

A close-up, profile view of a man with dark, wavy hair and glasses, wearing a light-colored, textured knit sweater. He is looking down at an open book he is holding with both hands. The background is a bright, circular opening, possibly a window or a tunnel entrance, creating a strong backlight effect. The overall mood is contemplative and focused.

Jock Phillips

# MAKING HISTORY

A New Zealand Story



## 4

# America!

My last year at Christ's College went well. I became a school prefect and academic head of the school and had my first girlfriend. By dint of good results in the English and history examinations, I just succeeded in getting a university national scholarship – I was about seventieth in the ranking, just a few marks above the cut-off. The extra money it provided was a help because I had decided that I did not want to go to the University of Canterbury. I was interested in history, my father was still the professor of history, and it would not be very comfortable studying under him. More importantly I wanted to get away from Christchurch and was attracted to Wellington. Every time we had passed through the city on our trips north to Hawke's Bay, I had enjoyed the place. The dramatic hills and sparkling harbour appealed after the dull flatness of the Canterbury Plains, and I sensed an energy and a touch of exoticism about the city. Escaping one's father was not considered grounds for a boarding bursary, but my grandfather promised to give me a £100 a year, and if I got a job in the holidays I could just afford the £300 I needed to board at Weir House, Victoria University's male hostel, and still leave a little to spend.

Accordingly I set off for Weir House to study for a BA. I quickly found the intellectual environment sympathetic. The warden of Weir House was Tim Beaglehole, whom I had met once previously when the family called in to see

*Aged seventeen and just beginning university in Wellington.*



John and Elsie Beaglehole on our way back from Hawke's Bay. At the time Tim was just back from King's College, Cambridge, bubbling with enthusiasm and humour. He cooked a superb dinner, which impressed me, not used to such a facility among men. At Weir Tim set out to reform the place. Its reputation was somewhat tawdry, after *Truth* had run articles about men and women showering together 'without any clothes on'. A correspondent noted that it might have been even more questionable if they had showered with clothes on, but the damage had been done.

Tim determined to make the place more like a sophisticated Cambridge college. There were regular Sunday-evening talks from such noted luminaries as the playwright Bruce Mason and the Labour Court judge Arthur Tindall; Tim persuaded the New Zealand diplomat Frank Corner to donate prints of modernist paintings which we could hang in our rooms; and every Sunday before dinner he would ask some students up to his flat to sip sherry, listen to Bach playing politely in the background and talk about cultural or political matters in a gentlemanly manner. I was awed by his sophisticated taste. Tim surrounded himself with a group of bright young students, all a couple of years older than me, who shared his interests. I became friends with the 'family' group as they were called; and under their influence not only broadened my knowledge of art and poetry, but developed a taste for classical music. I began to go along to concerts by the NZBC Symphony Orchestra and became a member of the Chamber Music Society. Mozart became my special hero; and having purchased a cheap record player and then many of his concertos and symphonies, I began to read voraciously about him. His letters became much thumbed. As for art, Tim and his friends were fierce modernists. I quickly followed suit, going off to every exhibition in the city, and reading about modern painting and architecture. Two heroes emerged out of this experience too – the architect Le Corbusier and the painter Paul Klee. I covered my walls with prints of Klee works.

In these ways my intellectual interests went further than those of my parents, for although they were interested in art and architecture, their passions in art had never extended beyond the Impressionists, and in architecture eighteenth-century good taste was about where it ended. Music was never present in our Christchurch home – apart from the hit parade, which I had listened to religiously and a bit surreptitiously every Thursday night, and which had inspired me to paste a poster of Elvis on my bedroom wall.



*A newspaper photograph of my family (Elizabeth at back left, Catherine back right) on the day in May 1966 when my father was announced as the University of Canterbury's new vice-chancellor.*



*With Jane McCartney at a Weir House ball.*

Downtown Wellington also offered cultural attractions – I spent much time in Parsons Bookshop, and in the coffee bar upstairs ate yoghurt (covered in rosehip syrup) for the first time. Not that Wellington offered many other culinary delights at this stage. The few licensed restaurants such as the Coachman were out of my price range, so it was largely big steaks, Chinese takeaways or hamburgers. All of these provided merciful relief from the Weir House tucker, where the low point came at Sunday lunch, when the beef was inevitably sliced up with the string and wooden skewers included. I will not forget the looks of horror on the faces of Colombo Plan students from Malaysia and Indonesia as they tried to sort out the string from the meat. You could also get a reasonable meal by attending Downstage theatre. Dine and a play was the menu; and several times I enjoyed memorable performances from Martyn Sanderson, Peter Bland and Pat Evison in such modern works as Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* and Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*.

