**Introduction to case 1: Protest and power at UC Davis**

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On November 15 2011, student activists at the University of California Davis occupied the campus quadrangle, a space something like our own Great Court. There they put up tents and stayed overnight. The students’ protest was against years of tuition fee increases that had been taken in response to the state’s reduction of university funding. Their protest was further linked with the Occupy movement, a loose coalition of activists that emerged in 2011, during the recession that followed the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

The central tactic of Occupy protesters was to physically occupy public spaces. This was meant to symbolically 'reclaim' public goods from institutions that were considered to exclude the majority of people (the so-called '99%') from the resources of society. Those institutions included banks, governments, and – in this case – a public university system that was seen to have become increasingly corporatised.

California’s decision to reduce public spending on education, and the university’s ensuing move to raise tuition fees, were consequences of the Global Financial Crisis, which had battered the state budget. The financial crisis was largely caused by the unethical and risky behaviour of private investment banks. From the view of the student protesters at UC Davis, however, the cost of the crisis was put on the backs of all those who would be excluded from public education by its increasingly unaffordable price.

Erecting tents on campus grounds and sleeping there overnight was a technical violation of UC Davis by-laws concerning health, safety, and security. On the 18th of November, the university’s Chancellor, Linda Katehi, ordered campus police to clear the tents and thus reclaim authority over the quadrangle. That afternoon, the tents were cleared, and a number of protesters were detained by police. Remaining protesters refused repeated orders to disperse, sitting arm-in-arm on the ground; they were advised that further refusal would be met with force. Police then used pepper spray against the largely passive students, seeking to subdue them before physically breaking their protest line.

The actions of the police were filmed by a multitude of students using smartphones, as well as by a number of journalists in attendance. The resulting footage was uploaded to YouTube and dispersed widely. The representation of the pepper spraying incident across a broad range of media would come to have significant repercussions that are of great interest to us in this course.



This is one of the most widely circulated and famous images made during the pepper-spray incident at UC Davis. It shows UC Davis police officer Lt. John Pike casually spraying protesters seated on the ground.

## Timeline of the Pepper-Spray-Cop incident

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This is a timeline of key events in the pepper-spray incident. Use this as a reference to help situate key moments within their broader context.

#### 2008

15 September

* Amid the collapse of the US mortgage market, investment bank Lehman Brothers declares bankruptcy, precipitating a global financial crisis. A long recession ensues.

#### 2009

19 November

* In response to declining state funding, the [University of California Board of Regents approves a 32% tuition fee increase](https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/20/education/20tuition.html). Students begin protesting on UC campuses.

#### 2011

17 September

* The Occupy Wall Street movement emerges in a protest held at Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan.

9 November

* Occupy protests are staged at UC Berkeley. [Police immediately use force to take down the tents, employing batons against protesters](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSat-nRefXY).

17 November

* Protesters plant tents and occupy the quadrangle at UC Davis.

18 November

* Morning – UC Davis Chancellor Linda Katehi orders the protesters to remove their tents by 3:00pm. They refuse.
* 3:30pm – UC Davis police assemble on the quad and begin to remove tents by force, arresting a number of protesters. Other protesters encircle police, sitting around them on the ground. They defy orders to disperse.
* 4:00pm – Police employ pepper spray against the protesters and use force to break their protest line, [as onlookers film the events using smartphones and other cameras](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=uc+davis+pepper+spray). Ten arrests are made. Eleven protesters receive medical treatment; two are hospitalised.
* 4:10pm – Police leave the quad.
* Evening – Smartphone footage of the incident that has been uploaded to YouTube circulates on [evening news bulletins](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHwhgRZMN9o) and [current affairs programs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qrx6DDgTH_w) in the United States and around the world, sparking outcry. The images are repeatedly played and [discussed](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/uc-davis-pepper-spraying-raises-questions-about-role-of-police/2011/11/20/gIQAOr8dfN_story.html?utm_term=.836ad6c56934) in news media over the following days.

19 November

* Under pressure to explain and justify the violent actions of the university’s police, Chancellor Katehi holds a press conference on campus. The event is not open to the public or to students – only invited news media are present. Students surround the building; the press conference is abandoned. Chancellor Katehi eventually leaves after nightfall, and is [filmed walking to her car while students line her route in silent protest](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmfIuKelOt4).
* UC Davis student journalists [report on the standoff around the press conference](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCJEomwVMrw); their piece contains snippets of the press conference itself.
* A photograph of UC Davis police officer Lt. John Pike pepper-spraying protesters is uploaded to Reddit. The image is striking for the nonchalance with which Pike appears to be dispensing the spray.

November 20

* Photoshopped alterations to the photograph of Pike pepper-spraying protesters are uploaded to Reddit, [and become the basis for a series of memes in which Pike is recontextualised in famous paintings and other historical events](http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/casually-pepper-spray-everything-cop).

The memes are compiled and shared across social media platforms and news publications, receiving discussion in a range of publications for approximately a month after the initial pepper-spraying incident.

* Chancellor Katehi issues a statement addressing the actions of police against student protesters. A copy of the statement can be read [here](https://boingboing.net/2011/11/21/uc-davis-chancellor-katehi-iss.html). Katehi also provides interviews with [student journalists](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxsIj4LFfa4)and [CNN](https://edition.cnn.com/videos/us/2011/11/20/nr-ucdavis-chancellor.cnn).
* The two UC Davis police officers who employed pepper spray against protesters are placed on administrative leave.

