inside me rebelled against the idea of taking off my clothes to sell the *Rag*. It wasn't that I was a prude. I certainly had gone skinny-dipping and I talked about the sexual revolution as much as anyone. But I did not want to pose for the *Rag*, and after countering accusations that I was being provincial (after all, I *was* from Wichita Falls), I heard myself saying, "Why not have a male?" "Why not a male nude?"
>
> A male nude? Everyone laughed. That wouldn't sell *Rags*. What a ludicrous thought! But even as we all laughed (me included) I did exchange some meaningful glances with some of the other women present. Why was it our bodies that sold *Rags*? How was this different from what happened in the larger society? It wasn't much later that we had a women's meeting in SDS, an announcement which initially by the way drew similar laughter. That meeting, though, rapidly changed everyone's consciousness, men and women. But for me, the real transformation took place when that inexplicable NO welled up inside me at the thought of posing nude on the cover of the *Rag*.[33]

[32] Interview with Kate Braun at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.
[33] Shelton, Sharon. "Rag Story," Rag Reunion 2005. Author's correspondence with Sharon Shelton, 2-6-2012.

Judy and Linda Smith, Judy Walther, Barbara Hines, Vic Pho, Bobby Nelson, Sharon Shelton, and Mariann Vizard were among the women associated with *The Rag* who started to participate in "consciousness-raising groups." They met in each other's homes and backyards to discuss, in personal and sociological terms, the gender roles that their families, their boyfriends, school, and society had defined for their lives. *The Rag* office received through the UPS and LNS mimeographed sheets from Women's Health Collective, which published the influential book, *Our Bodies, Our Selves*. They introduced Women's Liberation literature from all over the country to their discussions, reading and discussing the same passages that were revolutionizing female consciousness all over the country.[34] Some *Rag* women were even published in this literature. Alice Embree's essay "Media Images I: Madison Avenue Brainwashing-The Facts" was published in Robin Morgan's now famous anthology of Women's Liberation writings, *Sisterhood is Powerful.* In it, she reveals the negative effects of advertising and television programming, especially for female role models:

> The mass media molds everyone into more passive roles, into roles of more frantic consuming, into human beings with fragmented views of society. But what it does to everyone, it does to women even more. The traditional societal role for women is already a passive one, already one of a consumer, already one of an emotional nonintellectual who isn't supposed to think or act beyond the confines of her home. The mass media reinforces all these traits.[35]

Judy Walther recalls the "illuminating" feeling of discussing womanhood in a way that felt like "women at that time had never done before."[36] She recalls a particularly controversial article that *The Rag* received through LNS entitled "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm."

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[34] Interview with Judy Smith at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.
[35] Embree, Alice. "Media Images I: Madison Avenue Brainwashing –The Facts." *Sisterhood is Powerful* edited by Robin Morgan. New York: Random House,1970.
[36] Interview by the Author with Judy Walther 2-14-2012

Revelatory information like that spilled over into relationships, of course. "All this time you thought you were this frigid…whatever, and so you would go running home to your mate and say, 'Hey! We're going to do it this way! We're changing things!'"[37]

The Austin Women's movement began with a fury, and there was no stopping it. Women challenged the fact that society gave them fewer job options and paid them less for equal work.[38] They rejected the policy that female students could only get birth control if they were married or had a prescription from a dermatologist for the high-progesterone pills to treat blemished skin.[39] Women wanted to include more of their issues in *The Rag*, and the larger Austin women's community started a publication of its own called *The Second Coming*.[40] Several members of the *Rag* community such as Barbara Hines and Judy Smith wrote for both publications, transferring their printing skills learned from working on *The Rag* over to the women's newspaper.

Everyone who was working on *The Rag* during the emerging feminist period in the late sixties and seventies in Austin describes Judy Smith as the undisputed "moving force" of not just feminist issues, but every other political issue that mattered in *The Rag* at that time. She was confident and sociable, strong-willed, and smart (Ph.D. student in Chemistry). Judy was also 5'10," beautiful, blonde, and had been, according to Phil Prim, "captain of the women's basketball team at Brandeis University where she had a full scholarship and they had an undefeated season,"[41] so she possessed a commanding physical presence as well. Meacham calls

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[37] Interview by the author with Judy Walther 2-14-2012
[38] Interview by the Author with Judy Walther 2-14-2012 "Did you want to teach school? Or did you want to be a nurse?"
[39] Interview by the Author with Barbara Hines 2-14-2012
[40] Barbara Hines worked extensively on *The Second Coming* and says she has no idea where the name came from. In an interview 2-14-2012 she said, "I guess it's a play on words about women's sexuality but I don't think I ever thought about it in sort of the *religious* context!"
[41] Interview by the Author with Phil Prim 3-4-2012

her the "Valkyrie Mother."[42] She preferred to draw the connections between issues rather than separate them, and was politically more interested in doing than in talking.[43]

Judy came to Austin from San Francisco after much persuading on the part of her older sister, Linda, who would mail issues of *The Rag* to entice her to move back to Texas. When she first arrived, Judy was disappointed to find that the same ideological factions that she viewed as distracting from progress in San Francisco also existed to a less extreme degree in Austin. She originally fell in with the Progressive Labor (PL) crowd only because they appeared to be a group that was actually going out into the community and "doing political work." She soon found them to be too ideologically extreme, however, which was made evident by one argument in particular between herself and Dick Reavis, PL advocate and *Rag* contributor. Dick exploded at Judy, calling her "the problem" and "bourgeois middle class" when she mentioned she was going to attend a symphony. "Never being one to let someone attack me, I told him what I considered of that, and if that was what this group was going to be then I wasn't very interested in this group because it was very narrow-minded and ideological and would never get anything done anyway."[44] Judy then devoted her energy to *The Rag* and the Austin Women's Liberation Movement, inspiring *Rag* women like Suzanne Gott, who would go on to personally inspire other women like Glenn Scott, and so the movement grew.

Under Judy Smith's leadership, *The Rag* started to write about women's issues and became a major nexus in the Women's Movement, bringing women's issues like abortion and male dominance in society to the central discussion of the larger Movement for social justice in Austin:

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[42] Interview with Bill Meacham at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.
[43] Interview with Judy Smith at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.
[44] Interview with Judy Smith at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.

> We wrote a whole conversation around what are sex roles and how you are conditioned down into being this very limited being. We got into this whole other arena around health and birth control and abortion, again, because it was just an evolution. Those of us who got involved with the Women's Liberation discussion, a lot of us because we were friends, also had an interest in this whole area of birth control and particularly legal abortion. And we would have our conversations around that in our women's group and you would go, okay what do you do? Well, you start a referral center and you go to the *Rag* and you say, 'Guess what, we're taking some space in the *Rag* office and we're doing this.' It's not like, 'Can we do it?' It was like, 'We're doing this.' So we got our hammers out and we hammered up a little room, which was a really tiny little space, and we got our volunteers and we trained everybody and we said, if you get this kind of call you say this, and if you get this kind of call you say this, so it just became part of the Rag. So those articles appeared in *The Rag*.[45]

Judy's hotline started out as a birth control counseling number that women could call for free advice about where to find doctors who would prescribe the pill. It became a popular source after the women posted the telephone number all over campus and advertised in *The Rag*, and Judy and others trained more women to answer the calls. The counseling group moved into the Catholic Student Center, where the *Second Coming* space was located, and it gradually evolved to focus more and more on abortion. Barbara Hines explains that Austin women and women from other counties, some of whom were still in high school, would call or walk in asking primarily about where to get the procedure. Judy Smith explains that the main priority was to discourage self-abortion: "It was usually, 'I have a friend.' It was very rarely, 'I,' 'me.' And then we would say don't worry! There are ways to get safe – and don't even think about…"[46] The

[45] Interview with Judy Smith at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.
[46] Interview with Judy Smith at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.

group of women's movement volunteers would recommend a doctor who would perform a safe abortion in San Antonio or East Texas, or across the border in Piedras Negras, Mexico. Occasionally, Judy Smith or Victoria Pho (also an active member of *The Rag*) would serve as guides throughout the entire process and would drive women four hours to Mexico when no one else would. Wealthier "clients" could even fly to Europe or California, where laws were beginning to permit abortion under mental health regulations.[47]

Barbara, Judy, Vic and a few others began to be concerned about their legal liability involved with helping women get abortions, the performance of which was a felony in Texas at the time. One evening, they met with one of two female lawyers with whom they had contact to discuss their legal liability. Barbara says, "I don't think we were going to stop doing it, but we just wanted to know."[48] Sarah Weddington had been close with the Austin Women's movement group and had at one point in 1970 hosted a benefit garage sale at her house. It was on that occasion, Barbara Hines recalls, when someone in the group said that they should challenge the Texas abortion law, which led to *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion under a woman's right to privacy in 1973. This was a huge victory for Women's Liberation that they did not even expect, at least via that ruling. Judy remembers receiving the call from Sarah Weddington at the *Rag* office with the news that they had won:

> I answer the phone, "What?" because it was decided on a principle that we didn't think they were going to decide it on. We thought it was going to be Equal Protection or something and they did Privacy. Sarah had made her arguments Due Process, Equal Protection, and then Privacy was just a side thing. We weren't a birth control case. There were several birth control cases that had come in under Privacy but they were like married people being able to use birth control. We were over here on these other issues.

