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Revisiting a Simulation of the 1968 Occupation of Columbia University
March 14, 2019

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# Up against the Wall, Motherfucker—The Game?

## Revisiting a Simulation of the 1968 Occupation of Columbia University

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Slash the Rembrandt (if the threat of slashing it will deter the police, one must be willing to make the threat real).

Pile the Chinese porcelain camel on the barricade (Headline: Policeman's axe smashes art treasure.)

Rifle through the files. Smoke the president's cigars.

-UAW/MF

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## Further Reading

- Up against the Ivy Wall; A History of the Columbia Crisis by Jerry Avorn
- *Black Mask & Up Against the Wall Motherfucker: The incomplete works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea, and the Black Mask group*
- The Brown Paper Bag Theory of Affinity Groups by Up Against the Wall Motherfucker—one of the first texts about the affinity group organizing model to appear in the United States
- Elegy to Richard Lee, a Motherfucker from Austin—This gives a sense of the sort of lives that the most uncompromising anarchists from the 1960s era led over the decades that followed, rather than returning to electoral politics and academia (as many senior members of the Weather Underground did).



Following up on our J20 Protest Simulator, we raided the archives to find earlier examples of protest simulations. We found one from the 1960s, depicting the occupation of Columbia University in April 1968 at the high point of the anti-war and Black liberation movements. On the 50-year anniversary of its publication in the *Columbia Spectator,* we put this game at your disposal.

The occupation of Columbia University was a major flashpoint of the struggles that defined the 1960s. The two issues at the center of the conflict remain timely today: university-driven gentrification in predominantly Black and Brown neighborhoods and the complicity of the educational system in US military intervention overseas. Inside this upheaval, multiple movements with a variety of objectives coincided and competed. Black students established a Black-only space in one of the occupations; in many ways, it was their initiative that drove the movement, not the leadership of white activists. Non-students also played a major role, flooding in from off campus to add additional variables to the equation.

At the heart of the Columbia occupation, we see the classic tension between activists seeking to improve American society and a counterculture aspiring to make a complete break with it. Some students simply wished to block the construction of a Columbia gymnasium in Morningside Park, or compel the university to stop supporting military research. Others sought revolutionary change; many of the core members of the Weather Underground emerged from the struggle at Columbia University—Eleanor Stein, Mark Rudd, John Jacobs, Ted Gold, and David Gilbert, who remains incarcerated to this day for his revolutionary efforts. At the center of the most uncompromising participants was the game's namesake, a group called **UP AGAINST THE WALL, MOTHERFUCKER.**

This phrase was in the air already when the occupation kicked off, associated with the most extreme elements in the movement. At the opening of the events, Mark Rudd included the slogan in his letter to the president of the university:

> "You call for order and respect for authority; we call for justice, freedom, and socialism. There is only one thing left to say. It may sound nihilistic to you, since it is the opening shot in a war of liberation. I'll use the words of LeRoi Jones, whom I'm sure you don't like a whole lot: 'Up against the wall, motherfucker, this is a stick-up.'"
>
> -Mark Rudd, open letter to Columbia President Grayson Kirk, April 22, 1968

A distinct current under the name Up Against the Wall Motherfucker had emerged in the New York City counterculture three months before the Columbia occupation. Drawing its name from a poem by Amiri Baraka (then known as LeRoi Jones) and styling itself "a street gang with an analysis," UAW,MF introduced confrontational anarchist politics into the discourse of the anti-war movement and the hippie counterculture, emphasizing the importance of affinity groups and direct action. UAW,MF gained notoriety participating in the occupation and defense of the Mathematics building during the Columbia occupation.

> "There were five buildings occupied at Columbia and the one we were in was the only one the police didn't attack. We didn't put a call out, but everyone who was a fighter gravitated towards that building. We were so fortified and aggressive that having evicted all the others they decided to negotiate rather than force their way in."
>
> -Ben Morea, recalling the role of Up Against the Wall Motherfucker in the occupation of Columbia University



## Appendix III: All Power To The Communes

*A text from UAW/MF that appeared around the time of the Columbia occupation.*

Columbia University, as an institution owned and run by the same interests that run corporate America can never support an education directed to the overthrow of those interests. A revolutionary movement wishing to educate revolutionaries cannot come to terms with Columbia. Ultimately its goal must be to destroy Columbia. But the strike, although it speaks the rhetoric of revolution, cannot bring itself to admit what must be its ultimate goal. So its formulations are sometimes confused and unconvincing.

