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# Focus

## Hate violence against campus minorities on the rise

By Alex Roth

In the fall of 1986, white students attacked black students during a World Series victory celebration at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. One week later, “Niggers, Chinks and Spics stop complaining and get out!” was painted across the Cultural Center at nearby Smith College.

Both schools responded with campus educational programs, harsher penalties for bias-related infractions, curriculum reviews, and other measures designed to combat intolerance on their campuses. But at both schools, hate crimes have continued. Last fall five blacks and student activists at Smith received letters containing racist and anti-feminist slurs. And at U. Mass at Amherst last February whites and blacks brawled again, followed by charges of white racial intimidation.

“These incidents are happening all over the place,” said Mary Reutener, associate director of college affairs at Smith. “We certainly don’t feel exempt.”

On college campuses across the country, reported harassment of blacks, Jews, gays and

other traditionally victimized groups is increasing. A study released last month by the Anti-Defamation League said reports of anti-Semitism on college campuses more than doubled in 1988. Dr. Howard Erlich of the National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence said incidents of campus "ethnoviolence"—harassment motivated by ethnic, religious or racial prejudice—"seems to be being reported at a much faster ratio," although he was unable to say by what percentage, since the NIPV has been monitoring such incidents for only one year. Kevin Berrill, director of anti-violence and campus projects at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), claims "a marked increase in reports" of campus anti-gay violence in the last five years.

NIPV says 174 colleges have had "ethnoviolent" incidents in the last three years, and ADL reports 54 anti-Semitic incidents at 38 colleges last year.

In the last two years, the Ivy League has had a large number of highly-publicized bias-related incidents. At Yale last October, "white power" was sprayed on the college's Afro-American Cultural Center; Penn's Zeta Beta Tau fraternity was suspended in the fall of 1987 after fraternity members yelled racial epithets at black strippers during a rush party; last March three members of the Dartmouth Review, Dartmouth's right-wing newspaper, were suspended and another was placed on probation for publishing a column that called

probation after the our allegedly harassed and assaulted a black professor in his classroom.

At Columbia, a fight between whites and blacks in January of 1987 brought a series of loud protests and charges of campus racism; also at Columbia, "Get the homo's [sic] out of the kitchen, you are encouraging AIDS die!" was scrawled on a Johnson (now Wien) Dining Hall comment card in December after an on-duty dining hall worker kissed another male.

"From our research it's fairly safe to say that today one out of five to one out of four [religious, ethnic and racial] minorities has been victimized on college campuses," said Erlich. "This is a serious magnitude."

Among other incidents on college campuses in the last two years are these:

- "Kill the Kikes," "Zionist racists" and other slogans were sprayed on the Jewish Student Center at SUNY Binghamton.

- Members of a fraternity at Johns Hopkins set fire to an anti-apartheid shanty while four students slept inside.

- The Zeta Beta Tau fraternity at University of Wisconsin held a mock slave auction.

- A black student at the Citadel in South Carolina was threatened in his dorm room by students dressed in Ku Klux Klan uniforms.

- "Faggot" was spray-painted across the car of a gay male at Rutgers. Also at Rutgers, a lesbian student was chased by two male students who held out broken bottles of beer and told her they wanted to show her "how

to be a real woman.”

The rise in campus intolerance might simply reflect the rising conservatism in society at large. The ADL says anti-Semitic incidents in general are at their highest level in five years, which the organization partly attributes to the rise in “Skinhead” gangs and other hate groups. NGLTF says it received over 7,000 reports of gay and lesbian harassment in 1987, compared to less than 2,000 in 1985. And according to Erlich, ethnoviolence today appears as much in the community and the workplace as on college campuses.

Some educators and other experts say the Reagan Administration’s tacit support of intolerance has created a more hostile national attitude. Where bias used to appear only behind closed doors, they say, now it is socially acceptable.

“Campus hostilities are due in part to the fact that the tone is really set in Washington,” said Columbia Assistant Professor of Sociology Eric Hirsch. “People take their cue from what the president is saying. Reagan and Koch both

used racism as a way of furthering their political careers. And the Bush campaign also exploited racist fears [with the Willy Horton ads].”