[47] Interview by the Author with Barbara Hines 2-14-2012
[48] Interview by the Author with Barbara Hines 2-14-2012

> And they just slid that right in there with the privacy ones and that was the decision. And we were just like, Oh my God![49]

The *Rag* associated women's group played a crucial role in early talks with Sarah Weddington about the potential of *Roe vs. Wade*. Judy Smith explains that for one thing, she and the group had renewed confidence in the judicial system as a medium for establishing civil rights after *The Rag* had won its First Amendment case at the U.S. Supreme Court with the help of ACLU lawyer David Richards.

> One of the reasons why we tried Roe vs. Wade at all was because the *Rag* had had success in its suit and I had been involved in that suit and I had testified in that suit and we had won it like that [snaps]. And it was like, "WOO HOO! This stuff works! Let's go to court!" So I said, "Let's go to court, Sarah. We've done all this other stuff. We'll keep doing it, but if we can go to court, maybe that will help." So that's one of the things that the *Rag* helped, was the realization that that's a tool. Not one that we used everyday. In fact it was a strange tool for most of us, the idea that you go to court to get your rights. We were like, "Nah, smash 'em and get your rights!"[50]

The Women's Liberation movement had a profound impact on men and women in the Austin community and *The Rag*. The wave of feminist energy that went through the *Rag* had tangible effects on articles and advertisements, and internal processes as well. From then on, men did their own typing and everybody pitched in on the "shit work." Some men were more open than others to the changes. Phil Prim said,

> I was really, really interested in [the Women's Movement] because I didn't know anything about it. When I first heard the words "male chauvinism" I had no idea what they were talking about… I was able to understand what they were talking about when

[49] Interview with Judy Smith at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas.
[50] Interview with Judy Smith at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas.

> they explained it, and I just remember finding women asserting themselves to be really, really great. And I liked it. And I really loved being around someone like Judy, because she would make me better. Because we didn't agree on everything. She was an anarchist and I was a Marxist, so I couldn't get away with anything. I'd have to defend what I believed in, but it was always -- we were such good friends.[51]

Glenn Scott arrived to the *Rag* staff in 1975, and said she could tell that men like Danny Schweers, Hunter Ellinger, and Alan Pogue had also been touched by the movement. Glenn explains, "Hunter had lots of opinions (tended to talk), but he would stop himself and listen to others and be much more participatory and soliciting of women. Same way with Danny."[52] As an illustration for how much the Women's movement changed *The Rag* as a publication, Alice Embree showed me an advertisement in a 1967 issue that sought out new *Rag* contributors, the general angle of which expressed to a presumably male audience that writing for *The Rag* would be a manly thing to do and would result in attracting more women. My reaction was, "This would have never flown in 1975!" Alice replied, "No, it would not have."[53]

Austin City Council

Just as the Women's Liberation started to kick off, *The Rag* also began to cover Austin City Council regularly and was the only paper in town in to do so. Until then, City Council had operated under the radar and regarded any "hippie" presence at their meetings with contempt. Even toward the local daily, the *Austin American Statesman*, the City Council was accustomed to minor coverage. According to Hunter Ellinger, "They wanted the newspaper to say something

[51] Interview by the Author with Phil Prim 3-4-2012
[52] Interview by the Author with Glenn Scott 1-28-2012
[53] Interview by the Author with Alice Embree 2-2-2012

nice about them and that's all they cared about."[54] Bill Meacham arrived to *The Rag* in summer of 1969 and became the primary reporter for the new City News column. Neither the *Statesman* nor City Council took students' political demands seriously, as Bill Meacham recalls:

> *Statesman* didn't care about the students, and then *The Rag* came along and said, well, we ought to be involved because it affected our lives. Politics in Austin was kind of a cool spectator sport, and we made it even more of a spectacle than it was… So I went to City Council and wrote up what I thought. There was no clear demarcation between objective reporting and reporting. The so-called "objective journalism" was just a voice for corporate domination.[55]

The Rag targeted the City Council originally as part of its anti-war movement because they would never permit a public anti-war demonstration in the street. "All of them were on the sidewalks…there were all these court cases."[56] When the 18-year-old vote went into effect in 1971, *The Rag*'s coverage took on serious repercussions and by then, *The Daily Texan* had followed suit, starting its own column on local politics. In 1970, two influential members of the *Rag* community took over positions in the UT student bureaucracy: Jeff Jones as Student Body President in 1970 and Micheal Eakin as editor of *The Daily Texan* in 1973. As a considerable population of students won the right to vote in city elections, Jeff and Michael realized that the only media outlets that students really paid attention to were *The Daily Texan* and *The Rag*, and the two decided to used that advantage to promote liberal candidates.

> We realized we had a captive audience of like 30-40,000 students, and there were only like 30 or 40,000 votes in the average city council election. And so a bunch of people formed these student action things that went out and endorsed candidates, and forced them to pay huge amounts of money to advertise, and then we just bought *The Daily*

[54] Interview by the Author with Hunter Ellinger 1-22-2012
[55] Interview with Bill Meacham at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.
[56] Interview by the Author with Jeff Jones 1-24-2012

> *Texan*. Which had full-page ads, every day, attacking people. Some of them were outright attacking. Others were just like, here's the slate, vote for these people.[57]

The plan worked. Not only did students propel anti-war sentiment to the mainstream political level, they also began to challenge municipal policies that were at odds with the interests of an increasing population of young liberals that the university had attracted as a safe haven from both the draft and the conservativism of surrounding Texas towns. Jeff Jones explains that in the sixties, Austin was not a progressive city by any official means, but that would drastically change:

> Most people would never venture to the south part of the city. You'd go there because that part was where all of the really bizarre rednecks used to live… And the way that the city was set up, they had alcohol sales determined by constable districts, or some ridiculous state law at the time. And so you couldn't buy beer if you were in South Austin. You had to go to North Austin to buy beer and they didn't have liquor by the drink at any bar until the late seventies. You couldn't get a scotch. No such thing. You had to belong to a private club. So it really was not a progressive city. It was more progressive than Dallas or Houston in that it had a little enclave of people that were crazier than the other people who lived in other Texas cities. It had liberals; it had a lot of liberals. But the population as a whole was not progressive. They elected, like, Nazis to the City Council. Regularly. People who were just beyond the pail by any standard even used today… By 1975, something like 20,000 students voted in that city council election and five of the seven candidates on the slate were elected, and the power structure of the city just went berserk. They couldn't believe that. Somehow they felt that, "This is outrageous, these students have taken over!" There were several precincts like Jester Dorms, where the votes were like 895 to 6. The *Austin American* wrote an editorial that

[57] Interview by the Author with Jeff Jones 1-19-2012

> said something like, "These students are like sheep being led to the slaughter!" Like I said, those of us who realized that this was a group of people who only had one media outlet, we knew that if we somehow just constantly had people running *The Daily Texan* who were bombarding the students with every peccadillo committed by the city council, then sooner or later it would turn it around, and that's what turned around Austin politics. And it elected Sarah Weddington to the legislature, where she did the *Roe* vs. *Wade* thing.[58]

Whereas *The Daily Texan* maintained pretenses of "straight journalism" while reporting on City Council, Bill Meacham attended meetings and simply wrote whatever he thought for *The Rag*. Scott Pitman later covered City Council in the literary stream-of-consciousness style, like *The Rag*'s very own Hunter S. Thompson or Ken Kesey.[59] Bill admits that his early motivations as a local reporter were partly "to annoy, poke fun at, and aggravate the establishment." *The Rag* was, after all, "fermenting rebellion. We would write things that were outrageous."[60] It was a learning experience in "how the establishment treats the press," Bill discovered, after he bashed councilman Lowell Leberman and was subsequently ignored and refused interviews. Jim Rock, on the other hand, who covered City Council after 1975, said that he was always treated with as much respect as "straight," journalistic reporters. "If I wanted to have an interview with the mayor, I would get the interview." Jim would also receive his own media box with the same information given to major local news networks.[61]

