



1 Social Action—An Overview

- A Social Action’s Role in the American Experiment in Democracy
- B US College Social Action
- C Benefits of Social Action for Students, Campus, and Society
- D The Vision: Bringing Social Action into the Classroom
- E Overcoming the Challenges of Teaching Social Action

A Social Action’s Role in the American Experiment in Democracy

Social action occurs when everyday people band together to develop their power in order to change policy, and it has been a part of the American experiment in democracy throughout our history.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the enslaved banded together and participated in both non-violent (e.g., work slow-downs) and violent actions (e.g., armed revolts). In the 1800s, Native Americans, such as Tecumseh, rallied thousands from various tribes to join together to resist the US policy of taking land, and Wovoka’s ghost dance inspired many Western Native American tribes to take public action by dancing so as to be reunited with the spirits of the dead, and together, they would repel the US from their homelands.

In the late 1800s, the settlement house workers—who were composed mostly of privileged white female college graduates—moved into poor and working-class communities with the goal of developing policy solutions alongside the poor themselves. In addition, Jacob Coxey helped organize in 1894 a “petition in boots” that marched 5,000 men across the country to Washington DC to request that the federal government create a public works program to deal with mass unemployment. The suffragettes also used social action and, over a 70-year period, successfully obtained the right to vote, while the working class used social action during this same period to win basic labor protections such as the 40-hour work week, decent pay, and the right to organize. In the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans used social action to end legal segregation and obtain the right to vote. Even the federal government got into the act,

and for several years, sponsored social action programs as part of its War on Poverty, before liberal and conservative mayors saw it as a threat to their power and worked to end these programs.

In the late 20th century, social action was used by everyday people who were fighting against AIDS (e.g., ACT UP), nuclear weapons (e.g., at Rocky Flats Nuclear Processing Plant), income and wealth inequality (e.g., Occupy Wall Street), for the environment (e.g., Redwood Summer), and fair trade (e.g., the World Trade Organization [WTO] and the “Battle of Seattle”). More recently, both the National Rifle Association (NRA) and the Parkland students have used social action, as well as Black Lives Matter. And while I am an advocate of non-violence, and I teach my students to hold that perspective as well, social action practitioners in the United States have used both non-violent and violent means, as can be seen from the above historical overview.

B US College Social Action

From the very founding of universities in the United States, social action has also been a part of American academia. By examining the historical record, what becomes clear is that the issues of college students are both inter-generational and trans-generational. And while it is not possible to discuss and explore every social action that has taken place on college campuses in the past several hundred years, I do want to provide some of the highlights of these actions to demonstrate that they have occurred in every generation in the US, and to give an understanding of the issues that students have cared about since before the founding of this nation. And while this book is designed for teachers who will be using social action in their classrooms, this section might be shared with students, as it is inspirational to know that US students have been involved in social action for the past 300 years to bring about a more just society.

In the 17th and 18th century, college students—which were composed mostly of privileged white male youths—led “student rebellions” against the strict campus rules that were based *in loco parentis* (i.e., in the place of a parent). These rules, which restricted such activities as drinking, card playing, and dating “lewd” women, as well as required attendance at prayer services, would be something that college students collectively resisted over the next 200 years. Right before the American revolution, students at Harvard College led the “Great Butter Rebellion” of 1766, when Asa Dunbar, the grandfather of Henry David Thoreau,

jumped on to his chair in the dining hall and yelled, “Behold, our butter stinketh! Give us, therefore, butter that stinketh not”. Half of the student body jumped to their feet, and defiantly went out to the yard in protest. The Harvard administration’s response was to suspend half of the student body. At the time of the American Revolution, college students were also involved in political activities, like boycotting British goods and the burning of the British flag.¹

In the 19th century, campus demonstrations grew, as students continued to push back against the strict campus rules, but expanded their protests to include their lack of control over the curriculum and poor teaching. In 1800, Harvard, Brown, and William and Mary experienced student riots over these issues. At Princeton, six student rebellions occurred between 1800 and 1830. These student rebellions included taking over administration buildings and smashing bricks against doors, windows, and walls. At the University of North Carolina, students protested against the outdated curriculum by horsewhipping the president, and stoning two professors, while at Yale, the students bombed a residence hall. Most of these social actions were unsuccessful at changing the campus rules, as administrators responded by making the regulations even stricter and expelling the students involved, as well as forwarding their names to other colleges in order to blacklist them. Furthermore, college presidents and faculty began promoting Greek organizations in order to contain the students’ social action and redirect their energy which “captured and preserved the spirit of the revolts” but did so in a less threatening fashion.²

