Radicals, Rhetoric, and the War
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Radicals, Rhetoric, and the War
The University of Nevada in the Wake of Kent State

Brad E. Lucas
This book is dedicated to
Lyn, Kayla, and Corey
&
Elaine and Rachel
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1. English professor Paul S. Adamian, president N. Edd Miller, Procter Hug Jr., Chairman of the Board of Regents

2. Given “a minute” to get up, graduate student William Copren sits for his full 60 seconds, blocking the progress of the Governor’s motorcade

3. Professor Paul Adamian leans over a protesting student who placed himself in front of the moving motorcade

4. A crowd of protestors gathers around the stopped motorcade

5. After the motorcade incident, University of Nevada demonstrators walk to the stadium

6. As marchers circle the stadium track, president Miller, Governor Paul Laxalt, and various university officials and military personnel look on

7. Governor’s Day officials attempt to continue the ceremony, as planned, despite noise from demonstrators sitting above them

8. Protestors quietly raise peace signs in the bleachers. Professor Adamian raises a closed-fist salute

9. United Student Alliance members sit on the demonstration field while most protestors enter the stadium bleachers

10. ROTC cadets with unsheathed bayonets approach demonstrators on field
At the end of the 1960s in opposition to the Vietnam War and in sympathy with the civil rights and women’s liberation movements, protests erupted on college campuses. The University of California at Berkeley experienced the “free speech movement” earlier in the decade; in 1968, on the east coast, Columbia University ignited, forcing that institution to close after a Students for Democratic Society (SDS) demonstration led to the takeover of several campus buildings and a violent clash between demonstrators and the police. The turmoil, not limited to the United States, brought anti-war protests to the Universities of Tokyo, Prague, and Paris, and several campuses in Italy. At the conclusion of the 1969–1970 academic year, unprecedented violence erupted on an American campus when national guardsmen killed four students at Kent State University in Ohio on May 4, 1970. The incursion of American troops into Cambodia on April 30 had set off a wave of protests that spread to virtually every major campus in the nation. Across the United States, more than five hundred colleges and universities closed. In *Radicals, Rhetoric, and the War*, Brad Lucas, who was born less than a year before the Kent State episode, tells the story of the events during this period that occurred at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), a school that did not make national headlines but where the local impact was significant.

Lucas could do so because the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) had the foresight to establish the Governor’s Day oral history project. In 1970, Governor’s Day, an annual Reserved Officer Training Corps (ROTC) awards ceremony, occurred the day after the Kent State shootings and became the target of anti-military sentiment. The disruption that occurred at UNR on that day increased campus polarization and had long term consequences for the university and one professor who lost his job—and for academic freedom generally. Shortly after the incident, the UNOHP interviewed students, faculty, administrators, and observers about the events that had ripped the campus and the community asunder. In so doing, the UNOHP interviewers put oral history to use for one of the technique’s many versatile purposes: to record the present for the future. While oral history usually records memories of the past from the perspective of the present, it can be employed to preserve a record of a contemporary event for future researchers. This is what happened in Reno immediately following Governor’s Day and its aftermath, although the untranscribed tapes sat in an archival box until 1998 when the University Archivist led Lucas to this treasure trove of material. With the encouragement of the
staff at the UNOHP, who transcribed the tapes, Lucas edited them and added a special dimension to this work by re-interviewing several of the participants. In so doing, he created the opportunity to compare what was said in the original interviews with memories expressed almost thirty years later, a valuable approach not often available to oral historians.

Lucas’s interest in rhetoric, language, and symbolic action informs this study as well, and helps to insure that its significance extends beyond that of just another account of a local college protest during the Vietnam War era. For him, “The oral history interview situation is a rhetorical event.” Participants in campus protests battled over the means of communication and representation. Words became weapons in the cultural conflict that divided America. By offering us this framework, Radicals, Rhetoric, and the War contributes another dimension to the Palgrave Studies in Oral History series, which attempts to bring to readers cutting edge work in the field while making it accessible to students, scholars, and general readers alike. As the tenth volume in the series, Lucas’s study joins topics as diverse as China’s Cultural Revolution, Argentina’s “Dirty War,” and African American activism in the Mississippi Delta, and helps to demonstrate the ability of oral history to illuminate an infinite variety of topics.

Bruce M. Stave
University of Connecticut

Linda Shopes
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission
Acknowledgments

University archivist Karen Gash got me started on this journey in 1998 and frequently retrieved buried treasures from the archives—thanks for your inspiration. This book would not have been possible without the time, energy, support, and vision of the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP). The Governor’s Day oral history project was initially developed in 1970, at the urging of librarian Kenneth Carpenter and with the efforts of Mary Ellen Glass, Marian Rendall, and Ruth Hilts. I am also indebted to R. Tom King and Mary Larson for all of their support over the years, and have enjoyed their company as scholars and friends. With Kathleen Coles, Kate Wright-Ross, and Linda Sommer, they have made enormous contributions to the field of oral history and the narratives of Nevada. Above all, Tom deserves special praise for being an excellent teacher and a true mentor while I was a graduate student.