In 1972, in the heat of students' emerging involvement in city politics, construction of the South Texas Nuclear Power Plant united a swath of environmentalists against residential development and the potential toxification of the land. *The Rag* fought against the power plant

[58] Interview by the Author with Jeff Jones 1-24-2012
[59] Interview with Scott Pitman at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.
[60] Interview with Bill Meacham at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.
[61] Interview with Jim Rock at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.

and the City Council members who promoted it, raising questions such as, where will nuclear waste products end up? Who benefits from sprawling growth, besides commercial developers? *Rag* staffers like Hunter Ellinger staked out in residential neighborhoods in North Austin handing out leaflets.[62] *The Rag* also drew the connections from the South Texas plant, which was constructed by Brown and Root (now KBR, Inc., a former subsidiary of Halliburton Inc.), to corporate imperialism, which they connected to class oppression and war. The war in Vietnam was by now so lacking in public support that military contractors began to seek alternative markets for their products. Jeff Jones, along with Michael Eakin and Tom Samson, were public figures against the power plant because of its connection to militarism in Vietnam and corporate corruption in Texas politics: "Brown and Root built every single military installation in Vietnam. And I believe Mr. Brown was LBJ's college roommate. That was the obvious connection right there. Then they started building nuclear power plants." Ralph Nader came to the Student Union to speak about the "evils of nuclear power," meanwhile, pro-nuclear City Council members were pushing their slogan, "Energy too Cheap to Meter!"[63]

As the radical Movement progressed through the seventies in Austin, its energy shifted more and more toward the "doing" rather than "talking" that Judy Smith principally advocated because the scale was localized and the rhetoric was tempered with reality. As Jeff Jones put it,

> The personal is the political. So we were trying to have our life be a manifestation of a better way to live, but you can't do that outside of a societal context. So we wanted society to change so we could live the way we wanted to. We thought that the way we wanted to live was a good way for everybody to live, which was to not be dominated by

[62] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012
[63] Interview by the Author with Jeff Jones 1-24-2012

> any larger entity, whether it was the government, or corporations, or university bureaucracy.[64]

Participation in city politics was a significant development in what could be called *The Rag's* spiritual development. As Bill Meacham believed, *The Rag*'s movement to involve itself with city politics was a natural evolution of its ideals turning into action. It reflected the earnestness of *The Rag* community's effort to live out notions like participatory democracy in a realistic and meaningful way by holding local government accountable for its actions.

Alternative Institutions

Throughout the various generations of its history, the *Rag* collective generally grouped into two ideological camps that debated in copy meetings and everyday conversations *ad nauseam*. These included the political radicals, who believed in participatory democracy and the restructuring of public life, and the cultural radicals, who believed in the power of art and new social values to change behavior at every level of society. Of the political radicals' camp, there were those who believed in electoral politics, voting, and the court system for establishing rights and re-distributing power, and there were more anarchistic "natural order" types, who shied away from elections and devoted their energy to developing alternative institutions, creating the change they wanted to see in the world more quickly than could be effectuated by top-down change. The beauty of *The Rag* was that it provided a place for all of them. "Actually," adds Judy Smith, "There were three sides because there were those of us who thought you didn't have to take sides!"[65] For political people who steered away from city politics, the Co-op movement

[64] Interview with Bill Meacham at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas
[65] Interview with Judy Smith at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.

and the creation of alternative schools provided a means to exercise radical values at the community level and experiment with anti-capitalistic business and housing models.

Bill Meacham was heavily involved in starting housing co-ops and summed up their social benefits in an article of "Co-Op News," in *The Rag*, November 1975:

> Through cooperative activity people meet their needs by working together instead of competing. This way they can a) get the goods and services they want, b) usually get them cheaper than they can on the capitalist market, and c) enjoy the feelings of friendship and warmth with their fellow cooperators instead of the fragmented alienation so frequent in today's society. In Austin the cooperative principle is being applied to improve people with food, housing, auto parts, and other goods and services. I have recently discovered that, entirely outside of the "established" cooperating community here, the principle is being applied to provide a less tangible but no less vital service--therapeutic counseling, both for crisis intervention and long-term emotional growth.[66]

The Rag community started its own, mobile "eating co-op" that became a vehicle for welcoming more people into a conversational setting to talk about politics and change. Alan Pogue recalls, "We would go to someone's house or wherever they lived, and that person would feed everybody. Or sometimes two people would do it. So you have to prepare enough food to feed 24-30 people sometimes."[67] Bill and Hunter Ellinger were both founding members of Wheatsville Food Co-op, which started out as a group of people pooling money to buy food in bulk before becoming a storefront.[68] Wheatsville has evolved into a successful model for the sustainable and organic food business, and moved twice to larger locations before settling where it is now on 31st and Guadalupe. Val Liveoak started an auto co-op where members shared

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[66] Meacham, Bill. "Counseling Co-op" *The Rag* Vol. 10 No.3 Nov. 1975. Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
[67] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012.
[68] Interview with Bill Meacham at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.

vehicles and received cheap car repair services. Organic gardening groups shared resources and labor to grow their own food, a milder version of the "back-to-the-land movement," which attracted many radicals away from urban life altogether.[69] Co-ops provided a concrete experimental platform to test communitarian principles and democracy in business operations. Hunter Ellinger explains:

> It's something you can do before you win the big fight, cause that's the big thing. And the result of that… You end up maturing. Because what matures people is engagement with reality, because reality wins all fights. So you have to adjust what you're doing and all that… Where as if you're just in the fantasy world of argument, you can stay there forever, you know.[70]

The co-op movement did draw criticism, as Hunter Ellinger recalls. "Housing co-ops were seen by some as being, kind of, *bourgeois deviationism* in the sense it was, you know, you're just taking care of yourself. You're not changing the world, or whatever. That's the argument. It's a commie term for being off the party line in a way that is just making yourself comfortable."[71] Groups who were developing co-op models did not always agree, as could be expected from a collective trying to envision a new and alternative way to live. Just like any political constituency, there are bound to be individuals or sub-groups who want to incorporate rigid ideology into the system. Hunter Ellinger recalls, "There were people in the co-op who thought that accounting was paternalistic. That doesn't work for me, you know."[72] Alan Pogue adds, "There would be some people who were so *pure* in a way that they wouldn't want to own the building. I don't know what they were thinking, that they didn't want to be a part of the capitalist class or some nonsense. But if you don't own it, of course you don't control it, and then

[69] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012
[70] Interview by the Author with Hunter Ellinger 1-22-2012
[71] Interview by the Author with Hunter Ellinger 1-22-2012
[72] Interview by the Author with Hunter Ellinger 1-22-2012

you are at the whim of whoever does own it, and that's what happened to the Armadillo [World Headquarters]. The people just sold it out from under it and, poof, it was gone."[73]

According to Bill Meacham and Alan Pogue, the co-operative institutions begun in the seventies, many of which have functioned ever since, are the most positive results to come out of the social movements of that era. Co-operatives do require substantial participant energy to keep them going, but that process is part of its overall benefit in teaching people how to live and work communally. The amount of time people put into sustaining co-op life may have consequently drained the time that they could spend working on other initiatives, including *The Rag*. Some of the co-ops including Avenue Housing Co-op started their own newsletters that drew inspiration and publishing know-how from *The Rag* and members of its community, including Jim Rock who wrote for the Avenue newsletter and was a figure in its development.[74]

In addition to starting co-ops, other *Rag* members led efforts to start alternative schools that advertised primarily through *The Rag* and were the subject of education-related articles. Judy Walther, David Mahler, and about ten other people started an alternative institution in 1971 called Greenbriar School "on a, sort of, hippie commune" between Bastrop and Melvin, TX.[75] Judy had a degree in education from UT and she had fought along with Judy Smith and Barbara Hines to change the content of Texas textbooks to include better role models for women and Hispanic students. Greenbriar School taught life values in addition to educational skills, and Greenbriar kids even participated in protests to protect the trees that Frank Erwin ordered cut down to make way for a larger Memorial Stadium. Judy Walther says that not all of the original