A revolt at Columbia would have to cut Columbia's ties to the ruling corporate structures of America. This means taking power from the trustees and money interests that support Columbia. It cannot then be expected that Columbia will be supported by the money it is in revolt against. Without that money there is no Columbia. But the strike leadership denies that it wants to destroy Columbia.

Example of resulting contradiction: question of amnesty: one does not ask the authority one is revolting against to legitimize one's revolt unless one is unsure whether one is revolting or not. Amnesty was presented during the strike both as tactical (we cannot negotiate with the university with the punishment over our head) and as more than tactical (we cannot accept anything but amnesty because there is no legitimate authority around to punish us). Which is it?

If the rhetoric of revolution is to be believed, then the demands for reform of Columbia are tactical. One urges one's demands to expose, to force polarizing crises. The strike becomes a source of energy that will burn through the dry straw of academic life: in one door of the campus and out another. Its guiding principle: disrespect, bad taste.

Kick the professor in the stomach (if he stands in your way).

Classes suspended in most of University; academic calendar and grading procedures revised to permit completion of semester; Executive Committee establishes fact-finding commission

**Monday, May 6 to Thursday, May 16**

University reopens but thousands of students participate in boycott of classes; discipline commission proposes that criminal charges against students be dropped, and that most strikers be placed on disciplinary probation; Kirk rejects proposals, then accepts them; moderate Students for a Restructured University splits with Strike Coordinating Committee

**Friday, May 17**

Community activists seize Columbia-owned apartment building, Columbia students stage sit-in at tenement in support; police move in within hours and arrest 117 (56 students)

**Tuesday, May 21**

Students reoccupy Hamilton Hall in protest against disciplining of four SDS leaders; threatened with suspension, demonstrators refuse to leave; police empty building, clear campus as students erect barricades and fires break out in two campus buildings; 138 arrested, 66 later suspended

**Tuesday, June 4**

Columbia holds 214th Commencement Exercises; several hundred graduating students walk out of ceremonies and hold counter-commencement on Low Plaza

**Friday, August 23**

Grayson Kirk announces his early retirement as President of Columbia University, and Andrew Cordier is appointed Acting President

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"The whole point of Columbia '68 was that if you were inside one of the occupied buildings, you had just as much power as anyone else. It didn't matter who you were, what your major was, who your parents were, or whether you were on scholarship or paying your own way or not even a student. None of these things mattered when it came to our daily lives inside Mathematics. Everyone was equal…

"It turned out the cops were saving Math for last. It was going to be their dessert, probably because it was known to be the most militant of the five buildings, and also the one with the most nonstudents. We could hear them coming, one building at a time, and in the lights they had set up, we could see the chaos. When they reached Math, it took the cops forty-five minutes to dismantle that barricade and get through the front door… When they finally broke through, we were all sitting on the three floors of staircases, in our protective civil rights pose, arms over our heads. As they marched past us, everyone was slugged on the back of the head by a plainclothes cop with a small club. As I recall, some of them were using handcuffs as brass knuckles. Angry and pumped up, screaming and yelling, they got to the top floor and starting pushing everyone down the stairs, and then shoved us into paddy wagons…"

-Johnny Sundstrom

---

"When the Columbia University students in 1968 took over the university, we went up there and squatted one

of the buildings that was the most militant building—which we felt was the mathematics building—and saw our role as organizing the defense of the building, the defense when the police came and attacked, and also the defense against the right-wing and conservative students—the athletes and jocks who were attempting to prevent us from—in one case—getting resupplied from the outside."

-Osha Neumann

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"We never knew when rhetoric would leap the firewall that separated it from reality. During the strike at Columbia University, Valerie [Solanas] climbed through a window in the Mathematics building to ask Ben what would happen if she shot someone. Ben said it would depend on whom she shot and if he died. Less than two months later on, June 3, 1968, she shot Andy Warhol. As soon as he heard the news Ben cranked out a flier that claimed her as one of us."