While Wellington expanded my cultural interests towards international modernism, it was in Auckland where I encountered some creative New Zealand culture. In my second year I had met an interesting fellow arts



*A sketch of Hone Tuwhare by Joanna Paul, coloured chalks on paper, 479 x 636 mm.*  
HOCKEN COLLECTIONS – UARE TAOKA O HĀKENA, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO, 76/120

student, Jane McCartney, who became my girlfriend. Jane was from Hamilton, where she had been a close friend of Charlotte Paul, daughter of Janet and Blackwood Paul. So on several occasions we set off to Auckland, where Janet Paul was now living. By this stage Blackwood had died, but Janet was trying to keep the Longman Paul publishing business alive. Paul's had established a reputation as a dedicated publisher of serious New Zealand works, and Janet introduced me to some of her current enthusiasms. She spoke particularly warmly about a Māori poet who used to ring her up at lunch break from his job as a fitter and turner and get her to write down poems. His name was Hone Tuwhare. I will never forget one Sunday evening when Hone came around to talk about his poems and another of Janet's daughters, Joanna (later a very well-known painter), sketched him repeatedly in pencil. I still have some of those sketches. Janet was herself a painter, and introduced me to some of the painters then causing a storm in select Auckland circles. I discovered the work of artists like Michael Illingworth, Ralph Hotere and Pat Hanly (whom I met at Janet's), and confirmed my adolescent enthusiasm for the work of Colin McCahon.

Weir House encouraged personal and political rebellion of a mild kind. The family group offered one circle of friends but there were other interesting people in the hostel. In my second year the newcomers included a rowdy but thoughtful Paul Callaghan, later a famous scientist; but more significant for me personally were a group across the corridor, led by a funny, charismatic Māori student from Hastings, Moana Jackson, later an influential lawyer for Māori rights. At the time such interests were far from his concerns. Playing cards, betting on the horses and drinking beer were more on the agenda for those around Moana. Despite the fact that I had a part-time job working in the bar at the Trentham racecourse and my grandfather owned a successful steeplechaser at the time, I never took to the horses. But I certainly took to the beer. There were long, frantic sessions down at the Midland and too many scenes of gross overconsumption ending with the chant 'The Weir House boys are on the piss again.' Apart from the short-term hangovers, for the first, and only, time in my life I began to put on weight. This was still the era of a drinking age of twenty-one, so, not for the last time, I embarrassed my father through the media, when in 1967 at the age of twenty I was caught by a television camera drinking and guffawing at the Midland on the last night of six o'clock closing. When the clip appeared on the year's highlights show my father was very disapproving. There was also further exploration of sex, although, judging by my letters home, at least to my parents I still held to a surprisingly prudish set of attitudes. One letter describes a Saturday night:

We went to the Sorrento Club which was a real experience. It was pure unadulterated sex. Men with long permed hair and completely waxen characterless girls moped around in disgusting postures. It was so appallingly bestial that one could see Lear's judgement 'a man a worm' at its true value. After about an hour of disbelieving observation and desperate clutching of our wallets we retired to the dignified atmosphere of the 'Chez Paree' where there was some most attractive folk-singing.<sup>1</sup>

These were the normal mild rebellions of youth. More profound and long-lasting was a rebellion against my parents' political attitudes. I had grown up as the son of Tories living in Fendalton, a staunch National Party stronghold. In the 1950s I used to follow the election results hoping that the local

member, Sid Holland, would get back in as prime minister. In the early 1960s I swallowed my discomfort at the pomposity of Keith Holyoake to back his election. When New Zealand agreed to send troops to Vietnam in May 1965, I found myself still spouting to those around me about the need to fight the commies on the Mekong lest we had to fight them on the Waimakariri. My brother-in-law, David Caffin, was at the time in the Department of Foreign Affairs and put much work into the government's white paper defending New Zealand's involvement. So I got reinforcement from him. But at Weir House I found myself a lonely voice. Most of the students I lived with had become highly critical of the Cold War and the naïve assumptions on which fighting communism was based. In the capping parade in 1965 we Weir House boys dressed up as Vietcong with lightshades on our heads, and when we reached the mayor's viewing stand we all sang 'God save the Vietcong' to the tune of the then national anthem. This seemed fun at the time and it inevitably got me thinking. There was a teach-in at Victoria University in which my old acquaintance from on board ship, Michael Bassett, among others, presented a compelling case against New Zealand's involvement.