[73] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012. The Armadillo World Headquarters was a honky tonk bar and music venue where psychedelic rock and country bands like Shiva's Headband, Stevie Ray Vaugh, and Willie Nelson played. *The Rag* sold there, and *Rag* artists like Jim Franklin and Kerry Awn were also poster artists for shows there until it closed in 1979.
[74] Interview with Jim Rock at the Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas.
[75] Interview by the Author with Judy Walther 2-14-2012

instructors stayed teachers for very long, but the decision to build the school was for many of them a big step, nevertheless:

> We had been marching against the Vietnam War and complaining about this or that, and about a dozen of us decided, let's DO something. A few of us out that twelve, only a few of us were trained educators with degrees. By the second year, only two of us were left. Several of them decided, "I don't really like kids. Or I don't like teaching kids."[76]

A group of women also started a Socialist school called Bread and Roses that advertised heavily in *The Rag* in 1975. Glenn Scott had originally studied education and started writing for *The Rag* as a publication outlet before becoming very involved in the Women's Movement and Socialist Groups. Like Greenbriar, the Bread and Roses School also had a brief existence, but had a broad range of accomplishments in educating people about union organizing and Socialist teachings:

> Some of my Socialist friends and I decided it was high time that we had a Socialist School, to sort of reach out and have events - educational events - in a setting and there happened to be somebody who had enough money to have a house in West Campus, and so we formed the Bread and Roses School. And it would advertise, we would publicize in *The Rag*. It was the main way we publicized. It was open to anybody, and we had events. We'd have women's issues; we'd have forums; we'd have book clubs; we'd have talks by visiting scholars and radicals. The Texas Farm Workers leaders would come. We would have benefits there. We fed the Farm Workers when they would come to lobby [at the Capitol]. Latin American policy alternative groups would have events there and talk about, you know, the aftermath of [the Allende coup in] Chile. I remember we did a big benefit, there was a feminist comedian that we brought to raise money for the Chile human rights committee…And there were, you know, radical networks all around the

[76] Interview by the Author with Judy Walther 2-14-2012

> country and I luckily had the time and I did all the publicity, and we filled an auditorium somewhere near the campus…and raised a good bit of money for the Chile human rights group. So sometimes I would write a review of that or I would write something about its coming up.

The Rag Volume 10 (1975-1976) repeatedly features full-page, content advertising for Bread and Roses School about what the group did and believed:

> The Bread and Roses School for Socialist Education is a political school. We exist to sharpen awareness of what is wrong with our society and what can be done to change it. Knowledge is fully realized only through practical activity. We want the school to be a cooperative environment that encourages everyone to be active. We hope that the school can absorb some of the energy of people struggling to control their lives, and that through collective study and discussion, that energy can be redirected outward with greater force and clarity.
>
> What are our politics?
>
> We believe it is important that the school have an anti-capitalist perspective. The struggle of working people, gays, women and national minorities are a response to the injustice and oppression of the capitalist system; and eventually that system itself must be challenged. We also believe that domestic issues cannot be separated from the worldwide struggle against imperialism. We see our role as helping to focus and unite the ongoing daily struggles of people against a common enemy - the capitalist system, the class which controls it and the ideology which they promote.[77]

The notion of a Socialist school in West Campus today is about as farfetched as a black president of the United States would have been in 1975. Demographic changes aside, the energy required to coordinate and economically sustain such an institution and others like it must have

[77] *The Rag*, Vol. 10 No. 1, p.7

been immense. That Bread and Roses succeeded for any period of time is a testament to the commitment of those members, the sincerity of their belief that a political revolution was on the brink of happening in America, and that it was time to become educated leaders of that revolution.

Creating communities with alternative, non-capitalistic values and experimenting with economic models based on communal ownership was a further spiritual development in the *The Rag*'s movement, taking the task of "doing" up to another level. These communities were also tied to physical spaces, which are so deterministic to the social bonds that develop between people and how effectively people can work together.

> Building institutions is important. There's a problem with the average person's idea of what anarchy means as opposed to being a political anarchist. Not making anything concrete happen. You have to have a space. You have to have buildings. That's why the Armadillo was so important, and why the University Y was so important and the Methodist Student Center on the Drag was a big place to meet.[78]

As counterculture and opposition to the war started to go mainstream in other media sources, community news about alternative lifestyles and local institutions became a niche for *The Rag* in campus media, and was one of the most important features of the articles published from 1970 to 1977. It exposed open-minded students to ideas contrary to those of the dominant culture, and was a source of self-justification for misfits. Lynn Goodmanstrauss, who wrote a number of articles for *The Rag* in the early seventies on topics like organic farming, mothering, and Mexican restaurants, also initially read *The Rag* as a young mother married to a physicist who then worked at UT. For Lynn, always an outsider from the artificial-food, advertising-driven culture in which she was embedded, *The Rag* was a "lifesaver."

[78] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012.

The Rag kept me saner than probably anything else. For instance I was one of the first Lamaze mothers in Austin. It's an anesthesia, analgesic-free birth, and it was at Brackenridge. And I was 21! I don't believe it now. Women in labor were tied down flat. Try having a shit tied down flat. My husband was in the delivery room. Our doctor had just come to Austin – he was in the air force – and the whole night staff came in to watch. This is the way that women were treated. I graduated high school in 1963 – they wouldn't let the girls take trigonometry 'cause we didn't need it. It was hard to become an engineering major. And pre-med was pretty well discouraged too. You had to be outstanding to do any of that. For me, it was like, these people are saying stuff that I'm thinking about, and it feeds me. I'm not isolated anymore.[79]

[79] Interview by the Author with Lynn Goodmanstrauss 1-16-2012

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1977: Why *The Rag* Ended

If *The Rag* was a such an active center of community with focused intent to change public life in areas where many problems continue to this day, why did one of the Underground Press's longest-running papers come to a halt in 1977? The radical identity that *The Rag* defined in Austin has not changed much in the intervening decades since it stopped going to print. *The Rag* wrote about relationships between money, power, and American imperialism. It questioned the activities of the C.I.A. in Latin America and the Middle East; its authors wrote about the ecological and health concerns resulting from nuclear power and agribusiness. Just like Internet activists today, *The Rag* despised censorship and championed the First Amendment on its pages and in the US Supreme Court.[80] Many of *The Rag*'s political issues are still relevant in today's political discourse, so if the paper's demise in 1977 cannot be explained by victory over its ideological opponents, why did it end?

An analysis of the relationship between media and community illustrates some reasons for *The Rag*'s demise. In traditional cases of journalism produced for a mass audience, an elite group of individuals create media content for reception by passive consumers. Marshall McLuhan, whose media theory greatly influenced the Underground Press and was a frequent subject for discussion in *Rag* meetings, called this use of media "hot" that requires little imagination or active engagement with the information on the receiving end.[81] Community-

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[80] Harvey, Martin. *The Evolution of The Rag: An Analysis of the Social, Political, and Technological Influences on the Birth of One Underground Newspaper in the 1960s.* Masters Thesis, The University of Texas at Arlington, May 2010. p.63 ACLU lawyer David Richards, took a Free Speech case regarding *The Rag* to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1970 and won in 1972. *New Left Education Project v. Board of Regents of the University of Texas* established the right for *The Rag* and other papers to sell on campus regardless of whether the Board of Regents agreed with the content.

[81] Interview by the Author with Jeff Shero 10-15-2011

driven media, on the other hand, is "cool" media; it provokes participation.[82] *The Rag*, as a participatory community media, or "communal mosaic," was "cool" because of the inclusive nature of its content (contrasting perspectives), its collective production process, and because its readership actively reacted to the medium when they joined groups, protested, and had heated conversations about the issues that went to print.[83] The office provided a physical space for Austin activists to meet, and a project into which they could contribute their energy. It was a fire around which a radical tribe could gather, and the warmth that attracted new people into their movement.

Much of *The Rag*'s success, however, and the "cool" intensity with which it was created and received, derived from fear: a previously insulated community suddenly destabilized by political controversies earnestly believed that re-evaluation of the trajectory of societal progress was necessary in order to save humanity and the planet. As early members moved on and the new *Rag* community re-entered into some kind of equilibrium with post-Vietnam approach to activism, *The Rag* media failed to evolve along with it, participation dwindled, and the "coldness" of it became passive lukewarm.

The Rag ended in 1977 because the social and economic conditions necessary for its birth in 1966 had either disappeared or altered. The ground beneath *The Rag* shifted with the end of the draft and the decline of political unity that had existed in the sixties. Many efforts on the part of the local establishment to restore order and suppress rebellion finally succeeded as the young generation of exhausted radicals moved into a new phase of life, dispersing their collective political energy into new channels. Finally, *The Rag* lost the volunteer capacity it had relied on and failed to adopt a sustainable economic model for survival. *The Rag*'s struggle to provide

[82] McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. NY: 1st Edition McGraw Hill, 1964. 2nd Edition Camridge: MIT Press, 1994. p. 23
[83] McLuhan p.204

access to alternative information and unite a community whose connections were wearing thin reflect the struggle caused not only by a labor-intensive technological medium, but the survival-struggle of a people and an ideology at odds with the dominant socio-economic system and its assumed principles.