To my friends and former colleagues in Nevada, thank you for sustaining a kind and caring community. While I cannot list all your names here, I need to recognize some of the individuals who put a lot of their lives into mine: Michael and Eryn Branch, Colin and Monica Robertson, Tim and Linda Gorelangton, Jane Detweiler, Kathleen and Phil Boardman, James and Lilace Guignard, Michael and Valerie Cohen, Heidi Estrem, Geoff Baker, Patti Hanlon, Dana Zaskoda, Stacy Burton, Stephen Tchudi, Mary Webb, Steve Adkison, Eliot Rendleman, Nick Plunkey, Kara Moloney, Amanda Espinosa-Aguilar, Katherine Schmidt, Vince and Masami Raker, Geri McVeigh, Cami Allen, Ann Ronald, Lois Snedden, Michelle Satterlee, Scott Slovic, Patrick Barron, Mark Waldo, Jen Hill, and many others. Also, I would like to thank attorney Gary Manson for restoring my faith in the legal system after I ran into resistance downtown. And I would like to thank Jimmy Boegle (Reno News and Review), Viktoria Hertling (CenterNews, Center for Holocaust, Genocide, & Peace Studies), and Bill Rowley (Nevada Historical Society Quarterly) for making available early versions of the Governor’s Day story.

The Jon Ben Snow Foundation provided a generous grant for the UNOHP that indirectly supported the Governor’s Day project, as did the UNR Graduate Student Association. UNR’s annual Thornton Peace Prize emerged directly from the conflagrations of Governor’s Day, so I am particularly pleased to acknowledge, here, the Thornton family for establishing an award that annually recognizes courageous individuals who fight injustice through nonviolent means.
The daunting task of interviewing academics, judges, activists, and politicians brought me into contact with wise and wonderful people I might not have otherwise met. In particular, I would like to thank Paul Adamian, Joe Crowley, Warren d’Azevedo, Frankie Sue Del Papa, John Doherty, David Harvey, Robert Harvey, Anne Howard, Procter Hug, Jr., James Hulse, Fred Maher, N. Edd Miller, Jim Richardson, David Slemmons, Lorena Stookey, and particularly Bob Mayberry (whose path I continue to cross in the strangest of places). Thank you all for your time and interest.

The library faculty and staff at UNR and at Texas Christian University (TCU) have been invaluable in the last stages of the book. My colleagues at TCU have provided me with a supportive and warm environment that has enabled me to focus my energies on both my teaching and my research: Bonnie Blackwell, Neil Easterbrook, Richard Enos, Bob Frye, Theresa Gaul, Ann George, Jill Havens, Charlotte Hogg, Linda Hughes, Todd Kerstetter, Carrie Leverenz, Timothy Parrish, Ronald Pitcock, Curt Rode, Steve Sherwood, Elizabeth Spiller, Karen Steele, Australia Tarver, and David Vanderwerken. I want to give special thanks to Nancy White and Claudia Knott for keeping my department humming, and to my chair, Dan Williams, and to Mary Volcansek, Dean of the AddRan College of Humanities and Social Science, for supporting my work.

The folks at Palgrave Macmillan have been supportive and helpful throughout the process of creating this book. Series editors Bruce Stave and Linda Shopes took a chance on a manuscript that had yet to be written, and they pushed me to consider directions that I might have otherwise avoided. Without these editors, the book you are about to read would take you on a much more taxing journey. I would also like to thank Maran Elancheran at Newgen Imaging Systems for excellent copyediting work, and Alessandra Bastagli, Brendan O’Malley, Petrina Crockford, Emily Leithauser, and Erin Ivy at Palgrave Macmillan for managing the direction, content, and production of this book.

My family deserves special praise for putting up with me and an academic’s ways for the past two decades, from relocations and running debts to missed holidays and short vacation visits. Thanks to Craig and Donna Lucas; Janet and Brian Conlin; my mother, Ruth Lucas; and my father, Kenneth Lucas, who passed away on September 19, 2005, just a few weeks after this manuscript was completed. Since the 1980s, I have also been able to count on my dear brothers, which has meant more to me than I could ever put into words: Tim Pappageorge, Dan Miller, Edward Burda, Eric Fairchild, Jeff Gebert, and James Courtad. Thank you all for bringing me up and giving me a good life.

In Texas, Vaughn and Janiece, Robert and Ashley, and Kate and Robert have welcomed me into their family, bringing good cheer, support, and understanding. To Kayla and Corey, thank you for the joy, laughter, discovery, song, study, play, love, and grateful games that you have brought into my life. And for my wife, Lyn: thank you for bringing me a loving heart, a healthy life, and a nurturing home. I am thankful every day for your love and support, your care and respect, and your faith in me. This book wouldn’t have made it to print without you.