

40th Anniversary: The 1968 SF State Strike

The SF State student strike of 1968 was a revolutionary student protest aimed at the power structure of the school, and also the longest strike in the history of higher education till this day. San Francisco State College student population in 1967-1968 was 76% White, 5-5.1% Black, 2-2.2% Mexican American, .5% American Indian, 7.6% Asian American, and .9-1% Filipino. Racist newspaper slander and police intimidation against students of color grew through the 1960s due to an increase of radical student led organizing. Black students formed the BSU at State in 1966 (the first in the country as well!), which was quickly followed by the radical students of color organizers launching the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) as well the presence of Student for a Democratic Society (SDS).

The TWLF, starting in May 1968, led militant mass actions and protest against the administration's racist systems. The police would often violently break up the crowds of student activists. The organizing on campus won a victory when on September 10th, 1968 the English Department hired George Murray, the Minister of education for the Black Panther Party. On October 30th, 1968 the BSU called a press conference and presented nine demands dealing with establishing an autonomous Black Studies Department, changing college admission policies; and revisions in financial aid policy. The day after the conference George Murray would be suspended and the struggle at State deepened.

On November 5th 1968, the TWLF held a meeting of over 500 students with Stokely Carmichael who called for a revolutionary strike. The next day, November 6th, the strike began with thousands of students, white and of color, marching through and around the school demanding an end to the racist nature of the educational system and to end to the war. 80% of students were not attending class in this 5 month long strike. After the winter break the campus was reopened on January 6th, 1969 – with the SF State American Federation of teachers (AFT) local joining the strike. Many of the leaders of the strike were influenced by the Black Panthers' 5th point of their 10 point program, "*We Want Education For Our People That Exposes The True Nature Of This Decadent American Society.*" Over 700 strikers were arrested through out the course of the strike, who Governor of California Ronald Reagan described as "either on parole or have records for previous arrests for prior activities of a similar nature."*

On March 20th 1969, the TWLF signed a resolution granting some of their fifteen demands including the first and only College of Ethnic Studies and strengthened the departments who served working class students such as the Educational Opportunity Program. This strike inspired other students to organize and strike at San Francisco City College and UC Berkeley in 1969.

Now looking at SF State today 40 years after the strike, tuition is going up keeping working class students down, Ethnic Studies is neglected and underfunded, and the educational system fought for in 1960s, that was supposed to address the root causes of poverty and racism, has not been realized. Now is the time for our generation to *start organizing* against this same system that is destroying our education, neglecting our communities, & imprisoning & recruiting youth for bloody wars in the middle-east.

"The education third world people need is one that sees the dignity and the worth and pride of the people from which they come . . . enabling us in turn to go back to our communities and increase and develop the level of consciousness of our people and why they live in poverty and why racism is continuing and is the mainstay of keeping third world people poor not just in this country but around the world." – Anonymous SF State student leader, 1968**

"Strike to win, strike only when success is certain. If not do not strike at all."

-- Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap (Vietnam)

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