Campus Riots

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http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134

Campus unrest

• Campus unrest has a long history in the U.S.
  Students protested in favor of the U.S. Revolution
  Late 18th Century: Harvard students rioted against bad food
  19th Century: Riots against in loco parentis and other institutional policies; land-grant students protested against mandatory military training
  1960s-70s: Widespread protest regarding the Vietnam War and civil rights
  1990s-2000: Riots unrelated to protest become common; these are called “celebratory riots,” “mixed-issue campus disturbances,” or “convivial disorders”

Iowa State Campus Disturbances

• 1985: During VEISHEA weekend’s “Ash Bash,” cars were overturned and burned.
• 1986: Disturbances took place on three consecutive VEISHEA weekend nights. During the Sunday morning riot, people in a crowd of approximately 5,000 threw bottles, bricks and rocks and made a bonfire from furniture. Of the 45 people arrested, 25 were ISU students.
• 1989: Two VEISHEA weekend, people in a large crowd (est. 8,000) threw rocks, cars and bottles at police. Twenty-seven rioters were arrested and 47 were treated for injuries.
• 1994: During VEISHEA weekend, people in a large crowd threw cars, bottles and rocks at police. A total of 20 people were arrested, 11 of whom were students.
• 1988: Prior to VEISHEA, students in a crowd of approximately 300 chanted profanities, set off fireworks, and attempted to tear down a light pole in the Towers Residence Hall courtyard before being dispersed by police. The event was viewed as a protest against the first “Dry VEISHEA.”
• 1989: During a planned event three weeks before the second “Dry VEISHEA” and near the anniversary of the previous Towers Residence Hall disturbance, students committed acts of vandalism and chanted profanities in a crowd that moved from the Towers to The Knoll and then to Jack Trice Stadium, stopping at various points on campus in between to rally loudly.
• 2000: Following an NCAA basketball victory, participants damaged cars, pulled down light poles, marched to The Knoll and then to Jack Trice Stadium, where they tried to pull a goal post down. They then tore down pieces of fences and threw them in Lake Lauren.
• 2004: Rioters in a crowd of approximately 2,000 destroyed property in Campus Town and threw objects at police. Police arrested 37 individuals, including 22 Iowa State University students and three recent alumni.

April 17-18, 2004, riot chronology

• 11:20 p.m.: Ames police receive complaint of party on Hunt Street
• 11:45 p.m.-12:13 a.m.: Police arrest apartment occupant for book burning. Two officers arrested intoxicated individual, who fell or was pushed to the ground. Officers were targeted by rocks, bottles, and beer cans.
• 12:13 a.m.-3:30 a.m.: Large crowd of people dispersing from Hunt Street engaged with a crowd already on Welch. Several instances of violence took place: windows were broken, a fire was started in a trash can; one person was struck with a ketchup bottle, resulting in a light between the victim and thrower. Police asked people to leave if they weren’t residents.
• 3:30 a.m.: A large crowd of people dispersing from Hunt Street engaged with a crowd already on Welch. Several instances of violence took place: windows were broken, a fire was started in a trash can; one person was struck with a ketchup bottle, resulting in a light between the victim and thrower. Police asked people to leave if they weren’t residents.
• 7:00 a.m.: Police dispersal order.

Types of riots

• Communal riot (“race riot”): people targeted because of ethnic group, language or religion
• Communal riot: property is destroyed regardless of ownership
• Protest riot: violence to protest policy or actions by authorities or others
• Police riot: police beat people instead of arresting them
• Celebratory riot: violence to celebrate sports victory or other occasion
• Not found in contemporary U.S. soccer riots, food riots, machine breaking

Riots often take place in waves

• Race riots in 1910-20s and 1940s
• Urban (commodity) riots in 1960s
• Campus riots in 1990s-2000s

Urban (commodity) riots in 1960s

Celebratory riot: violence to celebrate sports victory or other occasion
Explaining riots

✓ Unsupported explanations
  • People are driven mad by the crowd (recall lecture on panic)
  • Community strain

✓ Prerequisites/contributing factors
  • People with access to riot area
  • People temporarily available to riot
  • Social cues may serve as "invitations to riot," e.g., rumors, media stories, administration/police preparations, police intervention, police in "riot gear," history of rioting
  • People with purposes for rioting

✓ Two types of purposes for rioting (McPhail 1994)
  • Intended violence: violence that results from people pursuing inherently violent goals
  • Outcome violence: violence that results from people with non-violent goals, but who face resistance to these goals

Purpose in a riot area

✓ Non-violent purposes:
  • Majority of people in riot area do not commit violence
  • People were in Campus town riot area to watch, transport friends, help injured, protect property.

✓ Intended violence (results from inherently violent goals)
  • "A majority of this violence [at the April 18 riot] was committed because it was fun for both the actors and their audience."
  • "Entrepreneurs" take the lead in attempting to start a riot. They are typically young white men. (Buettner 2004)
  • E.g., man chanted "Riot, riot!" from balcony at Hunt Street; "Spartacus" urged crowd on Lincoln Way

✓ Soc 134 survey:
  • "I would like to participate in a riot during my college years." 34.8% of males and 15.7% of females agreed
  • "I would like to watch a riot during my college years." 58.1% of males and 40.1% of females agreed

Outcome violence and alcohol restrictions

✓ Alcohol has been an important part of university life for centuries
  • 2003 ISU student survey: 73% had used alcohol in past month, 41% engaged in high-risk drinking during past two weeks. Majority believed alcohol helps break the ice (71.4%) and allows people to have more fun (56.1%).

✓ Alcohol can contribute to rioting in two ways:
  • Lowers inhibitions and impairs thinking and coordination
  • Restrictions may create encounters between partiers and police attempting to enforce restrictions and respond to problems

✓ Alcohol restrictions at ISU include under-21 ordinance, residence hall restrictions and "Dry VEISHEA" (enacted after 1997 murder)
  • Restrictions may drive drinking to large off-campus parties and create additional encounters with police

Outcome violence and police

✓ Policing a riot is very difficult; police are often unable to distinguish between rioters and onlookers/passersby

✓ Observers/passersby may increase involvement after being affected by police tactics
  • Many eye witnesses complained about overuse of force, usually by pepper spray. Some blamed police for precipitating/escalating the riot.