November 21

* Chancellor Katehi [attends and addresses a student protest rally](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbYUnpqaRmc&t=72s). Taking to the stage, she tells the gathered audience that she is there to apologise for the actions of the police. She claims that the police were instructed not to use force.

November 23

* The University of California [sponsors an independent investigation into police use of violence against protesters on the UC Davis campus](http://www.laweekly.com/news/bill-bratton-tapped-to-head-pepper-spray-inquiry-at-uc-davis-2389572).

#### 2012

April

* An independent report [finds that police officers had no reasonable basis to employ pepper spray and force against the student protesters at UC Davis](https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/12/us/task-force-criticizes-pepper-spraying-of-protesters-at-uc-davis.html). It also finds that Chancellor Katehi did not adequately communicate a prohibition against the use of force. A copy of the report can be read [here](http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/334867-reynoso-report.html).

July

* The University of California confirms that Lt. Pike is no longer an employee.

September

* County prosecutors [decline to file charges against Lt. Pike](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-california-pepperspray/no-charges-for-officers-in-california-pepper-spray-incident-idUSBRE88J1BV20120920), citing insufficient evidence that could prove his actions were illegal.
* The University of California [settles a class-action lawsuit taken by protestors](https://www.aclu.org/news/uc-davis-students-reach-1-million-settlement-university-over-pepper-spraying-incident) who had suffered harm during the pepper-spraying incident. Each claimant is offered $30,000 in damages in addition to legal costs.

October

Pike is [awarded approximately $38,000 damages](https://www.smh.com.au/world/all-in-a-days-work--infamous-pepperspray-cop-john-pike-gets-bigger-payout-than-victims-20131025-2w52y.html) in a [worker’s compensation claim](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-pepperspray/california-cop-who-pepper-sprayed-students-claims-psychiatric-damage-idUSBRE96R00L20130728) regarding his involvement in the pepper-spraying incident.

#### 2016

13 April

* The Sacramento Bee publishes documents that reveal how [UC Davis paid contractors more than $175,000 to influence Google search results](http://www.sacbee.com/news/local/education/article71659992.html) in an attempt to hide online references to the pepper-spraying incident; the revelations are [widely reported](http://nymag.com/selectall/2016/04/uc-davis-tried-to-hide-pepper-spray-incident.html), renewing attention to the events of November 2011.

28 April

* Chancellor Katehi is [placed on administrative leave](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/29/us/uc-davis-chancellor-accused-of-violations-is-removed-from-post.html) in the wake of revelations regarding the university’s attempt to scrub Google search results of references to the pepper-spraying incident.

The meaning of a representation is not only conceptual (what it gets us to think about), but also partly affective: a matter of the way it makes us feel. To analyse representation, then, we need to ask ourselves how it is inviting a certain affect from its audience.

In political contests like the UC Davis protests, performance is a crucial means for generating intense affect or feeling, which can be directed against a group or person. In the video below, we'll look at a particular moment of the protest in which performance and affect were used to challenge the university's power.

When we analyse representation, we have to consider the way it is meant to work on our feelings, to generate a particular affect. This is often achieved through qualities of performance. To explore these ideas in more detail, you might like to ask:

How does the students’ silent protest against Chancellor Katehi work as an act of representation meant to challenge the university’s power?

**Reputation management and institutional power**

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In this video, we look beyond the immediate events of the pepper-spray incident to analyse how UC Davis handled their longer-term aftermath. The potential damage to the institution's reputation didn't dissipate as the pepper-spray incident fell from the headlines, but persisted in the form of Google search results.

The way UC Davis sought to manage this fallout is instructive about the relative power of activist groups and large-scale institutions to influence representation in the age UC Davis's online reputation management is interesting because it moves beyond the exercise or contest of power by shaping the content or meaning of representation. To explore this in more detail, you might like to ask:

What do UC Davis’s attempts to manage its online reputation after the pepper-spray incident tell us about the power of institutions to control representation in an algorithmic culture?

of algorithmic culture.

UC Davis spent thousands to scrub pepper-spray references from Internet <https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/education/article71659992.html>

Your essay on representation is an academic research essay. This means that you need to draw on what other scholars have had to say about the ideas you are engaging with, and how your argument might relate to theirs.

#### Representation – recommended reading

Hall, S., Evans, J., & Nixon, S. (2013). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.*Sage: London.

Thwaites, T., Davis, L., & Mules, W. (2006). *Introducing cultural and media studies: a semiotic approach*. Palgrave: London.

Turner, G. (2003). *British cultural studies: An introduction*. Routledge: London.

Each of these titles sets out vital principles for analysing representation, and demonstrates how to go about it. They also include clear accounts of semiotics and of representation as a social process.

#### Case 1 – recommended reading

**Representation and the Pepper Spray Cop Meme**

Bayerl, P. S., & Stoynov, L. (2016). Revenge by photoshop: Memefying police acts in the public dialogue about injustice. *new media & society*, *18*(6), 1006-1026.

Huntington, H. E. (2016). Pepper Spray Cop and the American Dream: Using Synecdoche and Metaphor to Unlock Internet Memes’ Visual Political Rhetoric. *Communication Studies*, *67*(1), 77-93.

Peck, A. M. (2014). A laugh riot: Photoshopping as vernacular discursive practice. *International Journal of Communication*, *8*, 25. Available online: <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/2692>