Albert Camarillo, professor of history at Stanford University and chair of the Stanford Committee on Minority Issues, said that because the national climate is more permissive, a racist or anti-Jewish act today is more likely to encourage “copycat” incidents. He

also said copycats are encouraged by the increasing media attention campus intolerance is receiving.

Some experts say today’s college-age generation is more conservative than the general public. Berrill says today’s college students “have no memory of the Civil Rights movement, which their elders do. These days acceptance on campuses is greater among administrators than among college peers.”

One reason for the new college-level conservatism, think many educators, is greater competition on campuses. As graduate schools and the job market demand more of graduating students, students see fellow classmates as more threatening, and as a result, say these educators, students are more hostile in general.

According to these experts, many students today also resent affirmative action and other programs they think give minorities an unfair advantage.

“I see dramatic changes,” said Fred Pincus, a sociologist at University of Maryland in Baltimore County who specializes in race relations in higher education. “In 1968 the people who took my classes were guilty white liberals. Ten years ago, five years ago things changed. Today’s students aren’t cowed by blacks. Whites are more threatened.”

Also, some experts say, persecuted groups are more sensitive to harassment and more likely to report it. Definitions of “harassment” are enlarging; for example, ADL now lists “JAP” (Jewish American Princess) jokes as a form of anti-Semitism. A member of a persecuted group, these experts say, is also more likely today to mistake an innocent act for harassment.

“A lot of it is perception,” said Mike Markman, head of the New York City police department’s bias squad. “On college campuses you don’t get the blatant confrontations as much. Many incidents are a question of subjectivity. Many are subtle acts that someone has inferred as racist that might not have been racist.”

Ellen Futter, president of Barnard College, where racist and anti-Semitic graffiti was drawn on dorm room doors last semester, said the increase in intolerance reports could be

seen as a sign of progress, reflecting a "more sophisticated" understanding of what constitutes intolerance. Students are more sensitive to intolerance, she said, and universities and colleges are more willing to acknowledge it.

Futter said determining if intolerance was actually increasing or if simply more people were reporting it would be difficult, since "we are looking at the problem through a different lens today than we were ten years ago."

Other experts and educators attribute increasing campus hate violence to what they call a "backlash" effect. Many black, Hispanic, Jewish and gay action groups are becoming more visible and aggressive, they say, which increases resentment in certain sectors of campuses.

Berrill said the rising problems of AIDS had caused gay activism to increase, "making the gay community more visible today than ever.

The more visible gays become, the more likely they will be resented by certain people on campus."

Thomas Sowell, a conservative black senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, says the increase in minority protests and rallies on campuses has caused the rise in campus racism. Sowell says that as a result of affirmative action programs, minorities on college campuses generally are less qualified than their white counterparts. These minorities, he says, have the options of accepting their relative academic inferiority or rebelling

against “the standards they do not meet, scavenging for grievances and issuing a never-ending stream of demands and manifestos.” Many opt to rebel, causing a backlash of resentment in the white communities on campuses, he asserted.

“Even on a campus where most minority students concentrate on their academic work, those who engage in bombast and disruption are far more likely to be noticed by white students,” he says. “This is only one factor in the racial backlash that has led to a White Student Union at Temple University, racist

skinhead recruiting literature on campus at Stanford, Ku Klux Klan graffiti at Berkeley, and racist notes at Smith College.”

Camarillo said he agreed with Sowell’s assertion that increasing minority complaints have caused a backlash in white college communities—“Whites are thinking, ‘Isn’t it time we stopped doing everything for minorities?’” Camarillo said—but he said minority students were troubled not by their relative inferiority but by culturally biased curriculums and by the lack of minority faculty on campuses, “which are constant reminders of certain people’s less-than-equal standing at an institution.”

Dean of Columbia College Robert Pollack, who called Sowell’s statements “deeply disturbing,” said Sowell’s argument “tells whites that it’s natural to be prejudiced.”

“Affirmative action is not the cause,” said Pollack. “It’s a matter of prejudice to begin



with. If you have a problem with someone's qualifications, you will complain about their qualifications. When you commit a racist act, it shows you have a problem with their race, not with their qualification. He's saying white people resent blacks. Well, black people resent whites also. We have to move beyond that."

Pollack also said racist students are more likely to be anti-Semitic and anti-gay, since "once you let slip the boundary that keeps you from being prejudiced against one group, it is easier to spread your hate among other groups as well. Once you give into your hate once,

it is easier to give in the second time."