I realised that I needed to read more, and picked up Bernard Falls' *The Two Vietnams*. It was one of those books that overturned my perspective on the world. Before reading it I had blithely accepted that communism was a steady rolling tide coming down from Red China. I had had no idea of the nationalist impulse behind Vietnam's communism or the deceit by the West that had created two Vietnams. I changed my mind. Before long I was writing letters to politicians and arguing with my parents. In 1966 Lyndon Johnson visited Wellington to thank the country for its support in Vietnam. Along with a small group of mates I went down to Lambton Quay holding a banner, and carrying violin cases in the strange belief that this might suggest to the CIA that we had guns. Before too long the presidential motorcade came along, and to my astonishment stopped right where we were standing. LBJ got out of the limo and immediately thrust out his hand in my direction. Well, when the most powerful man in the world invites you to shake his hand, it is a hard offer to resist, so I found myself reaching out and grabbing the president's sweaty palms. So much for my newly acquired beliefs!

That was not the end of the fun because we had heard that Lady Bird, the First Lady, was due to travel up the cable car to visit the botanical gardens. Weir House was directly above the cable car, so we shot Guy Fawkes rockets down



the tunnel, and then clambered up onto the roof of the hostel carrying big signs, 'Welcome the CIA'. When the secret service turned up they were greeted with water bombs – although listening on their channel, we heard a frantic American voice shouting, 'Those bastards are throwing bags of urine on us!' Perhaps after all we did make our anti-war feelings known. Two years later, in March 1968, I attended every minute of the *Peace, Power and Politics* conference in the State Opera House and town hall, where international speakers compellingly laid out the case against western involvement in the war.

Having begun to question the Vietnam War, I inevitably began to ask other questions. Victoria University at the time was a lively environment. *Salient* was nearly always a source of ideas to debate, and once a week at lunchtime there would be an open forum in front of the Students' Union where people could spout forth. I remember listening intently to people like Alister Taylor, Helen Sutch, Michael King, Tony Ashenden and Michael Hirschfeld put forward other issues – the war, yes, but also Māori rights, social inequality, women's concerns and the level of student bursaries. The first march I joined was actually about student bursaries. I was by no means a radical activist at this stage; but along with so many of the post-war baby boomers I had begun to challenge some of the norms that had become gospel to our parents.

During those years I spent the summer holidays earning money to help support myself during the year. At a time of low unemployment there was little difficulty finding labouring jobs, and I tended to move around sampling different experiences – one year as a postman on my bike, another on a building site, a time in a grain store carting large sacks, once in the Skellerup rubber factory packing the rubber rings which farmers used to castrate lambs, and in my last year driving a big truck for a Dutchman who would buy fruit and vegetables at the market in the early morning and then deliver them to dairies around Christchurch. The work was never too onerous, but what I gained was a close acquaintance with boys and men from other social circles. Most were from the working class and I became increasingly conscious, and at times embarrassed, by my own genteel background and assumptions. I enjoyed the banter and the teasing of my workmates. At Weir House I also began to notice how much more mature and self-directed were the boys from state schools. I realised that there was another world outside Fendalton and Christ's College and Hawke's Bay landholders. Inevitably such learnings affected my political attitudes.



*Two scenes from my student life in 1966 – on the way to protest LBJ's visit to Wellington in 1966 (above); and performing in a German-language play – my only ever theatrical performance (below).*



If experiences out of school taught me much, what did I learn in the lecture room at Victoria? Here the effect was in many ways less radical. I decided from the start to major in two subjects – English and history. Of the two I found the teaching better in English. In an early letter home I note ‘Prof. Mackenzie [*sic*] for poetry is quite brilliant and really inspiring. The sharpest brain I have met and he makes Prof Gordon look like a waffly old bore.’<sup>2</sup> Certainly in both my first and second year I was spellbound by Don McKenzie’s theatrical performances, especially in his course on Shakespeare; I was also fortunate to have a stimulating tutor, Roger Savage. But the course reflected the colonialist assumptions of the university at that time. There were two English tracks – for the ‘serious’ students wanting to major, such as myself, you were given a chronological grounding in English literature: the renaissance the first year, eighteenth century the second, and the romantics in the third. You read nothing beyond 1850 and obviously nothing written in New Zealand, let alone the USA or Australia. I was deeply jealous of those doing the ‘cabbage English’ course, who were allowed to read some twentieth-century works which even included John Mulgan’s *Man Alone*.

