

November 1, 2006

An Activist, Then a Journalist, and Now a Victim of the Violence He Covered

By [COLIN MOYNIHAN](#)

When Bradley Will traveled to a state in southern Mexico last month, his goal was to document and describe the turbulence in the region, where striking teachers and their allies demanding the resignation of the state's governor have clashed at times with armed attackers.

The conflict had received scant attention in much of the news media, but it was exactly the kind of situation that Mr. Will relished witnessing and writing about. He often traveled from New York City to Latin America to chronicle little-known disputes, and his articles made him a familiar figure in the world of the alternative media.

On Friday, Mr. Will, 36, was fatally shot in the chest while videotaping near a barricaded road at the edge of the city of Oaxaca, the capital of the state with the same name, during a confrontation between demonstrators equipped with Molotov cocktails and fireworks and a group of men armed with pistols and rifles. Witnesses have said that Mr. Will was hit by bullets fired toward the demonstrators.

Five people have been detained in connection with the shooting, including two local officials and two police officers. State officials are running the investigation, and a spokesman for President Vicente Fox said that the federal government could take over the inquiry if state authorities did not do an adequate job. Human rights groups and a New York-based organization that advocates on behalf of journalists have called for the federal government to take over the investigation immediately.

"The story of the situation in Oaxaca was not getting out," said Beka Economopoulos, a friend who lives in New York and works for an environmental group. "Brad died trying to get the story of what was happening in Oaxaca out to the world."

Although Mr. Will grew up in Illinois and lived for years on the Lower East Side, he traveled from coast to coast to attend protests on a variety of issues, sometimes getting to far-flung spots by riding the rails in empty box cars.

Mr. Will's writings appeared in newspapers and on Web sites run by the Independent Media Center, a collective of left-leaning volunteers organized in chapters around the world, who commonly act as both participants in events and chroniclers of them. Its reporters and photographers typically include personal observations as they document issues that they have strong feelings about, like the war in

Iraq or the impact of global trade on the developing world.

Mr. Will had a long history of advocating for environmental causes and attending political demonstrations in the United States. In his travels to Latin America, Mr. Will, at times, found himself in perilous settings. In a 2005 article about squatters in Brazil, he described being shot at by the authorities and detained. Friends said that Mr. Will was haunted by violence he witnessed there.

“He was really affected by that,” said Seth Tobocman, an artist in New York who discussed the experience with Mr. Will. “He started out as an activist and became a journalist so he could tell people about what he saw.”

In his last written dispatch, which was posted on Oct. 16 on a Web site maintained by the New York City chapter of the Independent Media Center, Mr. Will described the killing of a man in Oaxaca and said that some people in Oaxaca blamed the death on paramilitary vigilantes.

The images filmed by Mr. Will minutes before his death, which are on the Independent Media Center’s Web site, show a chaotic scene, in which men used slingshots to shoot projectiles and gunshots can be heard. At one point, Mr. Will appears to videotape from beneath a truck, aiming his lens at a man firing a pistol. Minutes later, during the final images of the video, a cry is heard and the camera appears to fall to the ground.

Mr. Will’s funeral was held Saturday in Oaxaca. A priest splashed holy water onto his coffin and a woman bent down to kiss its side. Mr. Will’s mother and father, along with two sisters and a brother, issued a statement mourning Mr. Will’s death.

“We are grieving over the tragic and senseless loss of Brad’s life,” it read in part. “We believe he died doing what he loved.”

Elisabeth Malkin in Mexico City and Carolyn Wilder in New York contributed reporting.

[Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)