Despite these efforts, students remained active, as can be seen in the work of the abolitionists, who had a visible presence on college campuses leading up to the Civil War, as well as the College Equal Suffrage League, a student group formed in 1900 to promote the right to vote for women. In the early 20th century, Black students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and at colleges in the North began rebelling against campus rules and

¹ Jeffrey J. Phaneuf, “Behold, Cold Breakfast Stinketh!: The Historical Lineage of the Fight Against Dining Hall Despotism”, *The Harvard Crimson*, December 16, 2009, www.thecrimson.com/article/2009/12/16/students-breakfast-harvard-dining (accessed February 19, 2021); Genevieve Carlton, “Student Activism in College: A History of Campus Protests”, *Best Colleges*, May 18, 2020, www.bestcolleges.com/blog/history-student-activism-in-college (accessed February 19, 2021).

² Cassie Barnhardt and Kimberly Reyes, “Student Activism and Social Change on Campus Before the 1960s”, *Higher Education Today*, March 2, 2016, www.higheredtoday.org/2016/03/02/student-activism-and-social-change-on-campus-before-the-1960s/ (accessed February 21, 2021); Christopher J. Broadhurst, “Campus Activism in the 21st Century: A Historical Framing”, in *Radical Academia?: Understanding the Climates for Campus Activists*, Christopher J. Broadhurst and Georgianna Martin, Eds. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2014), 3–15.

the college curricula. Enrollment at HBCU's had increased by 80% between 1914 and 1925, and more Blacks enrolled in college between 1926 and 1936 than in the previous 300 years. This was at the same time as the Harlem Renaissance, where a whole cadre of intellectuals, writers, and artists began to rethink and reassess Black American life and their contributions to American society. W.E.B. DuBois, a graduate of Fisk University, told the students to resist the white benefactors of the HBCUs, who provided financial support to train servants and provide docile cheap labor. Encouraged by DuBois, students demanded that the curriculum be changed to reflect better the principles and values of the Black community. In addition, HCBU students demanded that Black presidents be installed at their colleges. In 1923, students met at Howard University and formed the American Federation of Negro Students, with the goal of changing Black higher education from the bottom up. The Black students demanded the right to have a student government, a student newspaper, decent food and housing, and the right for male and female students to talk to each other. In what has become known as the New Negro Campus Movement, the Black students led a series of rallies, strikes, and class walkouts.³

Another wave of social action occurred during the Great Depression. In April 1932, a major event took place at Columbia University, when thousands of students took part in a class strike in response to the expulsion of Reed Harris, the student editor of the college newspaper, the *Columbia Spectator*. Harris had a history of writing about provocative topics, such as anti-Semitism at Columbia and questioning whether the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) should be part of the university. When Harris wrote an editorial asking for an investigation into Columbia's dining halls, which he felt were more interested in turning a profit than in serving the students decent food, the administration stepped in, as Harris was seen as threatening the image of the college. A day after Harris' expulsion, Dean Herbert Hawkes wrote the following statement, which appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*: "Materials published in *The Columbia Spectator* during the past few days is a climax to a long series of discourtesies, innuendoes and misrepresentations which have appeared in this paper during the current academic year, and calls for disciplinary actions". In response, 60 students from Columbia's chapter of the League for Industrial Democracy (LID)—a

³ Barnhardt and Reyes, "Student Activism and Social Change on Campus Before the 1960s"; Bill Mullen, "Black Campuses in Revolt", *International Socialist Review*, iss. 85, <https://isreview.org/issue/85/black-campuses-revolt> (accessed February 20, 2021); Rachel Cavanaugh, "30 Famous Protests", *Stacker*, June 13, 2019, <https://stacker.com/stories/3177/30-famous-student-protests> (accessed February 20, 2021).