The Decline of Political Unity

After the end of the draft in 1973, the U.S. began a slow withdrawal of troops in Vietnam until the Fall of Saigon in April 1975. In Austin, the nebulous population of movement supporters who came out for the big marches evaporated, revealing the limits of the bourgeoisie's desire for change. While the core organizers of the earlier protest generation might have viewed the participation of tens of thousands marching in the streets as sure evidence for the crumbling of capitalism, by the seventies and after the dissolution of SDS, people began to recognize the weaknesses of the new left ideological movement. Factions and individuals had united primarily over what they were against, the war in Vietnam being the most prominent common enemy. The leaders of Leftist groups agreed that the cause of the war was the imperialist nature of America's crusade for global capitalism, but they did not agree on positive solutions for alternative economic or foreign policies, nor on what direction to take their constituents' collective political energy moving forward. Even if they all believed in revolution, the Austin conglomerate of self-proclaimed anarchists, Marxists, Maoists, Socialists, liberals, and "Street People" hardly agreed on what an alternative government would look like. Nevertheless, people felt compelled to take arbitrary sides. According to Philip Russell,

> It became the cliché to say, "What's your political tendency?" Because here we were, everybody, we were anti-war protesters or what not and then suddenly everybody had to align themselves with some Marxist country and political lines and all that…I thought it

> was total bullshit. So people would always ask me, "What's your tendency?" and I'd say, "Albanian Trotskyist!" just because I thought that was absolutely the most absurd thing, and nobody ever said, "Oh, you're full of shit," they just said, "Oh ,wow! Heavy, man!"[84]

Because they failed to provide unified and convincing arguments in support of a new reality, the rigidly ideological lost credibility with their temporarily captive anti-war audience. Alan Pogue explains,

> After '72 I guess it was, whenever they quit the lottery thing, unfortunately, you have a lot of people who are, well…Self interest is a great motivator. And the government learned that lesson. I mean, we have no draft. You have the mercenary contracts and an economic draft for the poor. So it's an "all volunteer" army, so young people in universities don't feel any heat. And young people in general can ignore it if they want to. Back then, you couldn't. And so the people who were working on *The Rag* understood the bigger picture. You know, who's pulling the string behind the curtain, what are the issues. But a lot of people don't. They still don't.[85]

While *The Rag* was a place for debate and discussion of different viewpoints on "who's pulling the string behind the curtain," and the political ramifications of that, after the end of the draft, there was a smaller demand for its decidedly left-leaning political information in the increasingly complacent campus community. In the worst cases, extremism emerging out of the new left and feminist groups "turned off" ambivalent members of the larger UT community, and dealt a blow to the movement's reputation as a whole.

Although Austin did not have a Weatherman group as insurgent as in other parts of the country, violent extremism had alienated many Americans from the new left movement and at least two Austin women were in prison for committing violent crimes against the State. "It

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[84] Interview by the Author with Philip Russell 1-20-2012
[85] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012

splintered off. There was a big divide…" says Barbara Hines of extremist groups and individuals in the new left such as Linda Evans and Marilyn Buck, the two women in Austin who were incarcerated. "None of those women were the core of what we were doing."[86]

Of the radical feminists in Austin, there were extremists who wanted to give away their male children, or claimed that you could not be a "real" feminist unless you had a lesbian relationship.[87] *Rag* staffer Barbara Haber recalls feeling "shattered" by her feminist group's reaction when she announced upon her return from India that she had decided to get married:

> Well, I was told that I had betrayed the women's movement by saying that I would get married. And I, who was very naive, said, "But you said this was about choice!" And they said, "That's only for public distribution. You don't have a choice. You as an individual, as a feminist, are not allowed to get married." And I was shattered by, or disenchanted -- I was really hurt by that. I thought I was trying to make more choices, and then I discover there was another rigidity taking its place. Before you *had* to get married, and now you weren't allowed to get married. There was no choice…And I think that if I've made any shift, I hope, is …trying to put people before principle. And I think everybody has to work that out for themselves. There are a lot of principles that I won't, you know, violate. But, I had hopes for the women's movement that we would remake the world with idealistic hopes, that we were really talking about choice. And it turns out for some people that wasn't the case.[88]

Even with the existence of positive and open-minded groups, the strengths of the local movement discussed in the previous chapter --the rise of alternative institutions, schools, electoral politics, and movements such as the Women's Movement within the larger movement-- also meant a weakening division of political energy in Austin. *The Rag* relied on volunteers from

[86] Interview by the Author with Barbara Hines 2-14-2012
[87] Inteview by the Author with Lynn Goodmanstrauss 1-16-2012
[88] Interview with Barbara Haber at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas

different areas of interest coming together under shared principles. While the principles remained, people became so involved in their separate initiatives that by around 1975, very few volunteers could also afford to sustain *The Rag*. Collectively, however, around the time *The Rag* finally ended, many of these separate local movements also began to die in waves, which further hurt *The Rag*.

Movements declined in energy probably due in large part because they lacked an organizational model to properly sustain leadership, and leaders eventually had to move on. "I think there was burn out," says Barbara Hines. "For me, I started law school. I lived and breathed [the Women's Movement]. This is what I did 24/7. For me, it was… I just needed to take a break."[89] Democratic as the movement was, the grassroots organizing of political groups and alternative institutions heavily relied on overworked and usually unpaid leaders who started to lose or re-direct their energy. The first generation of Austin SDS leaders had almost all left *The Rag* or Austin by the time the second generation, led most notably by Judy Smith, shifted the direction of *The Rag* to a broader range of issues. After Judy left, there were certainly strong, positive personalities and devoted contributors, but her move to Montana in 1973 did mark a turning point in *Rag* leadership, and it never did quite reach the same clarity or force of vision.

The Rag represented what had been a growing narrative for the Texas left in public discourse, suddenly cut short by a lack of political consensus and the fragmentation of leadership. Like the Civil Rights movement, the anti-war movement had provided an entry point to bring left-wing media to the awareness of young, middle class readers who were morally affected by racism and war, but had not necessarily considered how either of those issues related to a revaluation of American capitalism or to class consciousness, not to mention gender politics. The connections are not immediately obvious to everyone. Glenn Scott explains how she began

[89] Interview by the Author with Barbara Hines 2-14-2012

to draw the connections, and eventually formed a cohesive understanding from a Socialist perspective in line with the kind of writing published in *The Rag.*

> Looking back, it seemed fairly obvious at the time. [For] women who began standing up and saying it was wrong to discriminate against somebody because of the color of their skin, it's a fairly easy step to start saying, wait a minute, I feel like I'm being judged and discriminated against because of my gender. And If I'm fighting for somebody's freedom regardless of skin color, can't we also fight for freedom on the basis of gender? So that was one step. There was a lot of discrimination against women and against men in that era about access to fair resources and equality of pay…and access to professions, and access to loans and finance. Until '75 there was the Vietnam War and there was a huge critique of the military-industrial role in the war, the foreign policy, and the international capital, and so you begin at that and opposition to the war and you say, wait a minute, they're the ones who are also keeping it so that Blacks are down, and women are down, and so they're acquiescing in this process where women make less [money for equal work]! So that's how you begin to see the connections.[90]

After "obvious wrongs" such as the draft were eliminated, the entire social mechanism for connecting obvious moral imperatives to what the collective left considered the cause --the systematic immorality embedded in the nature of capitalism-- also faded. That mechanism encompassed the movement and the media itself: the participants, leaders, and ultimately, alternative journalism outlets like *The Rag*. The liberal constituency in Texas' white middle class had undoubtedly experienced a boom, but whether that population continued to increase at the same rate in the eighties is highly unlikely.

