

Fifty years after Kent State, conservative Republicans are the new counterculture on campus: Peter Jedick

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Peter Jedick is the author of "HIPPIES," a novel set in 1970s Kent State University.

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By Guest Columnist, cleveland.com

ROCKY RIVER, Ohio -- I've decided it's time to make a confession that's way overdue: I used to be a "hippie."

Actually, I didn't consider myself a hippie, but society branded me as one because I had long hair, a beard and wore bell-bottom jeans. We were called "the counterculture" back in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The reason I bring it up now, the 50th anniversary of the protests and shootings at Kent State University, is that the world has gone topsy-turvy. If a college student wants to be a member of the counterculture today, they should join their local Republican Party club.

You think I'm crazy, right? Please hear me out.

Let me take you back to 1968 at Kent State, my alma mater. I was fortunate to receive a journalism scholarship to attend there. So, as such, I was given a personal meeting with the head of the journalism department. As we talked in his office, I noticed a handful of students outside his window carrying signs protesting the Vietnam War. I asked him what that was about. He told me not to pay them any attention. They were just "communist" troublemakers.

Sadly, it was near that very spot two years later, on May 4, 1970, that the Ohio National Guard acted out our nation's hatred of the counterculture by killing four student protesters. Many Kent city residents said, "They should have killed more of them."

Back then, the people running our colleges and other institutions were mostly World War II vets like my dad. They thought that we "hippies" were traitors

because we were against the Vietnam War, probably the worst foreign policy mistake in American history. We called them “the establishment.”

Which brings me to today. Today, many establishment types in academia and the media call us conservative Republicans “fascists” because we believe the United States is the richest, freest, greatest country on the planet. This got me thinking about how Republicans today are treated like the counterculture used to be.

For example, way back on Nov. 2, 2006, long before Donald Trump was elected president, I read a Plain Dealer story describing some students at Oberlin College who were restarting a Republican Club that had been dormant for decades. When they tried to put up flyers publicizing a visit by conservative speaker Patrick Michaels, the fliers were covered up and defaced. (The article so upset me that I went and talked to the students, but that’s another story.)

When William Kristol, another conservative speaker, was invited to lecture, his posters were even torn in half. Jonathan Bruno, the [Oberlin College Republicans](#) (CRs) president, was outraged. “Radical students constantly denounce CRs lecturers as ‘fascists’, but we hear none of these detractors speaking out against this shameful vandalism, which itself smacks of fascist totalitarianism,” he said in their newsletter.

To be fair, both speakers’ visits went off uneventfully. But I don’t like being called a “fascist,” since my father almost died in World War II fighting the real fascists in Nazi Germany.

Fast forward to 2020 and not much has changed on college campuses. You would think that, after 62 million of us “fascists” voted for Donald Trump in 2016, the college crowd would cut us some slack. No such luck. They seem to have forgotten their hippie roots.

So if you want to see what it was like to be a hippie in the 1960s, try walking across any college campus in America today wearing a red MAGA (“Make America Great Again”) hat. See how far you get without being harassed. Maybe it would help if you put on a pair of bell-bottom jeans.

Peter Jedick is the author of “[HIPPIES](#),” a novel set on Kent State’s campus surrounding the May 4 tragedy.