democratic socialist student group that had its roots in the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, a previous student organization that changed its name after the Red Scare that followed the 1917 Russian revolution—released this statement: “We believe that the expulsion of Reed Harris from Columbia because of items contained in *The Spectator* is a clear violation of the principles of academic freedom. We therefore protest against this misuse by the college authorities of their disciplinary powers”. The following day, 4,000 students went on strike; instead of attending class, students held a rally outside the library in support of Harris, with professors lecturing to almost empty classrooms. With 75% of the student body participating in the strike, the administration reversed course and reinstated Harris at Columbia. Not surprisingly, other college students took notice of the success of Columbia’s social action campaign, which led to students at other campuses in the early 1930s using this tactic of a “class strike”. The students went on to create the American Youth Congress, a student-led organization that lobbied for congressional legislation against racial discrimination and war.⁴ The Red Scare continued to impact higher education. In early 1934, UCLA Provost Ernest Moore declared that his campus was “one of the worst hotbeds of communism in the US”. Provost Moore responded by suspending several UCLA students, including the student president, for alleged connections to communism. Provost Moore’s unilateral action, which was without approval from other university committees, enraged the students and the next day more than 3,000 students jammed into the campus quad to protest the suspension. Things became heated, and a police officer was pushed into the bushes, but no arrests were made. The students continued to take social action to repeal the student suspensions, and two months later, UCLA President Robert Sproul overturned the suspensions.⁵

During the 1960s, several waves of social action took place. On February 1, 1960, four Black freshman students—Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond—from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NC A&T) walked into the local Woolworth’s and sat down at the “whites-only” lunch counter asking to be served. The previous semester, the NC A&T students had been participating in NAACP student

⁴ Mark Edelman Boren, *Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject*, (New York: Routledge, 2019); Hal Draper, “The Student Movement of the Thirties: A Political History”, *Center for Socialist History*, 1965, www.csh.gn.apc.org/Archives/Students%20in%20the%2030s/main/StudentInThe30s.html (accessed February 20, 2021).

⁵ “Activism through the Years”, *Daily Bruin*, February 22, 1996, <https://dailybruin.com/1996/02/22/activism-through-the-years> (accessed February 22, 2021).

chapter meetings with students from Bennett College, a HBCU all-women's school across the street, and it was there that these young men and women came up with a plan to challenge directly the segregation laws. Inspired to take action by the murder of Emmett Till—a 14-year-old who had been killed for allegedly whistling at a white woman while visiting his family in Mississippi—and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the students decided that the NC A&T students would go to the local Woolworth's store in Greensboro and asked to be served, while the Bennett College students would serve as spotters. Dr. Linda Brown, one of the Bennett students, said later, "We were not stupid about what we were doing. Young, yes, and probably not as scared as we should have been". There had been lunch counter protests before in the 1940s and 1950s in the South, Midwest, and East Coast, but they had not gathered national attention. The students decided to change this by alerting the news media about their social action in order to get more publicity, and the TV cameras were there to capture the students' sit-in. After the Black students were denied service by the white Woolworth's staff, the students remained seated. The police were called, but since the students were quietly sitting there and not disturbing anyone, the police did not arrest them on this day, so the students just sat at the lunch counter until the store closed. The following day, the Bennett students joined the sit-ins, and within a week, 1,400 students had participated in the lunch counter protests. With television beaming out the story, news spread quickly, with students in other North Carolina cities, such as Charlotte, Durham, and Winston-Salem, participating.

Over the next several months, Black college students were sitting-in at lunch counters in 55 cities and 13 states with 3,000 arrests. Back in Greensboro, over 250 Bennett students were arrested over several months. Dr. Willa Beatrice Player, the President of Bennett College, was under pressure from white community leaders to stop the students from participating in the sit-ins. President Player, who was the first African American woman to become president of a liberal arts college, refused to stop the students saying that she supported their claim to equal rights under the Constitution. President Player even went to the jail and provided the Bennett students with their homework, and collected it when it was done. On July 25, six months since the students first took action, Woolworth's agreed with the students' demand, and desegregated their lunch counters nationally. The sit-ins inspired the students to create the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which would go on to help lead the 1961 Freedom Rides, which challenged the segregation laws by whites and Blacks sitting

together in the front of buses and by entering bus terminal “all-white sections”, as well as the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer, which brought together over 700 mostly white college students to go to Mississippi to support the effort to register Blacks to vote. At that time, only 7% of Mississippi’s African Americans were registered in comparison to 70% of the whites.⁶ In the 1960s, another student social action took place, but this time on the West Coast at the University of California at Berkeley. In the early 1960s, students’ free speech was restricted on college campuses, with students not being able to speak openly about politics. Even though *in loco parentis* had been ruled unconstitutional in 1961 when the Supreme Court ruled that Alabama State College could not use *in loco parentis* to expel six Black students who had participated in civil rights demonstrations, universities still tried to control the students. At the University of California, and many other colleges, this took the form of limiting the students’ political expression and free speech as students were not allowed to advocate for such things as the civil rights movement on campus. White students connected this suppression of free speech to the oppression they had seen and learned about from the civil rights work they were doing. Mario Savio, a UC Berkeley student leader, put it this way:

Last summer I went to Mississippi to join the struggle there for civil rights. This fall I am engaged in another phase of the same struggle, this time in Berkeley. In Mississippi, an autocratic and powerful minority rules, through organized violence, to suppress the vast majority. In California, the privileged minority manipulates the university bureaucracy to suppress the students’ political expression.⁷

As the semester started in 1964, a group of UC Berkeley students, many of whom had participated in the SNCC’s Freedom Rides and Freedom Summer, began setting up tables on campus and were passing out information about the civil rights movement and asking for donations to support the movement. On September 14, 1964, the administration sent out an announcement reminding the students that these actions were illegal, and they were going to be strictly enforced. Two weeks later, Jack Weinberg, a graduate student, set up his Congress

⁶ Rodney Overton, “Bennett College Students Played Key Role in Greensboro Sit-Ins”, *CBS17.com*, February 25, 2017, www.cbs17.com/news/bennett-college-students-played-key-role-in-greensboro-sit-ins/ (accessed September 10, 2020); “Greensboro Sit-Ins”, *History.com*, February 4, 2010, www.history.com/topics/black-history/the-greensboro-sit-in (accessed, September 11, 2020).

⁷ Josh Zeitz, “Campus Protesters Aren’t Reliving the 1960s”, *Politico Magazine*, December 21, 2015, www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/12/campus-protests-1960s-213450 (accessed September 17, 2020).

of Racial Equality (CORE) table on campus. The police responded by arresting him, and putting him in a police car. In response, the students jumped in front of the police car to stop it from driving away. Over the next 32 hours, various students took turns climbing onto the roof of the car to give their thoughts about Weinberg's arrest and the inability of the students to have free speech, all the time with Weinberg in the back seat of the car. With several thousand students blocking the car, the ordeal ended when the students brokered a deal with the campus administration for Weinberg's release. However, this didn't stop the social action, as on December 1, several thousand students occupied Sproul Plaza, which led to the arrest of 800 students. Once again, the students' social action led to their demands being met, as the administration announced in January of 1965 that students from the entire political spectrum would be allowed to have open discussion and to set up tables on campus. The Free Speech Movement spread to other campuses, and set the stage for even larger student actions against the Vietnam War. Years later, the Free Speech students reflected on the importance of not giving up hope, since the same people who had shown little interest in their cause just days and weeks before the beginning of their movement all of a sudden jumped (literally) into action.⁸

A major group leading the anti-war movement was the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). SDS had its roots in the League for Industrial Democracy, the student group discussed earlier, and had developed into a major force of the new left. In addition to its anti-war work, SDS worked against having ROTC programs on campus, as well as CIA campus recruitment programs. SDS also worked to enact pass-fail grading systems, no curfews in the dorms, a student voice on faculty hiring committees, and beer sales on campus. On the other side of the political spectrum, Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), a conservative student organization, formed in the 1960s in response to the student activism of liberals, worked for a US military victory in Vietnam, as well as for a stridently anti-communist policy towards Cuba.

In 1966, Tommie Smith and John Carlos were students at San José State, recruited by the legendary track coach Bud Winters. Tommie Smith was from rural Texas and California, and

⁸ Sam Whiting, "Free Speech Movement Activists Reflect on 1960s Achievements", *SFGate*, September 20, 2014, www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/FSM-activists-reflect-on-the-movement-s-5769931.php (accessed September 14, 2020); "Unforgettable Change: 1960s: Free Speech Movement & The New American Left", *Picture This: California Perspectives on American History*, <http://picturethis.museumca.org/pictures/jack-weinberg-being-interviewed-inside-police-car-was-taking-him-away-after-his-arrest-viol> (accessed September 14, 2020).

he was studious, religious, and not initially interested in the Black protest movement. John Carlos was from Harlem, and he was talkative, loud, and was immediately drawn to the protest movement. Both would eventually become connected to Harry Edwards, a Sociology instructor, who taught a class on racism. At that time, San José State had a student population of 24,000 students, with 72 African American students on campus, 60 of whom were athletes. These students had experienced racism when they tried to find housing off-campus, while Black and white athletes were recruited differently, with white recruits being treated to large fraternity parties and dates, while Black recruits were matched with a “negro” faculty member and given \$20 for dinner. Students held a “Rally on Racism” on September 18, 1967 with hundreds of students attending; it was here that the United Black Students for Action made nine demands of the administration to end racism at SJSU, including punishment for students and landlords who discriminated against Blacks, and equal treatment of prospective athletic recruits.