-Osha Neumann, *Up Against the Wall Motherf**er: A Memoir of the '60s, with Notes for Next Time*

—-

"We were singing. We were chanting our demands. Yet this was a strangely calm moment, as cops went about being moving-men, extracting the furniture, once a barricade, and passing it out, chair by desk by file cabinet. They were blue shadows, hulking back and forth as searchlights passed across their backs and into our



struction suspended
1:10 P.M. H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael enter campus
4:00 P.M. Galanter committee submits proposals for tripartite commission on discipline

**Saturday, April 27**

1:00 A.M. Mark Rudd delivers "bullshit" speech before Ad Hoc Faculty
10:30 A.M. Petersen-Trustee statement released on campus
11:30 A.M. Faculty cordon around Low Library established to prevent access to demonstrators
6:00 P.M. Rally of anti-war demonstrators held near campus
11:00 P.M. Faculty negotiators report deadlock on major issues

**Sunday, April 28**

8:00 A.M. Ad Hoc Faculty announces final resolutions ("bitter pill") to end crisis
10:00 A.M. Joint Faculties meet in Law School
5:15 P.M. Majority Coalition establishes cordon around Low
7:00–8:00 P.M. Demonstrators attempt to pass food through counter-demonstrators' cordon into Low

**Monday, April 29**

3:30 P.M. Kirk issues negative response to bitter pill
6:30 P.M. Strikers reject bitter pill
11:30 P.M. Ad Hoc Faculty appeals to Mayor Lindsay, tables amnesty motion

**Tuesday, April 30**

2:30–5:30 A.M. New York City police remove students from occupied buildings and clear campus; 712 arrested, 148 injured
Noon. Ad Hoc Faculty meets in McMillin; strike resolution presented and withdrawn
2:00 P.M. Joint Faculties meet in St. Paul's Chapel, establish Executive Committee of the Faculty
8:00 P.M. Students hold strike meeting in Wollman Auditorium

**Wednesday, May 1 to Sunday, May 5**

Noon. SDS Sundial rally
12:40 P.M. March on gymnasium site, Morningside Park
1:35 P.M. Sit-in begins in Hamilton Hall
1:40 P.M. Dean Coleman held hostage in his office
2:50 P.M. Six Demands formulated; students decide not to leave until demands are met

**Wednesday, April 24**

5:30 A.M. White students evicted from Hamilton by black students
6:15 A.M. Students break into Low Library and seize Kirk's offices

7:45 A.M. Police enter Kirk's offices but make no arrests
3:00 P.M. College Faculty meets
3:30 P.M. Coleman released
8:00 P.M. Administration makes unsuccessful compromise offer to black students
10:00 PM. Avery Hall occupied

**Thursday, April 25**

2:00 A.M. Fayerweather Hall occupied
4:00 P.M. Formation of Ad Hoc Faculty Group; formulation of its first proposals to end demonstrations
7:00–8:00 P.M. Strikers reject Ad Hoc Faculty proposals
8:00 P.M. Harlem activists address rally at Columbia gates, march across campus
9:30 P.M. Counter-demonstrators attempt to invade Fayerweather

**Friday, April 26**

1:05 A.M. Vice President Truman announces impending police action to Ad Hoc Faculty
1:05 A.M. Mathematics Hall occupied
2:15 A.M. First negotiating session between faculty and students held in Math Library
3:00 A.M. Police charge crowd at Low Library
3:20 A.M. Truman announces police action canceled; gym con-



faces. "Up against the wall, motherfucker!" (we're Math, after all). Then the first helmet appeared in the well of the entranceway. We, the defense committee, stood above them, atop a short flight of stairs. Five more helmets appeared. The last of the barricade was vanishing quickly. Suddenly, falling from five flights above, a chair crashed between us and them. "Up against the wall, motherfucker!" Then another. This was nuts! No matter what we did, we were at their mercy. Did we want to start this off by killing a cop? I put up my arms and yelled, 'Stop!' Everything went silent."

-Tom Hurwitz, in *A Time to Stir: Columbia '68*

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## Up Against the Wall Motherfucker: The Game

The game was created by several Columbia students who went on to successful careers in academia and, in one case, game design. Jerry Avorn, one of the chief designers of the game, also authored *Up against the Ivy Wall: A History of the Columbia Crisis,* detailing the events of the occupation. This is a useful reference point to understand what Avorn and his colleagues understood themselves to be depicting.

