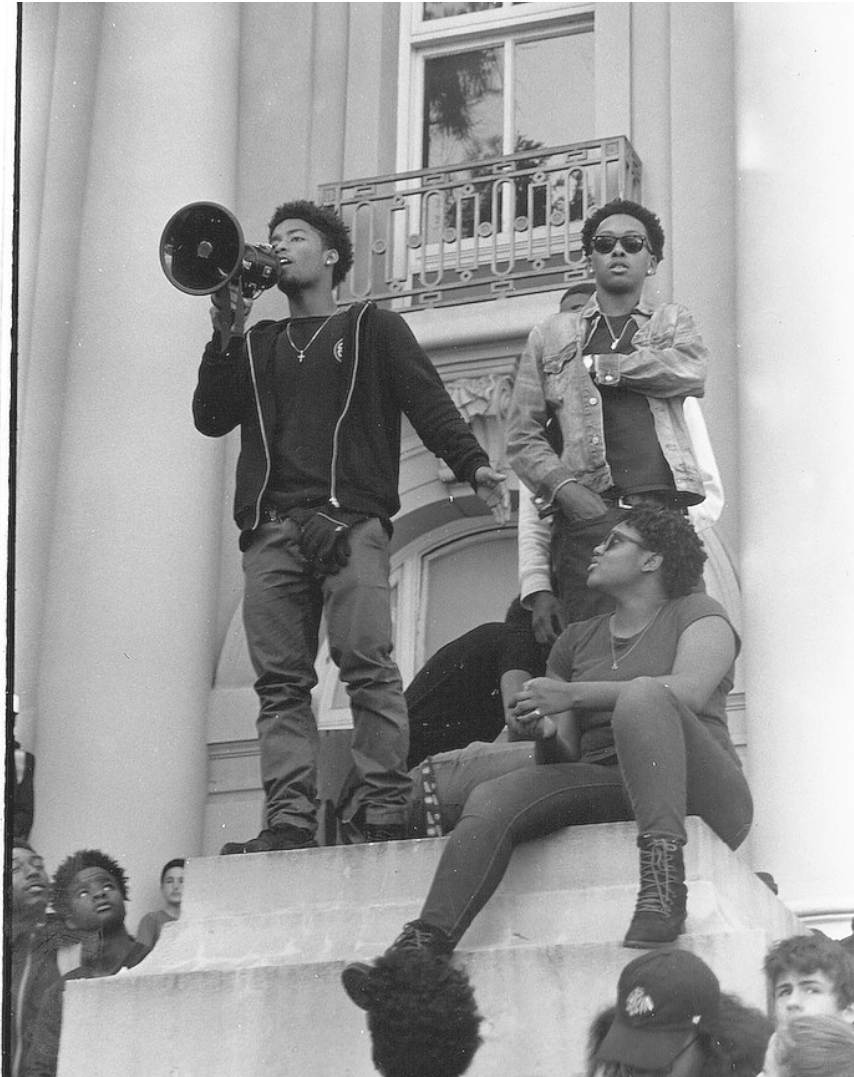


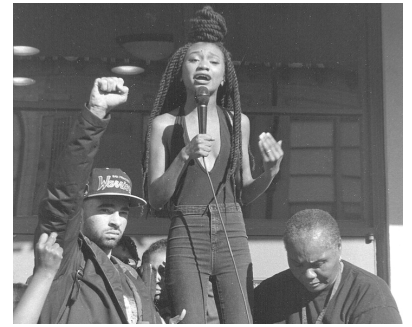
# Lessons from Berkeley High School Walkout



## WHAT CAUSED IT?

On Thursday, November 5th thousands of Berkeley High School students walked out of class and effectively shutdown the BHS campus. What provoked this inspiring action on the part of bay area youth was a racist, anti-black message left on a library computer the day before. While the racist message was discovered around noon on Wednesday, November 4th, the administration of BHS did not notify the community until around 10pm that evening.

Students and teachers were correctly frustrated with the lack of communication by the administration. In the context of anti-black attacks by police and vigilantes across the country, as well as the ongoing phenomenon of school shootings in the US, a violent anti-black message that included verbs like "lynch" and nouns like "nigger" should never be seen as merely language. These words carry powerful meaning that can easily become actions if people do not rise up to stop them in their tracks.