The same assumption that New Zealand content was easy and for lesser brains held sway in the history department, where again the basic outline was a chronological trot from medieval times through to the nineteenth century. At least this included some non-British European material in the medieval and renaissance coverage; but there was only one New Zealand course – and again this was not advised for majors. I did not take it, because I had no interest in New Zealand or New Zealand history at this stage – indeed in a letter home I talked of seeing a short film about the villages of England, ‘which made me most itchy to be back in the dales or the lanes of Kent’.<sup>3</sup> But, apart from Peter Munz’s spellbinding lectures in the first year, the teaching generally did not encourage much interest in British or European history – it was ponderous and dull and remained heavily focused on ‘great men political history’.

What kept me motivated in my first two years were several courses outside the English and history departments. There was a first-year course in German, which I took only to satisfy the language requirement in the degree. The professor was a gentle but inspiring immigrant, Paul Hoffman. He had no hesitation in exposing us to modern literature and I became excited at reading Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht. The German department was a small, friendly community and I found myself taking part

in a play, all in German. We practised at the weekends, and there I met some of the German–Jewish community of Wellington, all interested in music and modern art. I found intellectual stimulus here that was so much more exciting than what was being dished out in my English courses. The second centre of inspiration was two courses on economic history put on by a neatly groomed Englishman, John Gould. The classes were small, mainly economics majors, but Gould was a wonderful lecturer and led us to the very forefront of debates in the field. In the second course he decided to throw away the traditional curriculum and invite us to explore in depth the debate about the economic effects of the coming of railways in the United States, which had been sparked by a recent book by Robert Fogel. It was a marvellous introduction to a debate that was raging in the profession and, because Fogel had attempted to work out what the economic consequences would have been if canals, rather than railways, had carried America’s goods in the nineteenth century, the work raised many issues about the use of hypothetical history and statistics in history. Gould made history an urgent and vital subject.

There was a third course, this one in the history department, which changed my life. The lecturer was John Salmond, whose rotund, genial appearance belied a sharp intelligence and wit. He offered a third-year course in modern American history. I had long been fascinated by the United States. In the 1950s as a youngster I had enjoyed rock ‘n’ roll, and had begun to associate America with youthful rebellion. I had a friend from primary school whose father was American and he used to ask me home to listen to jazz and drink home-made milk shakes. The States began to acquire an allure. At school I had to write an extra essay for a prefect for some long-forgotten misdemeanour so I decided to read and write about the Beats. From about 1960, when I was thirteen, and certainly once John Kennedy had been elected, I began to follow American politics closely by a diligent reading of *Time* magazine. My interest in the States was reinforced strongly when I got to university and found myself rooming in Weir House with Frank Stone, a funny and intelligent native of Minnesota, who had decided to spend a year in Wellington. He was enthusiastic about New Zealand, but also infectiously informative about the States. He developed close friendships with a number of New Zealanders who had just returned from American Field Scholarships, and I shared many a pizza with them. My interest in the US was also piqued by the Vietnam War. I began to wonder how and why the country had found itself fighting in jungles in distant

Asia; and, like many others, I looked to the United States for models of resistance. Even in the 1950s the civil-rights movement, the sit-ins and bus rides had provided an inspiring example. Now we followed closely the teach-ins, the marches and the other forms of political and social protest against the war which were emerging in the United States.

All this was in the back of my mind when I took John Salmond's American history course. I instantly found it enthralling. For a start it was recent history, close to my experience and memory. Second, the history was not just about the political dealings of an Oxbridge elite. American politics had for a long time been intensely democratic and attracted people from a wide range of backgrounds. People like Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King or Eleanor Roosevelt were unlike the political leaders I had previously analysed. There were many topics that were primarily social rather than directly political. I became deeply interested in the experience of slavery and the effects that this had had on blacks and the American South. In addition the historiography hummed. I remember reading a book, *Manifest Destiny*, on the history of American expansionism, which suddenly seemed to explain the ideological forces that had sent the US into Asia. I read Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*, which argued that the progressive movement at the turn of the twentieth century came about because the old middle class had suffered a decline in status. I did not agree with the argument, but found it original and challenging, and in the end spent so much time and energy exploring it that I was asked to lecture to the other students about the Hofstadter thesis. In sum, US history seemed fresh, relevant and – in some way that I had not yet worked out – close to my situation as a New Zealander, the inhabitant of another 'new' colonial society.