The original text of the game follows. Consult Appendix I for our reflections on the politics implicit in the game itself, Appendix II for a chronology of the events it depicts, and Appendix III for what UP AGAINST THE WALL, MOTHERFUCKER themselves thought about the occupation of Columbia University.

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With the first anniversary of last spring's demonstrations fast approaching, we present a commemorative supplement to the

supplement: a playable game-simulation of spring on Morningside Heights.[1] It has been designed with the same kinds of operations research and game theory techniques that are used by mathematicians, business, and the military to generate models of interaction that can be used to predict events in real life. We call it UP AGAINST THE WALL, MOTHERFUCKER! Instructions follow.

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The playing board for UP AGAINST THE WALL, MOTHERFUCKER is made up of eleven tracks, each of which represents a quasi-political subgroup likely to be involved in the spring demonstration: black students, liberal faculty, alumni, uncommitted students, and so on. At the center of the board is Low Library; it is the goal of the ADMINISTRATION player to win the influence of these groups by moving the Position Unit Counter (PUCs) of each track inward toward Low. The RADICALS player, on the other hand, strives to move the PUCs on each track away from Low, radially out toward the edges of the board. The approximate initial political orientation of each subgroup is indicated by a dot in one of the squares on its track. The circular line surrounding Low Library represents an ideological isograph; that is, a PUC inside the circle means support for the ADMINISTRATION, and one outside the circle represents sympathy for the RADICALS. Fence-straddling for a given group is symbolized by a PUC directly on the line.

Underneath the boxes in each track are numbers ranging from 0 to 10. These indicate the magnitude (and value) of support from each group. You win UP AGAINST THE WALL, MOTHERFUCKER by amassing more support points than your opponent, or by wiping

[1] Columbia University is situated on Morningside Heights, looking over what was then the predominantly black and poor neighborhood of Harlem. The University's attempt to further gentrify Harlem by building a gymnasium in Morningside Park was one of the chief causes of the upheaval.



Keep in mind that the game is meant to be modified by changing your inputs (assumptions). The goal is to try to re-create the original situation; but even then you aren't finished. Just because you've arrived doesn't mean you got there the same way the original event did. But you've learned a lot about what was going on while you were doing it. Simulation is based on information; you've got to do your homework. Footnotes aren't enough. Your system has to work and you have to be able to see why, or why not. A book may be written, and that is that. A simulation is never completed.

Columbia isn't much of a school when it comes to Operations Research and simulation research. The IDA [Institute for Defense Analyses] is small change in this respect. This may be a relief to some people, but in the long run it can be very harmful. Like most techniques man [sic] has created, Operations Research can be used for both good and evil. "Dr. Strangelove" is much less of a fiction than you might think. People in the humanities, particularly at Columbia, seem to be reluctant in committing themselves to work in this area. This is regrettable. The potential of Operations Research is vast. Here I have only scratched the surface. If future Dr. Strangeloves (who CAN be good guys) do not receive a humanistic education in a "language" they can understand and respect… I don't have to describe it.

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## Appendix II: Chronology of the Columbia Occupation

*From Up against the Ivy Wall; A History of the Columbia Crisis by Jerry Avorn.*

**Tuesday, April 23**

*guys" [sic]. From our perspective, it's dangerously naïve to imagine that technology of any kind is neutral, be it military ordnance or sociological frameworks: as the slogan goes,* ***every tool has a world connected to it at the handle.*** *In this article, we see Dunnigan's belief in the neutrality of tools apparently lead him to endorse Columbia's involvement with the Institute for Defense Analyses—which was one of the triggers for the protests at Columbia in the first place. It may well be that game design, itself, comes with certain class interests. For precisely this reason, we consider it important to study game design and the assumptions of those who engage in it—not so much to influence them for the better, the way Dunnigan recommends, as to understand how they influence us.*

UP AGAINST THE WALL, MOTHERFUCKER… is as close to a computer-assisted simulation as you can get without using a computer. Why the computer? The computer keeps the books. It handles the details. An operations research simulation looks at an event to be simulated as a "system" which has "movable parts" and is oriented towards an "objective." In the case of UAW,MF the movable parts are the major participants of the spring confrontation, past or future. In most human systems the "objectives" are ill defined, if at all, by the participants, which may be one reason for the mess the world is in. Thus one immediate benefit you obtain from social simulations is a defining or objectives, or at least possible objectives. To get even this far you must attempt to define the situation as well as the relationships between the parts of the system. In UAW,MF I arbitrarily defined the "system" as two major ideological directions (which made the "game" simple although less accurate). Proponents of these two ideologies vie for the favor of various other groups. The game pieces represent the relative "influence" of the two major groups, and to this is added another assumption: That the proportion of influence fluctuates between the Radicals to the Administration as the confrontation progresses. Throw in a few more assumptions and you have a game ("simulation").



out your opponent altogether (see below). The manner in which the PUCs are manipulated will be explained below.