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**Advance the Struggle**

We are a communist collective operating in the Bay Area. We seek to organize with workers, students, and community members to challenge capitalist domination of our workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, and our everyday lives. For more info, please see our blog.

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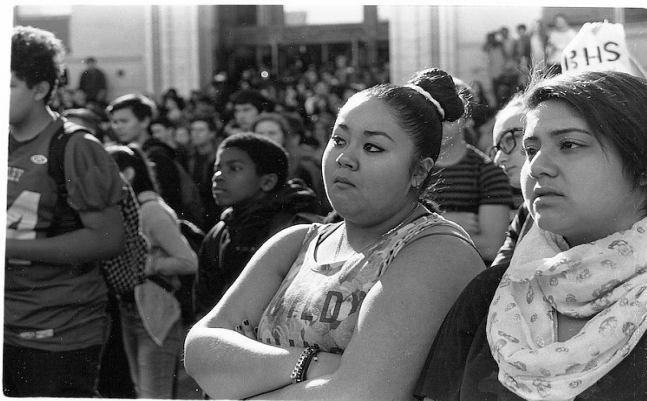
## WHAT WENT DOWN?

And BHS students did just that. Instead of relying on the administration to handle things properly, students communicated among themselves on Wednesday evening and Thursday morning, laying the groundwork for a powerful direct action on a moment's notice. At the end of 1st period, students went from classroom to classroom announcing the walkout and rally in the courtyard. Once 2nd period hit, hundreds of students gathered on the steps of the theatre waiting for next steps. A speaker yelled out at the crowd, "let all your friends know that they should join us immediately," and students began circling around one another, cell phones in hand, texting their friends to come out.

Staff members in solidarity with the students, especially black security officers, supported the rally by providing a sound system. Students effectively facilitated a speak out that allowed for complaints against the administration, calls for ongoing action, and critiques of the racist school structure of BHS to be heard by all who gathered. And many gathered - after a few minutes of rallying there were over 1000 students in the courtyard listening to the speakers.

Students from all genders, racial identities and class backgrounds were present at the rally. The black students, some from BSU and some independent black students, facilitated an effective speakout. They prioritized black voices, and the voices of students of color generally, but they also made it clear that all were welcome. This was a powerful way of demonstrating multiracial solidarity while never losing site of the importance of black power as a central dynamic in the action.

Black students then lead a militant walkout that blocked the streets and took over intersection as they lead over 2000 students toward UC Berkeley. Once they got to the Cal campus, they rallied again and provided space for more speakers to share their stories, experiences, and perspectives on how to grow the movement.



## WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

First and foremost, students shutdown the campus that day. Similar to when workers go on strike, shutting down the workplace, students have the power to make business-as-usual stop at schools. When the students strike, it forces all the school workers to take a stand: either follow the lead of the students and participate in the action, or expose yourself as being against what they're calling for.

But students didn't just shutdown the campus and go home. Instead, they created a new space - an open assembly - where all students and school workers had the opportunity to interact with one another and speak out about the issues of the day. This open, democratic and inclusive space was a beautiful example of the type of participatory culture that can be built when students and workers take direct action at their schools and workplaces.

All of this represents the potential that students and school workers have to not only shutdown the school system but to take it over and run it ourselves. Administrations are increasingly focused on managing budgets rather than supporting learning, so it's the responsibility of students and school workers to begin thinking about how we can fight for student and worker control of schools, and the action that black students lead at BHS point the way toward this revolutionary direction.

Lastly, the march off-campus was a reminder that schools don't exist in a vacuum. Our schools are one part of a broader political, economic and social system that includes public transportation, hospitals, grocery stores and other workplaces and educational centers. When students take action they open up the possibility of igniting the political dreams and energies of other working class people to take action as well.

Imagine: what if students had simply marched over 1000 people into the downtown Berkeley BART station and shared their story with the BART workers, building solidarity with them and asking them for their support. This would have instantly shutdown the BART station simply due to the number of students present, and it would have taken the power of the high school walkout and directed it toward a key part of the economy - public transportation. These types of connections between the education sector and other sectors of the capitalist economy are the type of links we should focus on building in order to expand our movements.

All BHS students who participated, and the black students who lead the action in particular, have inspired people across the country. Now is the time to think about how to build off of this political energy in order to expand the movement for black lives, as well as build the power of students and workers to challenge capitalism as a whole.