At the end of 1967, when I had just completed the American history course and was contemplating, without much enthusiasm, going on to do history honours, I casually mentioned to John Salmond that I would like one day to go on to study US history in the States. Although I had enjoyed my year in England, the thought of returning to study there, as was expected of most successful history graduates at the time, did not appeal. I still had the overseas-experience bug, and at the end of my second year had gone on a University Students' Association working trip to New Caledonia. We had spent time in Nouméa, snorkelling and drinking in bars, and then a week or so helping to mix concrete for a new school building halfway up the island. The



*In New Caledonia in early 1967, we stayed in this beautiful village inland (left) and mixed concrete in the sun (right).*

work was hard in the tropical heat, but I did enjoy the visit to another overseas culture. I took endless photographs of one especially beautiful village where we stopped one night. I saw Nouméa very much through the eyes of my previous French encounter – the city, I wrote home, is 'very much colonial France without the stink of history or the classical architectural beauty of the French town, but there is the same smell of rotting food, the same tree-lined "places", the same impressive cathedral dominating the town with its own highly continental courtyard, the same dogs barking at every corner, and the same hair-raising drivers'.<sup>4</sup> So while I still had the travel bug, France and England were not the favoured destinations. A few years in the States, at a time when there seemed to be a feast of new ideas, plenty of good music to hear and excitingly different places to explore, began to appeal.

I thought nothing more about it, until John Salmond came to me some time after and said that there was a special scholarship for New Zealanders to go to Harvard. Would I like to apply for the Frank Knox Fellowship? Frank Knox had been Franklin Roosevelt's secretary of the navy and had married a New Zealand woman. The fellowship was his recognition of the Kiwi connection. So I did apply, and once more thought little about it. I would set to and complete a history honours degree. Then in May 1968, after I had long given



up, I received a letter from Harvard, sent by surface mail, saying that I was being offered the Frank Knox. The trouble was that the news had been so long arriving that I had missed out on applying for a Fulbright travelling scholarship to help pay my airfares to Boston. The letter also said that since I was a foreign national I would need to take an English-language test. I promptly wrote to Harvard telling them that I had grown up speaking English and that because of the surface mail I was now unable to obtain the travel costs. Within a fortnight I opened a letter from Harvard, sent this time by airmail, with a cheque for \$1000 inside to pay for the airfares. I was stunned by American largesse. I was off – Harvard for four-and-a-half years it would be. It was August 1968.

The United States was a rude shock. I landed in Hawaii and was immediately hustled into a back room, where I was asked to swear that I was not a communist and hand over the X-ray of my lungs which I had been carefully carrying. This was projected onto the wall while officials carefully examined my lungs for signs of tuberculosis. New Zealand, I discovered, was classified as a ‘third world country’. I was not impressed by my first sight of American culture. I sent a postcard home: Hawaii ‘is American in all its worst aspects – fat scaly middle class women with their painted toe-nails, loud-mouthed business men spewing forth inanities, huge ungainly cars that seem to pursue one, and everything is very expensive. No-one seems very friendly so I have spent a solitary day in the sun.’<sup>5</sup> Then it was on to San Francisco. I collapsed into my room at a cheap hotel. I turned on the television and there saw thugs (actually Mayor Daley’s Chicago policemen) bashing the heads of protesters on the floor of the Democratic Convention. I began to ask what sort of democracy, or rather tyranny, I had found myself in. I flew to meet Frank Stone in his home town of Minneapolis. My companion on the first flight was a campaigning Buddhist; my companion on the second flight quickly pulled out a pencil and pad and with deft illustrations tried to convert me to fundamentalist Christianity. Did I really want to spend time in this strange world? Nor was this all – as Frank drove us across the Midwest to New York, I became increasingly distressed at the evident signs of gross wealth on the one hand, and decrepit hungry beggars on the other. I wrote to my girlfriend Jane McCartney back in New Zealand that I was stunned ‘by the crass commercial instincts and coarse attitudes of the American middle class. Size in buildings, cars and middle-aged ladies’ waist-lines were very strong impressions.’<sup>6</sup>

By the time I reached the east coast I would have been prepared to tell the immigration authorities that I was indeed a communist.