Systematic Opposition

[90] Interview by the Author with Glenn Scott 1-28-2012

As Doug Rossinow points out at length in his book, *The Politics of Authenticity,* the Texas New Left always had a different character from the overriding "red diaper baby" SDS, and confronted a different set of cultural challenges while functioning at the local level. When news spread across the country in August 1966 that Charles Whitman, a racist, had climbed to the top of UT tower and shot 42 people, only to be taken down by a platoon of Texas boys who ran to their dorm rooms to retrieve their rifles before the police even arrived to the scene, the SDS must have looked to their Austin counterparts like they had come from another planet. Violence was a real threat to activists in the sixties and seventies, even if they believed in non-violent direct action. This was especially true in Texas, where the Civil Rights struggle aroused particular antipathy, and the endorsement of Communism, real or imagined, drove men to murder. People in *The Rag* were a focus for the pro-war, anti-Civil Rights, anti-drug and traditionalist movement, which operated just as vehemently although with more secretive and subversive means. The Johnson and Nixon administrations and local governments exerted systematic opposition to the anti-war movement out of authoritarianism as well as paranoia over the possibility of a nationally coordinated Black militant or Communist revolt. The COINTEL program of Johnson and Nixon's administrations included domestic spying and sabotage protocol executed by the FBI, including wire-tapping and the hiring of provocateurs and informants to destabilize the movement. The extent of protection offered by the First Amendment was clearly brought into question, and yet organizers had no way of filing suit against government agencies who exercised powers in secret against their own citizens. Government suppression of the movement is an indisputable factor in *The Rag*'s demise as a publication, as well as a community, as conservative insurgence attacked and hindered the professional careers of several of *The Rag*'s active members.

Barbara Hines requested access to her FBI file after reading an article in *Ms.* Magazine about FBI surveillance of the Women's Movement. "I had graduated from law school and had applied for a Department of Honors Justice fellowship… And it was great, they said, 'We've got a job for you in San Antonio. You speak Spanish…' and the next note I got was, 'I'm sorry, we picked somebody else.' What it was, [in my FBI file] is a letter to the Department of Justice from the FBI saying that I can't pass the security clearance. I'm marked someplace in here as disloyal number 3."[91] Someone in the local Austin women's group had been an informant and had reported information such as Barbara's "hippie attire" and the fact that she "supports abortion" to the FBI, as if that information threatened public safety. Another page mentions that Barbara contributed to "*The Rag* – Austin Underground Press." Many lines of Hines' FBI file are blacked out to protect the identity of the informant and for reasons of National Security. Barbara wrote the FBI requesting that her file be cleared, coming to the conclusion that the government basically had no reason to hold on to the information.

> …There's nothing in this file that says I did anything illegal…The only thing I ever did was within my protected First Amendment activities. And I got this letter back saying they had expunged my file. But I doubt they ever expunged it…What I think about this, just personally, is if I have 100 pages, imagine what they did with people that were really a threat. People like Martin Luther King or big Black Power people or whoever were threats to whatever the national interests were.[92]

Judy Smith could tell that *The Rag*'s telephone in the hallway outside of the office was bugged – said she had become an expert in detecting the tiny 'click' that went off on bugged telephones while organizing in San Francisco.[93] Oftentimes during the first four years of *The*

[91] Interview by the Author with Barbara Hines 2-14-2012
[92] Interview by the Author with Barbara Hines 2-14-2012
[93] Interview with Judy Smith, Rag Reunion 2005, People's History of Texas

Rag, copy meetings would run for hours and 30 or 40 people would attend. It was generally assumed that FBI informants were present at large meetings like this, or perhaps students who were working for the UT Board of Regents, attempting to get students expelled for illegal activity. *The Daily Texan* reported to the FBI letters it received that contained anti-war messages, or maybe just the ones written by *Rag* staffers and SDS members. Philip Russell, who first wrote for The Rag about his travels through Cuba, said that when he requested his FBI file, in it were all the letters he had written for the *Texan* against the war, "Nicely preserved for me!"[94]

The Board of Regents was likely the administrator of *The Daily Texan*'s connection to the FBI, and it was unquestionably a direct opponent of SDS, the University Freedom Movement, and *The Rag* throughout its existence. Professors and faculty who supported SDS or worked on *The Rag* were fired or denied tenure. Nick Hopkins, Ph.D. in Linguistics from Chicago University, came to UT as an assistant professor in 1966 and decided to help with *Rag* layout and copy meetings out of his support for the anti-war and the Free Speech movements. In a memoir that Hopkins wrote for the Rag Reunion in 2005, he explains how the administration attacked him on a professional level because of his political involvement:

> By about 1968 I was working for the *Rag*. I went in on weekends to do mainly page layout, or whatever needed to be done. I think the *Rag* was one of the most important things that was happening. Its very existence created a feeling of community; there was somebody else out there that wasn't lock-step orthodox. It supported a lot of street people as well. For me, one of the most important lessons was that a bunch of ordinary people -- including street people, speed freaks, acid heads, academics, intellectuals, ideologues and bomb-throwing revolutionaries -- could get together and work towards a product.

[94] Interview by the Author with Philip Russell 1-20-2012

> I worked first in the basement of the Y Building at 22nd and Guadalupe, and then moved to the 24th (?) street location, above a drugstore. I painted the Rag logo on the windows. One of my favorite memories there is the night Steve Russell, then the music critic, came in with the first Santana album and played it all night.
>
> I was one of the few faculty members of SDS (which meant, at that time, I attended meetings), and I participated in the national meeting of SDS that was held in Austin. As I recall, that was the year Dick M/F and his New York motorcycle gang moved to Austin, and I remember them bathing (naked, what else) in the fountain across from the Newmann Center, where SDS was meeting.
>
> All this probably cost me my job. In 1970 I got married (to Kathryn Josserand) and went to Milwaukee for a year, returning to go up for tenure at UT. I was nominated for tenure by unanimous vote of the department, but was turned down at some higher level, at the beginning of 1971. When I tried to find out what was going on, I was stonewalled by the administration, who wouldn't even tell me where (much less why) the decision had been made. It smelled. In retrospect, I'm sure I was on a list of subversives. I knew from a friend in Campus Security that my name had come across their desk as a probable dope dealer, since I "made frequent trips to Mexico." In any case, it was time to move on.[95]

UT professors and other government employees were easy targets for the establishment's attack on the movement since they put themselves in a vulnerable position if they allied with the students. Neither Barbara Hines nor Nick Hopkins had the means to challenge government employers' decisions. Students were most vulnerable if they managed to get arrested during a protest or engaging in illegal activity, as Alan Pogue learned in 1970 after the infamous

[95] Memoir by Nick Hopkins written for the Rag Reunion, 2005. Shared with the Author via personal correspondence with Nick Hopkins

Chuckwagon Riots, which, he adds, were probably incited by an agent provocateur.[96] Twenty-one people were arrested when hundreds rebelled against Frank Erwin's decision to close the Chuckwagon to non-students. Among those arrested were several "street people" who had slashed tires on police vehicles, and students, including Alan Pogue, the *Rag* photographer and a crucial member of the collective from 1969 onward. Alan remembers getting into a patrol car with Burt Goerding, the infamous police chief, as Burt said to him, "Well, Alan, I know you're only a moderate radical."

"I said to him well, thanks a lot Burt. Let me go!"[97] Alan could hardly manage his studies at UT and organize simultaneously as he spent the semester in an out of court and paying lawyers' fees. Eventually, all charges were dismissed except for those against the people who slashed the tires. According to Alan, in cases like his, the establishment was using the court system as a weapon against protest organizers to create obstacles for them and impede their freedom of expression, rather than serving as an instrument of justice.

> So, that's a tactic, you know. Get people all tied up in the legal system. It took a lot of time and money… They had the Chicago 7 on an even larger scale, but the same idea. You get them all tied up in court forever…So when people want to do things that's going to get them arrested I always say, no don't do it. You'll get three column inches in the newspaper and the next six or eight months of your life will be hell. Do something else.[98]

In terms of public support, the unity of anti-war activism with the cultural "hippie" revolution had its drawbacks. Texans who associated hippies with moral depravity, drug use and extramarital sex could justify their desire to oppress their activism out of a belief that to do so was to uphold more descent standards of civil society. According to numerous *Rag* accounts, the

[96] Interview with Bill Meacham at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas
[97] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012
[98] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012

FBI and court justice system may have bent the law and granted themselves the right to impede on activists' rights, breaking the social contract they shared as American citizens and turning a blind eye not only to the infringement of privacy and the First Amendment, but to murder.

Michael Eakin had worked on *The Rag* before editing *The Daily Texan* and co-founding *The Austin Sun* with Jeffrey Nightbyrd (previously Jeff Shero) in 1974, just as the South Texas Nuclear Power Plant became a primary issue for both papers. In 1979, Eakin was shot and killed in the middle of one afternoon walking out of a restaurant in Houston. He had been one of the most public figures in Austin opposing the Power Plant, personally carrying the issue to City Council year after year. Alan Pogue, Jeff Jones, Jeff Nightbyrd, and others who were involved with that movement believe that he was assassinated, possibly by someone working for Brown & Root. According to Pogue, "He was shot by a sniper, I mean somebody in a moving car with a rifle. You have to be really good to do that."[99] His murderer was never found and brought to justice.