It was in this intense atmosphere that Harry Edwards put forward the Olympic Project for Human Rights, which called on athletes to boycott the 1968 Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City unless the athletes’ demands for racial equality were met. And while the boycott didn’t transpire, as many athletes did not want to give up the opportunity to compete, the Black athletes did decide to protest individually, with the form of protest left up to the individual athletes. The athletes arrived in Mexico City in a frenzied atmosphere, as the Mexican military and police had just killed over 300 students who were protesting for more democracy in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas just ten days before the opening Olympic ceremonies. A few weeks later, Tommie Smith ran a world record time of 19.83 seconds to win the 200-meter race, with Peter Norman from Australia finishing second, and John Carlos finishing third. During the playing of the national anthem, while standing on the Olympic podium, Tommie and John raised their black-gloved fists, which represented power and human rights, bowed their heads to demonstrate that their action was non-violent and prayerful, and took off their shoes to represent the poverty African Americans experienced as a result of racism. In addition, John wore beads, which represented the lynching that Blacks had experienced. Both men wore the button of the Olympic Project for Human Rights. Before walking out for the podium ceremony, Peter Norman asked to wear an Olympic Project for Human Rights button, as he wanted to stand in solidarity with Tommie and John. The backlash was immediate. Smith and Carlos were suspended from the Olympic team, expelled from the

Olympic Village, and banned for life from the Olympics. When they returned to the USA, they received death threats, were denied jobs (e.g., Smith applied to be a San José police officer and was told by the police that they didn't take "traitors"), and were followed by the FBI. Peter Norman also suffered, as he was not given the opportunity to compete in the 1972 Summer Olympics, even though his qualifying times were good enough to make the team. And even though Peter is considered one of the greatest sprinters in the history of Australia, he was not even invited to take part in the festivities for the 2000 Sydney Olympics. But Tommie and John never forgot about Peter's decision to stand in solidarity with them on the Olympic podium, and when Peter died suddenly of a heart attack in 2006, they flew to Australia and carried his casket. The year before, the three men had all been together for the unveiling of the Tommie Smith and John Carlos Sculpture at San José State in front of several thousand people. Today, the 23-foot statues of Tommie and John raising their fists in the air continue to inspire students, staff, faculty, and the larger community to take a stand for social justice. Importantly, they provide "public space" for current social action activities.⁹

In the same year that Smith and Carlos raised their fists in Mexico City, the largest campus strike in US history took place at San Francisco State University (SFSU), a working-class college with a sizeable population of students of color. Before the strike started, things were already tense, as the Black Student Union were informed that their tutoring, which was part of SFSU's Experimental College alternative educational program, and which had been tutoring hundreds of kids in the Filmore and Mission Districts on math and English, as well as Black power, was going to be cut. The event that started the strike was the suspension of George Murray, an English instructor and graduate student, who was also a Central Committee member of the Black Student Union. On a trip to Cuba, Murray made some incendiary comments about US soldiers, and when Governor Ronald Reagan and the Board

⁹ David Leonard, "What Happened to the Revolt of the Black Athlete", *Color Lines*, June 10, 1998, www.colorlines.com/articles/what-happened-revolt-black-athlete (accessed October 15, 2017); Saqib Rahim, "The Agitator: Harry Edwards on the Revolt of Today's Black Athlete", *Vice Sports*, May 4, 2016, https://sports.vice.com/en_us/article/8qyqxv/harry-edwards-revolt-of-todays-black-athlete (accessed October 15, 2017); *Fists of Freedom, The Story Behind the '68 Summer Games*, Dir. George Roy, HBO Sports, 1999; Ethel Pitts Walker: "Keynote Speech at the Smith & Carlos Statue Unveiling", October 16, 2005 (PDF); Thomas Bonk, "San José Statement", *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 2005, <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/jun/26/sports/sp-statue26> (accessed October 20, 2017); Richard Gazzaniga, "The White Man in That Photo", *Griot*, October 3, 2015, <http://griotmag.com/en/white-man-in-that-photo/> (accessed February 4, 2018); Jason Ferreira, "1968: The Strike at San Francisco State", *Bay View*, December 28, 2018, <https://sfbayview.com/2018/12/1968-the-strike-at-san-francisco-state/> (accessed September 17, 2020); Karen Bates and Shereen Meraji, "The Student Strike That Changed Higher Ed Forever", *Code Switch*, March 21, 2019, www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2019/03/21/704930088/the-student-strike-that-changed-higher-ed-forever (accessed September 17, 2020).