There were also signs of real change in the air. The TV shows and newspapers were full of searching self-criticism of the United States and its policies. Over the previous few months both Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy had been shot and killed, Eugene McCarthy had fought a spirited, but unsuccessful, anti-war campaign, and then there had been the violence in Chicago. You simply could not escape the widespread complaint that the country was in crisis – things were seriously awry. I saw McCarthy signs everywhere, and wrote at the time, ‘Indeed it is very impressive to see the whole nation look at itself and debate its problems with such honest ferocity.’<sup>7</sup> Wherever we travelled Frank gravitated towards hippie hang-outs. In New York we spent time among the ‘besandled bearded “hippies” in Greenwich Village’<sup>8</sup> and went to a rock concert in Central Park where the men all had long hair and the women long, flowing, flowery dresses. There was the smell of dope in the air. I had landed in the States just as the baby boomers came to adulthood. Brought up amid the affluence of the 1950s and the tensions of both the Cold War and the civil-rights movement, they were ready to break out and challenge everything, both politically and culturally. It was a hugely exciting time, and it forced me to question everything I had grown up with. I noticed something else about the United States on the journey east. I was stunned by the physical beauty of the place and the extent to which the east coast, which I had imagined as one large urban metropolis stretching from Washington to Boston, was predominantly a landscape of trees, of oaks and maples. I wrote back home, ‘I am continually surprised how treed this country still is, even very close to extensive settlement, and this gives it an unexpected feeling of the Frontier [*sic*], of raw wildness even in areas settled for 200 years.’<sup>9</sup>

I arrived in Cambridge and immediately felt at home, noting that ‘the middle class commercialism and stubbornness are swallowed up in the beautifully treed quads, pleasant old brick halls, and the tingling vivacity of Harvard Square’.<sup>10</sup> I spent the first two years (from September 1968 to June 1970) living in a dingy, prison-like student hostel called Perkins Hall. My room-mate the first year was an Orthodox Jew from New York complete with a yarmulke. He prayed three times a day in the room, and insisted on cooking kosher food, which made the atmosphere distinctly unpleasant. He observed the Sabbath with scrupulous commitment – to the extent that

he even emptied his pockets on Friday night because carrying keys in the pocket was regarded as work. It was a fairly intense confrontation with my Jewish heritage, but fortunately all but three of our thirteen class members (including me) were Jewish, and they provided a rather more liberal and attractive representation of the culture. I came to love their wit and humour, a combination of the Marx Brothers and Woody Allen. The two smartest teachers among our professors, Bernard Bailyn and Oscar Handlin, were also Jewish, so I learnt a new respect for their intellectual traditions. In my third year I became a resident tutor in one of the Harvard undergraduate houses, Leverett House. It was a cushy number. I did not have to pay for food or board. I had a palatial apartment with bedroom and large living-room, and all I had to do was offer intelligent guidance to the undergraduates and make polite conversation in the House's senior common-room.

For the whole time I was in the States I lived and breathed politics. I became an avid reader of the newspapers, particularly the *New York Times* (which I read religiously despite its tiny type and huge bulk) and periodicals such as the *New York Review of Books* and *New Republic*, which I subscribed to. I wrote home within the first month, 'one seems immediately to get caught up in the pressure of politics here and to begin pursuing it with a committed seriousness. This intense political earnestness is universal – in the nasty slogans covering numerous walls, in the long dispirited discussion . . . and in the extraordinary enthusiasm of his supporters and the massive rumbling vicious dissent of his opponents which V-P Humphrey met as he spoke at an enormous rally in Boston.'<sup>11</sup> I took every opportunity to experience the political turmoil – pushing to the front of the Humphrey rally, going on every anti-war march I could, and before long regularly attending the meetings of the radical student group, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). SDS had been founded in the early 1960s and released its famous Port Huron statement challenging the Cold War and racism in the United States in 1962. In many ways this was the proclamation of a 'New Left'. The organisation had made its name in April 1968 when it led the students at Columbia University in New York in a major action concerning its links with the defence establishment and its alleged racism. The students occupied buildings and brought the university to a halt.