Berrill said the fact that campus harassment of minorities is increasing while anti-Jewish and anti-gay incidents are also rising "is no coincidence. It proves that people who hate do not discriminate."

Many colleges are going to great lengths to combat campus bias harassment. Smith College called in a handwriting expert to examine the hate notes circulating on campus. In January 1988, Wellesley College hosted the Conference Concerning Racism and Bigotry on Campuses "in response to an overall concern for greater racial understanding on campuses." Thirty-six colleges attended.

Last November, the presidents of Smith, Wellesley, Mt. Holyoke, Amherst, Wesleyan, and Williams issued a joint statement condemning "such cowardly and incendiary acts."

Smith President Mary Maples Duane last October released the "Smith Design," a list of 40 initiatives designed to improve race relations at Smith. Under the Smith Design the college is hiring more minorities, increasing work-study programs

on campus, funding internships for blacks and taking other measures to increase "campus diversity." The college has also added a civil rights policy, which underlines the college's commitment to social equality for minorities.

Other colleges and universities are taking similar measures against intolerance. In early February, a 33-member panel at Rutgers released a preliminary report containing far-reaching measures—including the creation of a gay and lesbian studies program and the expansion of married-student housing to include lesbian and gay couples—to combat the often "vicious" discrimination against gays on the Rutgers campus. In response to 24 incidents of harassment in January and February 1988 alone, Penn State began releasing reports of documented campus intolerance.

But many victims and campus activists are not satisfied. Last February blacks at U. Mass Amherst took over the school's Africa House for six days to protest delays in implementing the school's anti-bias measures. Blacks at University of Maryland at Baltimore County last April organized a five-day sit-in at the chancellor's office to protest the university's failure to act against what they said were a series of racist incidents in the dorms.

Students and faculty at NYU Law School in February blockaded the main staircase of the school's Vanderbilt Hall to protest what they considered a shortage of black faculty. And at Howard University last March, students staged a five-day sit-in at the school's main administration building because the school has not responded to a series of demands involving housing, financial aid and the curriculum.

"Officials have simply chosen to look the other way," Berrill said. "They claim these incidents are isolated as an excuse for not finding comprehensive solutions. Or they blame the victim—the black or the homosexual. Colleges should reach out to victims, make it clear they won't be revictimized."

Berrill says colleges and universities need "educational programming from orientation on, to make it clear that bias isn't tolerated. They must make it clear to students who came from homogeneous backgrounds that the rules are different at college."

Reginald Wells of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives says campus intolerance will not subside until the national climate changes.

"We need a climate that starts with the chief executive indicating that the types of incidents will not be tolerated," he said. "When this becomes institutionalized, then you'll see a reduction in these incidents."

Sowell says eliminating quotas and other affirmative action policies is the best way to get rid of campus racism. He says colleges and universities should stop worrying about their racial profiles and admit only those minorities who meet inflexible admissions standards, "regardless of what that does to the statistical profile of any given campus."

Camarillo, who says Sowell uses affirmative action as "the whipping boy" for campus racism, says universities and colleges must increase minority faculty and students to make minorities feel more comfortable at college and to combat what he says is ignorance among many students—black and white—who come from homogeneous backgrounds. Hiring more minority faculty, he says, also will bring diversity to a school's curriculum, since "most of the people who do minority research are minority faculty."

Camarillo also says each college and university must "make a commitment to understanding the particular sources of tension on their campus. What we do at Stanford might be different than what is done at Columbia. Otherwise they won't put their finger on the problem."

How effectively any efforts will combat the rising campus

intolerance is unclear. Many educators feel a college is helpless against the complex and often overwhelming social forces that make people more conservative and intolerant. Camarillo admits that “you can’t change a person’s world view in four years.”

Futter said that, regardless of how effective any measure would be, a university or college is “obligated as an educational institution to provide comprehensive education, which means not just classroom education. You can’t say, ‘There’s nothing we can do.’ ”

Futter said recruiting more minorities, scheduling talks about intolerance, and perhaps changes in a school’s curriculum were all “positive measures at the bottom line. Whether they will be a panacea, I don’t think anybody knows that. But if there was a quick fix, we would have applied it years ago.”