The threat that a leader could be eliminated in cold blood from public discourse infuriated and deeply hurt the fighting spirit of Austin organizers. Some people thought Texas must be too backwards to merit staying here to work for progressive change. Jeff Jones was among those so affected by Michael Eakins murder, and concerned that he might be next, that he left town.

> I moved because Michael Eakin was murdered. And he and I and Todd Samonson were three of the people who were most out-front nuclear power people. And after Michael was beaten, Todd would come out of the Rag office out of that Y building, and would just be attacked by thugs on the street. He was beaten up like 5 or 6 times. He moved to Portland. And Then One night right after Michael Eakin was murdered, I came home, and I lived on Mount Bonnell Rd. down a dirt road, and I was the only house by myself, and

[99] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012

> there were several goons waiting for me at my house at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. And I never went back. Because I knew I was next and they had shot the light bulb out in front of my house several times, so I knew my number was coming and I left town.[100]

Intimidation and harassment of liberal organizers did hurt *The Rag* in the seventies, not only because its contributors were among those who were directly oppressed, but also because the success of *The Rag*'s readership relied on public support for the issues that replaced anti-war activism after the war ended in 1975. Public support depended heavily on the leaders of those issues, like Michael Eakin in his efforts against the South Texas Power Plant, and others who were burning out or getting tired of fighting against Texas' capitalist power structure. Extremists in the Weather Underground justified violence against the state in their effort to "Bring the war home," but in many ways, systematic opposition from the state and corporate power had been at war with the movement all along, and *The Rag* eventually became a casualty.

There were less sinister manifestations of opposition to *The Rag*: Frat boys throwing firecrackers into the basement windows, printers refusing to print *The Rag*, and buildings that refused to give *The Rag* a space. To be truly radical necessitated this opposition, perhaps, but whereas *The Rag* community utilized expression in attempts to challenge the status quo, their opponents countered primarily by silencing them and using force, which was much easier from a power standpoint than democratic engagement. External forces that interfered with the functional operation of *The Rag* only added to the internal problems that made it economically unsustainable.

An Unsustainable Economic Model

[100] Interview by the Author with Jeff Jones 1-20-2012

Inherent to the anarchistic character of *The Rag* collective was a deliberate disinterest in creating a self-sustaining "business" model based on advertising and sales revenue. Just as *Rag* staffers opposed having a formal editor's position, they also rejected the traditional journalistic dependence on advertising and consumerist content because it was seen as detracting from the political and social aspirations of the paper and the movement that it existed to support. The attitude toward revenue maximization basically never wavered from *The Rag*'s inception in the SDS days, as founding-Funnell Thorne Dreyer explains, "People were always afraid to create an institution that could make money, that was self-supporting. Somehow once it started doing that, then you lost your radical roots or something."[101] As a consequence, *The Rag* created economic difficulties for itself as volunteer energy fell into short supply and unexpected costs cut into an already bottom-dollar budget.

The Rag's loose advertising and sales model had always provided just enough money to cover printing costs and compensate a few volunteers who otherwise would not have been able to sacrifice their time. Whoever wanted to sell *The Rag* would do so and would sometimes receive compensation; whoever volunteered to find advertisers would do so and would sometimes receive a percentage of those sales. In the early days, *Rag* staffers would vend issues on Guadalupe Street or in the Student Union for fifteen cents and then a quarter per issue. Bill Meacham would attract attention by playing harmonica for campus passers-by and shouting variations of, "Get your *Rag!* Get your *Rag!*"[102] *The Rag* also had a metal vending cart that according to Bill Gordon, "may have been liberated from the Student Union cafeteria."[103]

It was Gordon who in the mid seventies talked the *Rag* staff into buying wire newspaper stands and chaining them to stations scattered throughout Central Austin, primarily in West

[101] Interview by the Author with Thorne Dreyer 11-15-2011
[102] Interview with Bill Meacham at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas.
[103] Interview with Bill Gordon at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas

Campus near the student housing.[104] The staff then organized a route to distribute stacks of *Rag*s every week and collect the quarters that readers could leave in tubes attached to the stands.[105] This method increased circulation and but also shifted *The Rag* toward an honesty-based system for sales revenue since readers did not have to drop a quarter in the tube in order to take a *Rag* from the stand. "But people dropped coins in!" says Glenn Scott. "I mean, I can remember unloading and that thing would be full of coins. So people knew what we were doing with just a shoestring budget, that we were all volunteer, and so people would contribute to help see it keep going."[106]

Advertising tended to create more contention from the staff than sales. Just as Embree's essay in *Sisterhood is Powerful* illustrates, many members of the community at the time felt that, according to Bill Gordon, "commercialism and consumerism were a big part of the problem we have in the U.S. and that by running ads, even if they were from politically vetted sources, we were contributing to the problem."[107] The majority view in the collective allowed that advertisements from local businesses that supported the movement and the politics of *The Rag* were acceptable. Certain contracts were simply irresistible from the perspective of paying the rent and supplies for layout. In 1976, a national company selling a medicated crab lice cream offered *The Rag* "probably $200 an ad" for a relatively small spot in the paper that covered most of the operation for that month. According to Alan Pogue, "They had found their niche," in the underground press.[108]

For less alluring advertising contracts, arguments arose over whether ads' content was politically appropriate. Especially after Women's Liberation, both men and women in the *Rag*

[104] Interview with Bill Gordon at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas.
[105] Interview by the Author with Glenn Scott 1-28-2012
[106] Interview by the Author with Glenn Scott 1-28-2012
[107] Interview with Bill Gordon at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas
[108] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012

wanted nothing to do with advertisements that sexualized or objectified women's bodies in order to sell products. The third issue of *The Rag* Volume 10 from November 1975 contains a scandalous exception: a full back-page advertisement for a pornographic film entitled, "Behind the Green Door," sponsored by a student organization, the Students for a Democratic Media.[109] The ad triggered an influx of letters to the Funnel criticizing *The Rag*'s moral judgment, including a letter from Lauren Rabinowitz fulminating, "If many of us have to compromise our political ideals at different times for different reasons, a full page ad for a porno film that centers around a hypnotized woman performing erotic acts does not seem to me to be the proper time or correct reason."[110] Most readers had no idea that the Students for a Democratic Media was actually spearheaded by one of *The Rag*'s own, Jerry Moctezuma, who wrote movie reviews in addition to bringing highly controversial films to campus as part of his anti-censorship campaign. The SDM sold tickets to film screenings and raised large sums of money for various community groups, including *The Rag.*[111] According to Jim Rock, they would fill Batts Auditorium and make between $10-12,000, which bought a camera for the Women's Press and funded many donations until the University found out and banned the group from showing pornographic films.[112] Despite the group's apparently good intentions, feminist women and men did not appreciate the utilized means, and Bill Meacham wrote a negative review of the film for the next issue to alleviate some of the backlash ("'Green Door' - fucking over sex").[113] As it turns out, *The Rag* had never approved the ad in the first place - Jerry and his cohorts had snuck it onto the

[109] *The Rag* Vol. 10 No. 3 p.14
[110] The Rag Vol. 10 No. 4 p.2
[111] Interview with Jim Rock at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas
[112] Interview with Jim Rock at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas. Jerry took this issue to court and according to Jim, "got an injunction an the court showed that the University could not control the movies we showed. After that year the University stopped showing movies…I think [Jerry] liked the controversy, that he was making people uncomfortable. He enjoyed the fact that his efforts were successful. Jerry liked pushing the envelope. He was…probably one of the only people to bring a lawsuit that was successful against the University at this time."