of Trustees heard about Murray's comments, they moved to have him suspended. The Black Student Union realized that they would need allies, so the students formed the Third World Liberation Front, a student coalition that included students from the Latino student organization (LASO), a Mexican American student organization (MASC), a Filipino organization (PACE), and the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA). In addition, white students from the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) supported the strike. Hundreds of students stopped going to class and, after five months, the administration gave in to their demand for an Ethnic Studies Department, the first one in the nation. According to student leaders Julien Ball and Melanie West, this social action was different from others: "I think what made the strike so unique is the way that white students on this campus followed the leadership of Third World students".¹⁰

With the end of the war in Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement losing steam, other areas of concern came into prominence for college students, including issues of gender, the environment, and economic justice. In the midst of the second wave of feminism, a group of women students from the University of South Florida created the first "Take Back the Night" event in the United States, when they dressed up in black sheets and carried broomsticks and marched through campus against sexual assault and demanding a women resource center. The students had been inspired by women in Belgium and England, who had led protests because they did not feel safe walking down the street at night by themselves. Take Back the Night events have spread to hundreds of college campuses and beyond, and continue to this day as a way to fight against sexual violence. At one of these events at San Diego State University (SDSU), students who were participating marched by Delta Sigma Phi fraternity house, where the fraternity members yelled obscenities at the marchers and held up sex toys. In response, 20 women held a march and sit-in at the administration offices, demanding that the

¹⁰ Ferreira, "1968: The Strike at San Francisco State"; Bates and Meraji, "The Student Strike That Changed [news/2014/dec/09/student-sexual-assault-protest-led-dialogue/](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/news/2014/dec/09/student-sexual-assault-protest-led-dialogue/) (accessed September 17, 2020); Alexandra Svokos, "Student Body President Pressured to Resign after His Frat Harassed Anti-Rape Activists", *HuffPost*, December 11, 2014, www.huffpost.com/entry/sdsu-president-sigma-phi-epsilon_n_6305258 (accessed September 17, 2020); Tyler Kingkade, "SDSU Bars Delta Sigma Phi Fraternity from Campus for Waving Sex Toys at Anti-Rape Marchers", *HuffPost*, December 16, 2014, www.huffpost.com/entry/sdsu-delta-sigma-phi-fraternity_n_6334610 (accessed September 17, 2020). Higher Ed Forever".

fraternities involved be held accountable; one week later, the university responded by barring Delta Sigma Phi from campus.¹¹

Another example of students taking social action against sexual violence was when Emma Sulkowicz, a student at Columbia, could not get the university to expel the student who allegedly raped her, so she decided to carry her mattress around with her wherever she went. In 2014, dozens of other Columbia students joined Emma in carrying a mattress around campus in order to make a public statement against sexual assault, which led students at other campuses to organize similar protests under the banner of “Carry That Weight”. In total, 80 college campuses held protests against sexual violence and sexism in 2014. President Barack Obama took notice, and stated that because of this “inspiring wave of student-led activism”, he decided to create a federal task force to combat sexual assault on campuses where one in five women in college had been raped. More recently, leaked documents in mid-April 2018 at Swarthmore College showed how Phi Psi members had joked about sexual assault and a “rape attic”, as well as making homophobic and racist remarks. Outraged students responded by holding a four-day sit-in at the Phi Psi fraternity house, which forced the president to respond. On May 1, just two weeks after the leaked documents became public, the president ended all fraternities and sororities on campus. In that same year, Tufts University students were focused on another gender issue, and that was to install gender-neutral bathrooms in campus buildings. This effort was led by trans and queer students, and after a multi-year campaign, they were successful in getting the university to create gender-neutral bathrooms in the two dining halls and the campus center, with all pre-existing single-stall bathrooms being relabeled as gender-neutral.¹²

