



Written by [Beverly K. Eakman](#) on March 29, 2011

D.C. Resident Complains About Nonstop, Noisy Protests

Take the March 27 [commentary in the *Washington Post*](#) by District of Columbia resident Masako Iwamoto, who asked right up front whether a worker's right to protest trumped residents' rights to peace and quiet. Iwamoto, declining to comment on the merits of the protest, wrote an exceptionally reasoned piece focusing only on the noise that, since February, had disturbed her sleep and that of fellow residents, made their illnesses insufferable, and rendered it impossible to follow a radio or television program even with the windows closed. The racket usually extended from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily — a full 12 hours, she noted.



Apparently, workers had a beef with their employers at a hotel on 15th Street Northwest, in the same block as the *Washington Post*, which printed Iwamoto's piece, and they were trying their hardest to rally support for their cause.

"If it were just the chanting and shouting of a typical protest, that would be bad enough. But these picketers use drums and microphones to make themselves impossible to ignore.... There is no escape," explained Iwamoto.

Suddenly, the relatively peaceful existence Iwamoto had found in Washington, D.C., as opposed to New York City, had become a nightmare; the mere thought of returning home touched off extreme tension, giving her headaches.

Finally, she walked several blocks to confront the organizer (or at least the lackey of the moment) to ask that the noise be toned down and to explain how the protesters were making life miserable for people who had nothing to do with the hotel workers' complaints.

The response? The organizer told her the workers had a *right* to protest and declared that if residents such as Iwamoto were unhappy, they should call the hotel management and demand that they better improve the workers' conditions. At that point, Iwamoto asked the organizer how she would feel if the noise was in front of *her* house? The organizer laughingly replied that it wouldn't happen because she lived in "a residential area."

What is interesting about this exchange is that Iwamoto clearly didn't understand this struggle between peaceful individuals and the tried-and-true Marxist agitation techniques that started long before in the Leninist-Stalinist world of Eastern Europe. They were perfected in the United States during the volatile 1960s, when well-paid agitators such as Herbert Marcuse, among others, imported them, to the glee of naïve college-age students having nothing better to do on their parents' dime. Back then, most of these young people didn't know much about the topics of their protests, or even particularly care, as long as their friends attended. It was an event staged to "be seen" and, sometimes, even to play grown-up, under the illusion one was making a difference.



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In his brilliantly researched book, *Young Stalin*, Simon Sebag Montefiore recounts how a then-youthful Josef Stalin, around 1917, helped perfect these techniques when he switched from bank robbery to revolution in Tiflis and Georgia to make himself noticeable to his hero, Vladimir Lenin. He succeeded. “Lenin decided that Stalin was ‘exactly the kind of person I need’,” writes Montefiore.

The rest is history. Gangster-style killings of innocents, misery imposed on residents more concerned with living ordinary lives than politics (not to mention revolution): It was all “collateral damage.” Except it wasn’t called that then.

But by the time such manipulations reached the United States, they had morphed. Provocateurs of the 1960s and '70s, such as Bill Ayers, Bernadine Dohrn, Emily Harris, and firebrands such as Bill Clinton (who helped organize protests against the Vietnam War while still at Oxford), continued the tradition. Additional sophistication made the actual conspirators harder to locate because by then they were using not only Vietnam, but the civil rights movement as an excuse to generate mayhem that resulted in riots, massive property damage, and citizen deaths. Barack Obama, a self-admitted “community organizer,” who was friendly with Bill Ayers and may even have considered him a mentor, emanates from that mold.

Thus, in the interest of free and open expression, the writer of the opinion piece, Masako Iwamoto, took pains to mention that it was no particular turnoff that the apartment complex was routinely treated to the chants and shouts of protests that had become endemic to the democratic process. Except, in America, that should never have happened.

The question of whether the right to protest trumps the right of residents unconnected with a demonstration to live in peace begs the question. The Constitution provides for the right of the people “to peaceably assemble.” It does not specify the right of the malcontents to raise hell 12 hours a day, maim citizens, damage property, or make the streets impassable. That’s pretty much why today we have inner cities that are barely tolerable, save to the extremely wealthy — and, even then, many of them choose to live elsewhere. It is not a question of “the underclasses having taken over,” as many imply. There have been laws on the books that make it a crime to create a public disturbance, but they are not invoked. As a result, everyone who can afford to do so moves away from areas awash in riots and public nuisances.

Having ignored such laws for so long, it is difficult now to control crime in *any* form, because even the police do not want to go to these areas and do battle. Court dockets continue to swell until the inner cities look like, and are run like, war zones. Even the designations assigned to subdivisions within the District of Columbia (and other American cities, for that matter) are, in a sense, ironic: Ward 5, Ward 7, Ward 8. What is meant by “Ward”? A ward of the State?

The Founders and subsequently state legislators, in articulating a simple phrase about public disturbances, revealed their genius. But, like so many simple answers to important questions, such as the right of dissent, prohibitions against such behavior were ignored. Today, terms that probably seemed obvious years ago are defined using hundreds of pages of legal argle-bargle. And dignified, thoughtful individuals such as D.C. resident Masako Iwamoto pay the price.

Beverly K. Eakman began her career as a teacher in 1968. She served as a scientific writer for a NASA contractor, went on to serve as speechwriter for the Voice of America and for the late chairman of the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution. She became an editor-writer for the



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