Now Harvard wondered if it was next on the list. The shooting of Robert Kennedy, the defeat in the Democratic Party primaries of the anti-war



*In the snow in Harvard Yard in early 1969.*

candidate Eugene McCarthy by Lyndon Johnson's deputy, Hubert Humphrey, and the election of Richard Nixon made critics of the war and advocates of social change feel that change was impossible. By early October, huge banners floated in Harvard Yard, 'Revolution at Harvard?' The newspapers and periodicals I was reading had large advertisements proclaiming simply, 'Resist'.<sup>12</sup> The enemy was no more, nor less, than 'the system'. I found myself in fierce arguments and joining an SDS march down to the Boston State House to protest the war and civil rights. The winter was cold and snowy but when the weather warmed up in spring 1969 it was time for political action. The SDS demanded the abolition of the ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps), the campus organisation for training army officers. When course credit was stripped from the ROTC but it remained on campus, the SDS occupied the University Hall at



the centre of Harvard Yard. The hall contained all the financial and personnel records of the university. At 5 a.m. the next morning, the police were sent in to evict the students. Just before they arrived, fire alarms sounded in all the Harvard undergraduate houses, so most of the students were in the yard to witness the very considerable brutality of the police which left forty injured. It was an instantly radicalising experience. That morning a three-day strike of students was called, and no-one dared to go to class. Instead Harvard Yard saw clusters of serious students sitting round discussing the coming revolution and getting lessons in the gospel according to Che Guevara. It was a remarkable and unforgettable sight. Over the next week, in glorious spring weather, the tension and debates became fierce. There was a huge meeting of some six thousand students in the football stadium, called Soldiers Field and shaped like a classical amphitheatre. By a majority of about three-quarters the original six SDS demands were backed. People split into different groups and wore ribbons accordingly. For a week to ten days, none of us did any school work as we were all inevitably drawn into this class in instant revolution. Debates among the Harvard faculty were broadcast on the student radio.

So where did all this political excitement and debate leave me? By the time of my arrival at Harvard I had broken with my parents' political views to the extent that I was against western involvement in the Vietnam War and was prepared to march in the streets. Exposure to the materialism of the American middle class pushed me further left. I wrote to Jane in October 1968, 'One gets so incensed by their narrow entrenched right-wing views that America really turns me into a fervent socialist. I have somewhat changed my tune since you first knew me!'<sup>13</sup> But I was never a revolutionary. I found myself caught between the moderate anti-war pragmatism of many Harvard liberals, whom I found too wishy-washy, and the angry extremism of SDS. During the Harvard 'revolution' I found myself sympathetic to the SDS demands but disturbed by their methods. In letters home I drew a distinction between those in SDS who were primarily humanitarians, angry about the Vietnam War and genuinely concerned by inequality of race and class within America, and those 'self-admitted Maoists whose sole aim is revolution' and who 'condone violence'.<sup>14</sup> I told Jane that the country needed change, 'not the bloody mess of revolution'.<sup>15</sup>

I continued to get involved in anti-war activity. When the nationwide day-long moratorium protesting the Vietnam War arrived on 15 October 1969,

I rose early and knocked on doors in Revere, a poor white suburb of Boston, and handed out leaflets. Then I joined a march of 12,000 from Cambridge Common to Boston Common, where a crowd of 100,000 had gathered. I described the scene at the time: 'It was a most beautiful experience – folk groups sang in the background, planes drew the peace sign in the sky with vapour trails, and George McGovern got nicely angry over the microphone.' The day had reaffirmed my faith in democracy and people power.<sup>16</sup> The next month, I decided to head to Washington for the second moratorium, when half a million people gathered outside the White House to protest the war. I bought a bus ticket from the local anti-war committee, but the buses ran out of seats. So we set off for Washington by car – only to be stymied when we had a massive blow-out about 80 kilometres along the way. We then watched while the spare slowly deflated, thus also deflating my little act of protest.

The next year, 1970, while the war rumbled on, things became rather more violent. 'Men no longer whisper "Revolution", they shout it; and they no longer carry banners, but throw bricks,' I wrote home.<sup>17</sup> In April I joined another big demonstration against the war on Boston Common, and then returned to do some reading in Harvard's Widener Library. I heard noises outside in Harvard Square, so decided to take a look. There I saw a crowd, perhaps five hundred strong, shouting slogans and throwing burning garbage containers and rocks through the windows of the shops and banks in Harvard Square. Many were armed with helmets and chains to battle the 'pigs'. Sure enough before long I saw the 'pigs', the Boston police, arrive. They were wearing gas masks and carrying batons. I was perhaps 300 metres away, well out of the riot zone. I had just caught the whiff of tear gas when I saw a phalanx of police heading up Massachusetts Avenue in our direction. I went to the sidewalk fully expecting the police to rush on by. No such luck. Several cops, swirling batons, followed me and caught me against the stone wall of Harvard Yard. Next I knew, despite pleading innocence as a pure observer, I was being pummelled over the head. I escaped without serious injury but others did not, and I recall seeing one grey-haired and very respectable bystander being brutally beaten.