[113] The Rag Vol. 10 No. 4 p.3

back page just before the issue went to print.[114] The incident was indicative, however, of a staff model that lacked advertising oversight. In fact, there was usually no one who wanted to manage advertising at all. Alan explains,

> Nobody wanted to sell ads because that's terribly boring, selling ads. You have to have a whole list of businesses and you have to make the rounds and solicit money and get them to buy space. So there was a certain core group of people, Oat Willies, Freewheeling Cycles…Every now and then I remember we landed a big contract, a clothing place that paid us like $1200 up front for a whole series of ads in the future…But there was nobody who wanted to make that their function. Everybody wanted to do something else. Somebody wanted to do movie reviews so they can schmooze with Peter Fonda or whoever was in town…
>
> …At times we were even worse at collecting on ads. Ice Cream shop, nothing strikes back, we ran ads for them for about six months without collecting.[115]

Alan believes that the looseness of the advertising revenue model was a major factor in *The Rag*'s eventual demise, and cautions against the anti-profit approach in community organizations:

> Love it or don't, you have to interface with the culture. There's no way around it. You have to. And even while you're changing it from within you have to sustain yourself somehow. And so, I know that there are activists that I've worked with, and I mean, are you going to have a sugar daddy? You know, where is the money coming from? You know, if you don't have some rich person or a trust fund, you have to make the rent. You have to do all of those things. And so, the trick has always been

[114] Interview by the Author with Phil Prim 3-4-2012
[115] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012

> being able to do what you love and do the right thing and make a living. That's the trick. And *The Rag* never found the trick. Not exactly.[116]

On the other hand, when Jeff Nightbyrd and Michael Eakin started *The Austin Sun* in 1974, they entrepreneurially envisioned it as a farther-reaching and more professionalized version of *The Rag*, which they (as adults separated from the student community) viewed as a dwindling and "irrelevant" initiative.[117] The *Sun* started with an investor, won large ad contracts with Lone Star Beer, and provided hip coverage of the music scene while simultaneously advocating for left-wing politics and environmentalism. In other words, it did what *The Rag* might have done had economics been at the heart of the *Rag* mission, which, for better or for worse, was simply not the case. A self-sustained community of volunteers perpetuated *The Rag* and supported its economic model, not the other way around.

It is safe to speculate that if *The Rag* had been able to pay staff members and reach a wider audience, it might have been able to combat the declining interest of its volunteer and readership community following the end of the war in Vietnam. On the other hand, doing so would have imposed on *The Rag* a hierarchy and consumerist motivation contrary to its anarchistic nature and would have detracted from its vision as advocacy-driven alternative media. It is also possible that by the end of the decade, the declining demand for left-wing media was for whatever reason irremediable. After *The Rag* went under in 1977, *The Austin Sun* followed suit within a year and was replaced by an even more ad-driven and culturally focused publication, *The Austin Chronicle,* in 1981. The *Rag* staff's decision to have a poor economic model undoubtedly contributed to the paper's demise, but had it taken the steps necessary to

[116] Interview by the Author with Alan Pogue 1-24-2012
[117] Interview by the Author with Jeff Nightbyrd 10-10-2011

evolve into the capitalist matrix, the essentially propagandistic and rebellious soul of *The Rag* would have died anyway.

5

Conclusion

Many people in the new left felt a sense of failure after the united front of the Movement diffused, and the end of *The Rag* was a poignant symbol of that for many who worked on it and read the paper. Jim Rock said that when the staff dwindled down to just himself, Phil Prim, Alan Pogue, and Richard Croxdale, there was discussion on whether or not to continue on. "I felt that the energy was gone. It was kind of like Saturday Night Live… Everybody felt like it was funny but it was time for it to end. The energy just wasn't there anymore and it was really an insult to *The Rag* to carry it on past its natural demise."[118] People shared that feeling that the energy of the Movement was gone not just in the *Rag* community, but all over the country. Especially for people like Thorne Dreyer and others who had begun to devote their lives to the Movement during the Civil Rights era, the years to follow were a total restart. For some, a feeling of failure accompanied the sudden hitch of all the political energy that seemed to be mounting to a revolution in America. Thorne remembers,

> We didn't know how to make the transition into living our lives. That's why lots of people went through very difficult periods, especially in the late seventies and eighties. There were a lot of people who committed suicide. Because people didn't know how to take those values and commit to the long-term. Commit to building a life. And the other aspect of that is that everything that happened in the sixties seemed like – I mean I did something like *The Rag* for two years and yet they were an epochal two years, a phenomenal two years. Everything then froze. In '68 there were periods of several months in which all of these things happened in the country,

[118] Interview with Jim Rock at the Rag Reunion, 2005, People's History of Texas.

> and so when you were involved in all of those things, those months felt like a virtual lifetime.[119]

Many of those who survived the transition continue to devote their lives to social justice to this day. Glenn Scott continued to work with unions; Steve Russell became a judge; Alan Pogue continued his work in photojournalism; Judy Smith continued to work in women's issues and ecology; Barbara Hines is one of the top immigration lawyers in Texas and the entire country – the list goes on and on. The *Rag* community may have broken up to some extent, but the spirit that had brought it together it really remained in the individuals who each went on to continue the work in other ways. The end of *The Rag* publication should be seen as a turning point, not a failure. Whereas other underground press newspapers in their country blew up under egomaniacal schisms like the falling out between Ray Mungo and Marshall Bloom at the Liberation News Service, *The Rag* simply went dormant, and in fact, has come to life in yet another reincarnation as a blog initiated at the Rag Reunion in 2005 and Funnelled by none other than Thorne Dreyer himself.[120] The *Rag* legacy carries onward even as so few people of the new Austin generation appreciate the impact that it had on their city and so much of what makes it a vibrant place to live.

Dear Funnel,

Hunter Ellinger said something very wise to me in the course of our *Rag* interview. He said that the problem of spreading truth in the world is "a problem of demand, not supply." I assume that by "truth," he meant the information that humans need in order to live up to their potential to be rational and compassionate beings. Media (not simply "news," but also art and

[119] Interview by the Author with Thorne Dreyer 11-15-2011
[120] *The Rag Blog* is online at http://www.theragblog.blogspot.com.

any technological medium for transmitting human experience) play such an interesting role in human development, because they are the both the channels for supplying truth and simultaneously the best mechanisms we have to create more demand for truth. The accessibility of information through media naturally creates a potential for the demand of truth, as the capacity to learn and create something out of information sparks human curiosity.

During the time in which *The Rag* was published, the demand for truth experienced a rise and a fall. Ultimately, the forces behind the demand for truth on the national the scale were beyond the Funnel's control; the Austin movement was necessarily entwined with the fate of the Movement at large. I look around today and see that on the national scale and even in our local communities, the collective demand for truth is so fragmented that it has not been able to reach the critical level to result in a national movement with any real gravity to it, even though we live in a time of ecological, financial, and social crisis.

The dream isn't over, after all. If anything, the problems that my world faces are the same as yours magnified and microwaved. More than ever, we could really use more communities like the *Rag* that bring minds together to talk and do something about these problems; that experiment with alternative models and that conserve resources; that take injustices to court and to the streets in peaceful protest; that network, like *The Rag* did, with other communities across the country and the world. But what can my generation do to increase the demand for truth?

Like Alan said, "Self interest is a great motivator." Your generation had a war – so does mine, but no draft. More and more people are feeling economic pressure and are politically dissatisfied, as evidenced by the emergence of the Occupy Movement and the discussion that it provoked about the financial industry and the state of democracy in America. I could be wrong,

but the current global state of affairs appear to be pointing to a re-culmination of whatever those mysterious forces are that create a demand for truth on a national and global scale.

Thanks to your work and people like you both before and after you, the U.S. does have a strong base of people working for ecological sustainability and social justice who are ready to confront the big challenges of our generation. And thanks to the Internet and social media networking, they can communicate in more ways than ever. *The Rag* could serve as a media model adapted to our times if we were to save the best qualities of the paper and group structure while attempting make them more sustainable. The most effective advocacy journalists are people with good judgment who are participants in the struggle they are advocating for, or are at least passionate about the issues. Like *The Rag*, online community media should originate from a physical community of participants who share philosophical values but have a range of political perspectives on the issues, and who can verbally discuss information before it is sent to the public. The lack of physical community is the major flaw with social media activism today. There is no accountability in a remote, fragmented community. If you can't organize a pro-active community at home, how do you expect to build a remote community of people who are devoted enough that they will actually vote for better policy, or alter their ecologically unsustainable habits? Not to mention the obvious problem with a lack of substantive communication: if you don't discuss things, then how do you know that you actually agree?

I hope that the demand for truth is growing with humans' potential to deliver it, but the capacity to meet the demand most effectively can only issue from the communities that have the courage to take the truths that they discover and turn them into a sustainable way of living. To me, the most impressive thing about interviewing people from *The Rag* was realizing that at least they tried, and are still trying, to animate a democracy that deserves to be called one. They tried,

through embodying participatory democracy and exercising their values, to not simply “talk the talk” but “walk the walk” as well. That is why the history merits re-telling, and why I found this study worthwhile as a youth living several decades later, embarking on the same precarious path towards trying to live a harmless human life.

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