Others think the best a college or university can do is limit the damage.

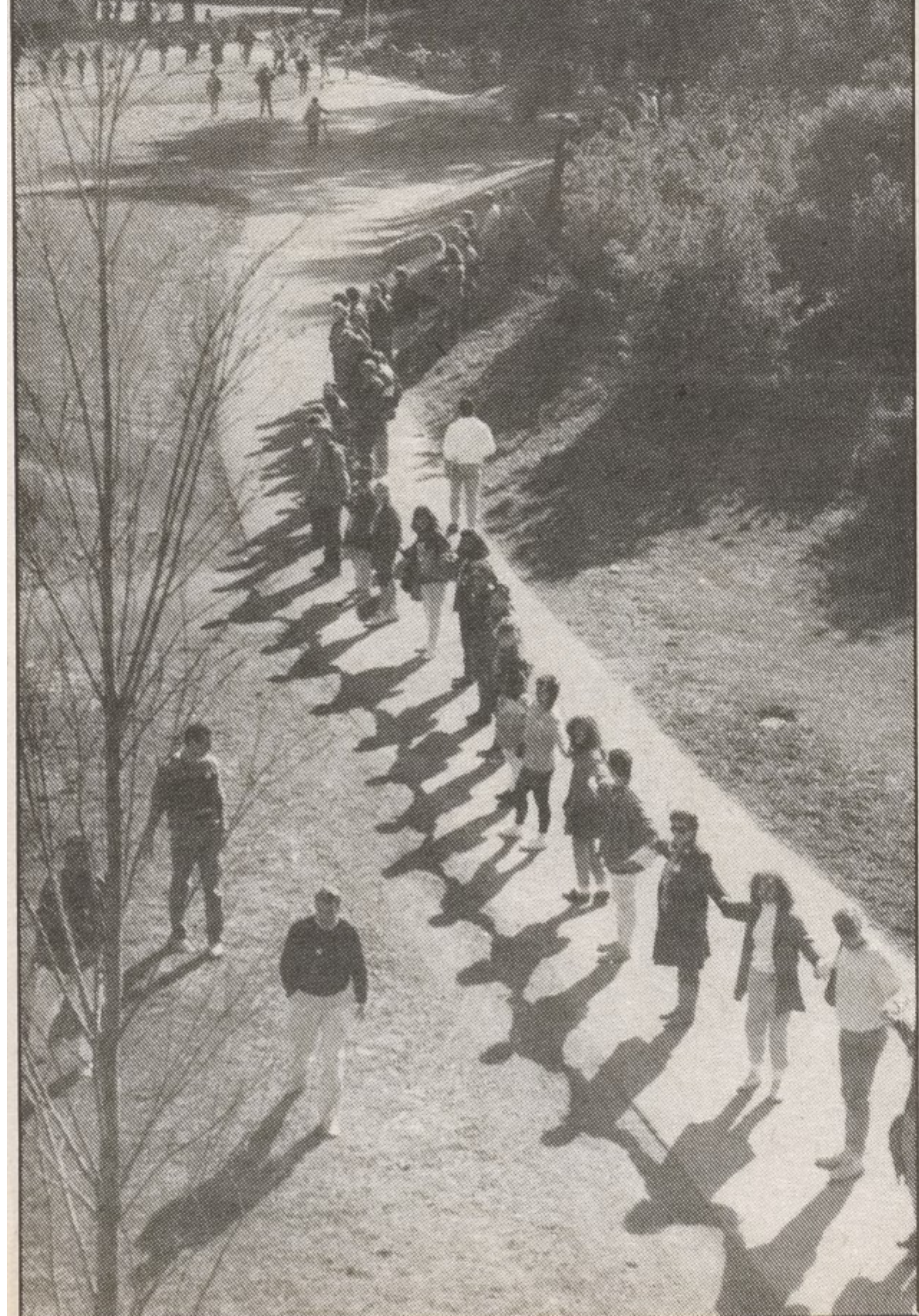
“I don’t think you can change anybody’s attitude,” said Smith’s Reutener. “But you can change people’s behavior.”