The incident had several consequences. It forced me further leftwards and I developed a deep cynicism about the American police; and it had, as we shall see, a rather strange sequel. Although the Vietnam War was the initial stimulus for student protest and lay behind my participation, by early 1969 increasing numbers of incidents on campuses across the country were led by

black students and concerned issues of race. I had come to the United States relatively ignorant of such matters. Like many people overseas I had grown up reading about Martin Luther King and the fight for civil rights, but that was about where it stopped. I believed in liberal integration. I had thought little about issues of race within New Zealand. In 1968 I wrote home about ‘the negro problem’, as if the issue was one of black people themselves rather than white attitudes and institutions.<sup>18</sup> After King’s assassination, a new group of black leaders emerged, who spoke in more radical terms of separate institutions and violent action. This was a challenge. I spent a couple of months in my second year house-sitting in a ghetto in Boston and this brought home the realities of life in such places. I set to and began to read about the modern black movement. I began with essays by Eldridge Cleaver, one of the leaders of the radical Black Panther party, in his book *Soul on Ice*. There he articulated the case for a black-liberation philosophy backed by violence, and described, although renouncing the practice, raping white women as insurrectionary acts. My initial response was that Cleaver was ‘rather extreme and irrational’, but I warmed to ‘the personal sequences in between’.<sup>19</sup>

Two months later I picked up *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. This time the personal sequences turned my head around. I immediately told my parents that the book was ‘a quite remarkable document by a very great man, describing his rise from hoodlum and dope peddler in Harlem to the leader of the “Black Revolution”. These angry oppressed black writers are certainly a remarkable breed.’<sup>20</sup> It was not only that the book was a gripping personal story. It convinced me of the argument for separate black institutions. To Jane I said that

*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* has had quite an effect on my thinking. I can see now that ‘liberal’ integration is not the answer, for it always means integration into a white man’s culture, and white man’s values, and of course the blacks must therefore suffer. What one wants is a black race conscious of its independence, of its distinctive racial pride, and only then will there be an equality of sorts.... There must be ‘Black Power’ before black integration.<sup>21</sup>

Other reading during these years stimulated my thinking. I picked up Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* and largely accepted his argument



Well-thumbed copies of some of the books that turned my head around from 1968 to 1972.

that workers were co-opted into capitalism by the power of consumerism and advertising. I read Herbert Kohl’s *36 Children*, which developed in me an enthusiasm for progressive education and for the need to make sure the education of the poor and minority groups was appropriate for their cultures. I toyed with the thought of breaking my PhD and ‘teaching for a year in the ghettos here’.<sup>22</sup> I went along and heard Noam Chomsky, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), just along the road from Harvard, lecture on American Imperialism, and became an enthusiast for his book, sparked by opposition to the Vietnam War, *American Power and the New Mandarins*. This diagnosed the role that university academics at places like Harvard had played in planning and justifying the United States’ anti-communist methods.



***'Men no longer whisper "Revolution",  
they shout it; and they no longer carry  
banners, but throw bricks'.***

**– Letter home from Harvard, 1970**

Jock Phillips grew up in post-war Christchurch where history meant Ancient Greece and home was England. Over the last fifty years – through the Māori renaissance, the women's movement, the rediscovery of ANZAC and more – Phillips has lived through a revolution in New Zealanders' understanding of their identity. And from *A Man's Country* to *Te Ara*, in popular writing, exhibitions, television and the internet, he played a key role in instigating that revolution. *Making History* tells the story of how Jock Phillips and other New Zealanders discovered this country's past.

In this memoir, Phillips turns his deep historical skills on himself. How did the son of Anglophile parents, educated among the sons of Canterbury sheep farmers at Christ's College, work out that the history of this country might have real value? From Harvard, Black Power and sexual politics in America, to challenging male culture in New Zealand in *A Man's Country*, to engaging with Māori in *Te Papa* and *Te Ara*, Phillips revolted against his background and became a pioneering public historian, using new ways to communicate history to a broad audience.



9 781869 408992



AUCKLAND  
UNIVERSITY  
PRESS