

"The Third Wave" 1967 original experiment

NOTE: History is not an exact science, as experiences of the participants varied at the time, and the impacts then and memories now will vary. There were also 3 Third Wave classes going simultaneously (see below), which also accounts for why some students remember things differently than others.

Where did it happen?

Elwood P. Cubberley Senior High School, Palo Alto, California, USA. The Ron Jones classroom was room C-3, and the final rally was in room H-1. The high school was closed in 1979, and the facility is now the [Cubberley Community Center](#).

When did it happen - how long did it last?

Probably between 5 and 8 school days (either way, very quickly). While the experiment is generally described as a one-week event, there are some Third Wave students who remember it running into a second week. It is generally agreed by all involved that it began on a Monday. The school newspaper at the time said it ended on Wednesday, April 5, 1967 ([Catamount, April 21, 1967, page 3](#)), so it likely ran sometime between Monday, March 27, 1967 and Wednesday, April 5, 1967. Looking back, one student interviewed for the "Lesson Plan" documentary said it felt like 6 weeks.

What about the class overall?

Ron Jones' class was called "Contemporary World", and was a history class as part of the Social Studies Department. Subjects in Jones' class prior to The Third Wave included Russia, China and Africa (including an "Apart-Hate" classroom experiment with the students). The Third Wave was part of the study of world conditions and events that led up to WWII. After The Third Wave, the subject was the Viet Nam war through the end of the school year. All year long, Jones presented the various sides of those subjects and their issues, through a wide variety of material including visiting speakers and films. He encouraged critical analysis of the material, and independent thinking.

The teacher

Ron Jones was young (age 25), handsome, charismatic, enthusiastic, involved, energetic, innovative, very supportive of his students and those around him, and always had a smile on his face. He is still young at heart, and all of those things. This was his first full year as a teacher. Throughout the school year in this "Contemporary World" history class, he placed an emphasis on helping the students understand the different perspectives on issues, and learn to think for themselves. His website with more info is: www.ronjoneswriter.com

Tell us about the students

The students were mostly age 15, and in 10th grade ("Sophomores"). This was their first year at Cubberley Senior High School. Most came from the three nearby junior high schools, and some had been friends for years in the elementary schools before that. Cubberley had about 1,200 students in three grades (10th/11th/12th = Sophomores/Juniors/Seniors). Palo Alto was already the heart of "Silicon Valley" with Stanford University, think tanks, research institutions, aerospace facilities and early high-tech companies in the area. Most of the families were middle or upper middle class, with professional parents and students preparing to go to college. Cubberley was a school that prided itself on creativity and experimentation, and was likely one of the best high schools in the US (Palo Alto schools always rank very high in surveys). The hippie counterculture movement was still a few months away, so the students were mostly clean-cut and well behaved.

How many students were involved?

While the story is told in the context of a single class of about 30 students (Ron Jones' "homeroom" class), there were in fact 3 Third Wave classes taught at the same time by Jones (per the school newspaper - [Catamount, April 21, 1967, page 3](#)), which formed an initial group of about 90 Third Wave members. There were additional Cubberley students who regularly skipped other classes to attend Jones' classes, and still more who were recruited as new Third Wave members by the students. Some Cubberley teacher friends of Jones began to become involved. The school principal was rumored to be seen giving the salute. There was Third Wave news in the morning announcements over the Cubberley PA system, so the entire school heard it mentioned. Word of the Third Wave activities also reached the other two Palo Alto high school campuses. At the final Third Wave rally, there were up to 200 Third Wave student members in the room.

Why were the students attracted to it?

It began as a game in class, was initially fun, and school grades depended on active participation. Ron Jones was the most popular teacher in school, young, and very charismatic. The students had already been in the class with him for 6 months, they trusted him, and this was not the first experiment they had done in class. When it became "real" there was promise of a new national student movement that would do a better job running the country than the current "establishment" Democrats and Republicans who were pursuing the Viet Nam war. The boys in class were about 2 years from being subject to the military draft and being forced to fight in that war by the government (they also needed good grades to get into college where they could be deferred from military service). Peer pressure played a role, and for some students it was much more - a chance to be part of something greater than themselves, part of a group, part of a special group...

Did all students react the same?

No - as in real-world situations, some were active Third Wave members, many simply went along with it or stayed out of the way, and a few did acts of resistance. Reactions varied when it ended as well, where some said they thought it was a game all along, and others admitted to having bought into it.

What happened after the final rally?

In the next regular meeting of class after the rally, Jones and the students discussed what had happened during The Wave. They shared thoughts and experiences, and reviewed what was learned from the experiment. In the meeting of class after that, they went back to routine studies of the next subject, Viet Nam. Some students were able to make the transition readily to the new studies, while others needed more time to reflect, decompress and recover from the Third Wave experience.

Was there resistance?

Yes, there was some, conducted by a few individuals who remained secret (the secret police prevented groups from forming, as trust was difficult between students). The most visible acts by one key student are presented in the Lesson Plan documentary film.

Was the Third Wave anti-Semitic or racist?

No, the Third Wave was not anti-Semitic or racist - it did not cross that line. There were a few Jewish students who participated in the class, and most of the Third Wave students were friends who grew up together in the Palo Alto schools. At the time of the Third Wave, the President of the entire overall 10th-grade class of Cubberley was a Black student elected by the 433 Sophomores (and two of the three officers of the Senior 12-grade class were also Black). Student organizations included an International Club and the interracial "Committee for All Students." When "Black Power" did come

to Cubberley the following year, the white students were generally supportive on those issues, as documented in detail in the book "[Hassling](#)". While there was no scapegoat group, the Third Wave was, however, very critical of the "establishment" that was leading the US Government, and which was pursuing the Viet Nam war.

Where did the name "Third Wave" come from?

From surfing lore (the third wave is the largest), not from Germany. The teacher was a surfer, and Cubberley is a one-hour drive to the Santa Cruz surfing beaches.

How did the Third Wave logo look?

It varied a little within the class (students each made their own), but was generally an outline of a stylized ocean wave, with a wide bottom and curvy top (see the [Museum](#) page).

How did the Third Wave salute go?

Arm out to the side, bent 90 degrees at the elbow, with a raised cupped hand (similar to the 1981 movie, without the chest pounding)

Did the teacher have bodyguards?

Yes - students from the Third Wave class, and also from the older students in the Executers Car Club who were in Jones' "Government" class of Seniors (12th grade). They added to the authenticity of the experience, served to protect Jones in case of an incident (there were rumors of threats), and helped in enforcement of the rules.

What happened to the teacher?

Two years later, when his teaching contract came up for renewal, Ron Jones was denied tenure by the school district and not allowed to continue teaching at Cubberley. This was well documented in the book "[Hassling](#)", and in the [Cubberley Catamount](#) school newspapers. The Wave experiment itself was probably not a major factor in this decision. A few years later he began a 30-year teaching career at the [Janet Pomeroy Center](#) in San Francisco. His many other accomplishments and activities can be found [on his website](#).