**“Once you let slip the boundary... it is easier to spread your hate among other groups as well.”**

**—Dean Robert Pollack**

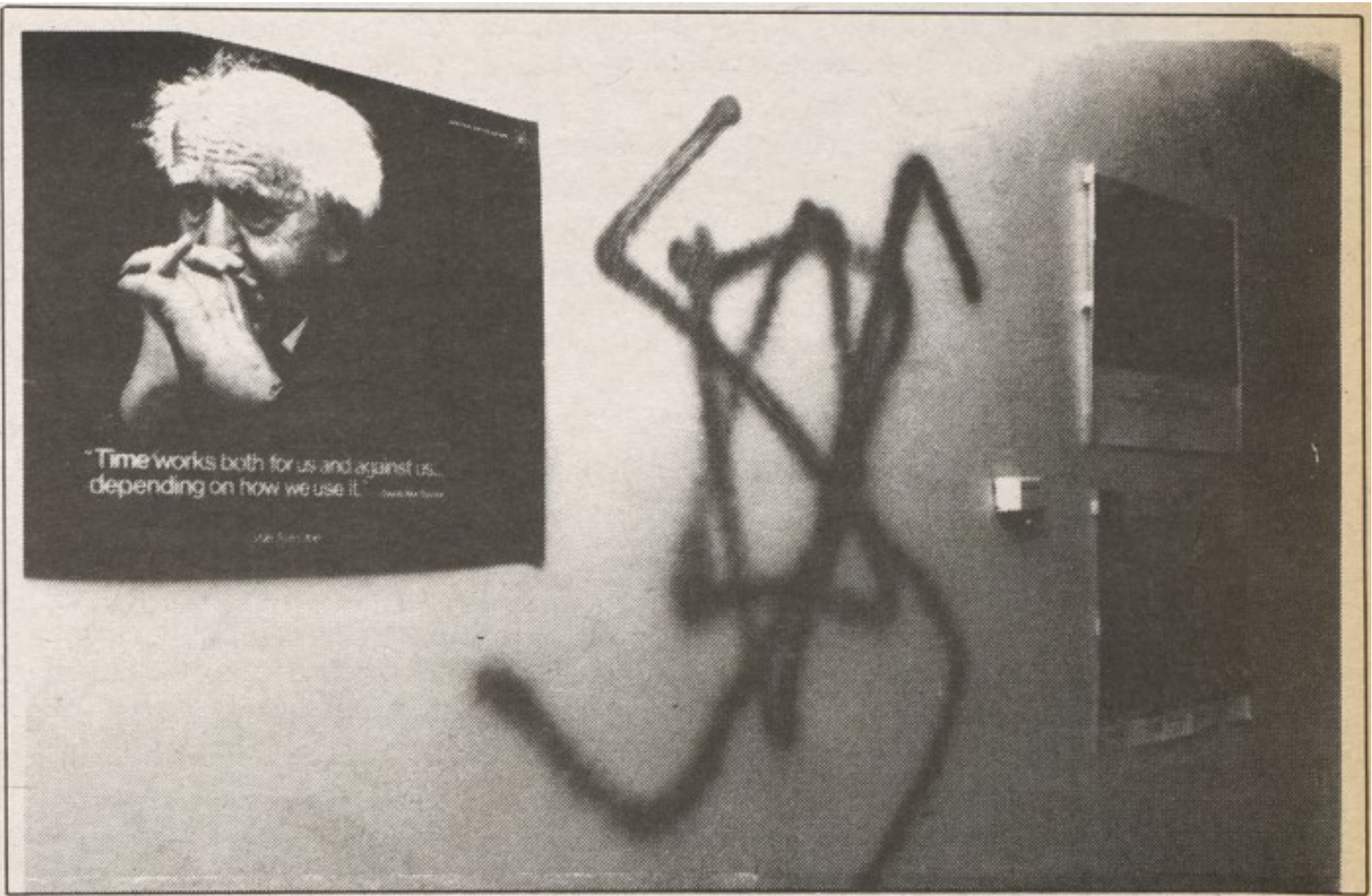
**Today’s college students “have no memory of the Civil Rights movement.”**

**—Kevin Berrill**



COURTESY U. MASS CAMPUS CHRONICLE

Fighting racism with a "Hands Across Campus" campaign at U. Mass.



COURTESY STEPHEN GERARD

**Vandalism at the Jewish Student Union at SUNY-Binghamton, Nov. 10, 1988**

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