The game consists of twelve turns. Place (or, better, paste) the board on a smooth flat surface. Cut out the Position Unit Counters, mount them on cardboard or heavy paper, and place one in every box with a dot in it, one per track.

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**Step One**: The RADICALS move first. The attacking player consults the Projected Leverage-Over-Time chart (PLOT) on page c7. This determines the combat influence he will be able to exert during that turn (indicated by Level of Administrative Will (LAW) for the ADMINISTRATION, and Ratio of Activism Determinants (RADs) for the RADICALS). LAWs can be represented by small pieces of paper colored red, white, and blue, or by individual capsules of Secanol. Small pieces of paper colored red or marijuana seeds can be used for RADs. The attacking player then deploys his [gendered language *sic,* throughout] LAWs or RADs in the boxes so marked in each track, as he chooses. He may concentrate most combat pieces on one track, distribute them over all the tracks, ignore one or more tracks, and so forth.

**Step Two**: If, on any given track, there are any of your opponent's combat pieces opposite your combat pieces, (as of course there won't be on the first half of the first turn), you may choose to "attack." This is done in the following way: the attacker computes the odds in his favor by counting the number of combat pieces he has at his end of a given track and dividing by the number of combat pieces the enemy has on the other end of the same track. Thus, if there are six RADs and three LAWs on a track, the odds are 2–1 in favor of the RADICALS.

(NOTE: following standard combat-game practice, if the odds are uneven, they are computed in favor of the defender; that is, when dividing, any remainder—no matter how large—is disre-

garded, so that 39 LAWs attacking 10 RADs would result in odds of 3–1 for the ADMINISTRATION).

Having computed the odds, the attacking side rolls a single die and refers to the University Conflict Outcome Matrix (UCOM) to determine his results.

You must roll the die again for each different track you attack, but you can attack as many tracks as you want in a single turn. You may never attack at worse than 1–2 odds.

**Step Three**: After each attack, you may move the Position Unit Counter (PUC) one box closer to your combat pieces (LAWs or RADs) if and only if you have eradicated all of your opponent's combat pieces in that track.

**Step Four**: After one side has completed its part of the turn, the other side repeats Steps One through Three.

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## Contingency Cards

A set of Contingency Cards is provided. These are to be mounted on heavy paper and placed in a pile, face down, near the playing board. Before each move, a player draws a contingency card. You may use it immediately, or you may save it, or, if it is not to your advantage, you may disregard it. You need not reveal its contents to your opponent.

## The Motherfucker Gambit

At the beginning of his turn, each player may choose to up the ante by shouting, "Up Against the Wall, Motherfucker!" You should call a UAW,MF! with feeling, as it is usually the high point of the



game. For the ADMINISTRATION, it represents calling in the cops or worse; for the RADICALS, it means calling a strike, or taking another couple of buildings. After calling a UAW,MF!, the player rolls the die and consults the UCOM, but the results apply across the board (not just in a single track) in the following manner:

- TE means that ALL of the defender's combat pieces are removed from play.
- YE means that the attacker (who called the UAW,MF!) loses all of the combat pieces he has on the board.
- AL means that the player with the lesser number of combat pieces loses all of them, while the other player must remove an equal number from the board.

The attacker may then advance the PUCs as above.

The game ends after each player has taken twelve turns. Each then adds up the total number of points on his side (measured by the point values under the boxes on his side of the circle in which a PUC is found). The winner is he who has the most points. The loser calls a news conference.

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## Appendix I: On Simulations and Game Design

*The following text is excerpted from an article that co-creator Jim Dunnigan authored in the Columbia Spectator alongside the game. Like many apologists for cybernetics who insist that technology is "neutral," he argues that computer simulations (and the mechanistic understanding of human behavior that they imply) can be used for "good" as well as "evil" if they are in the hands of "good*