¹¹ Cavanaugh, “30 Famous Protests”; Cavanaugh, “About Take Back the Night Foundation”, *Take Back the Night*, <https://takebackthenight.org/about-us> (accessed September 17, 2020); Angela Carone, “Student Sexual Assault Protest Leads to Demands and Dialogue”, *KPBS*, December 9, 2014, www.kpbs.org/

¹² Madeleine Aitken, “40 Years of Student Activists Organize, Demand Change”, February 25, 2020, *The Tufts Daily*, <https://tuftsdaily.com/news/2020/02/25/40-years-student-activists-organize-demand-change> (accessed February 24, 2021); “20 of the Most Important College Protests and Social Movements”, *Best Degree Programs*, www.bestdegreeprograms.org/features/college-protests-social-movements (accessed February 24, 2021); Allyson Chiu, “Swarthmore Fraternities Disband after Outrage over Leaked Documents Joking about ‘Rape Attic’”, *Washington Post*, May 1, 2019, www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/04/30/close-rape-attic-swarthmore-students-occupy-fraternity-after-disturbing-documents-leak/?noredirect=on&wpisrc=nl_mix&wpm=1 (accessed February 24, 2021).

In addition to gender issues, the environment has also become a major focus of college students' social action in the past 50 years. In 1970, several college campuses held the first "Earth Day" celebrations, inspired by Senator Gaylord Nelson's call to hold "teach-ins" to educate the public on the environmental threats to the planet. Nelson thought, "If we could tap into the environmental concerns of the general public and infuse the student anti-war energy into the environmental cause, we could generate a demonstration that would force the issue onto the national political agenda". Several college campuses responded to his call. At San José State, the students came up with the idea of burying a new Ford Maverick to create a symbolic message, similar to the Boston Tea Party, that would galvanize the nation to end the production of millions of gasoline engines that were polluting the planet. As part of the first Earth Day on April 22, students held a parade, pushing the car through downtown San José, as the students walked as if in a funeral, along with three ministers and the San José State marching band playing in dirge style. Students dug a 12-foot deep pit, and with the press watching, the Ford Maverick was rolled into its "grave", symbolically marking the death of the car and its gas engine.

Other campuses participated in that first Earth Day. At the University of Colorado, students created the ECO-Center in order to prepare for the teach-in. The administration had given the students a small office with some phones, desks, and typewriters. At the conclusion of the event, Sunni Eckhardt and fellow students decided to turn their office into an "action headquarters" for students who wanted to protect the planet. Eckhardt described the ECO-Center as "an experiment in controlled anarchy... We wanted it to be a place where if a student had an idea about something to do with the ecology of the world—with anti-pollution ideas or pro-creating an endangered species protection program—the students would have a place to go and get information". Today, its name has been changed to the Environmental Center, and it has eight full-time staff, 100 part-time student workers, and even more student volunteers. Over the past 50 years, the students at the Environmental Center have created: (1) the first student-led recycling program paid for with student fees (1976); (2) the first pre-paid bus passes for all students (1991); (3) a program to purchase wind energy credits with student fees to offset some of the university's energy (2000); and (4) an initiative that supported the

development of new campus buildings with student fees if the building met national green-building standards (2004).¹³

Sometimes the students are called to be involved in social action off campus, and that is what happened in “Redwood Summer” in 1990. Redwood Summer was patterned after Mississippi Freedom Summer, where students a generation before travelled to the South to register African Americans to vote; this time, students would be called to travel to Northern California to stop the destruction of the remaining old-growth redwood forest, as 95% of it had already been logged. When Louisiana Pacific announced it would be doubling the rate of its logging of the old-growth forests, Earth First! put out a call to college students to participate in a non-violent campaign to stop the logging. That spring of 1990, Judi Bari and Earth First! activists visited college campuses, and several months later, a group of over 1,000 students, seniors, and environmental activists participated in a summer-long campaign, dressing up as owls, singing protests songs, blocking logging roads, and chaining themselves to equipment. As Chris Balz, a recent Stanford graduate put it, “I was sick of just demonstrating. I wanted to try direct action... When you feel about this the way we do, it’s not enough to say, ‘This is my big political act, holding a sign and getting spat on’. You want to stand in front of the chain saws”. And while their actions only slowed down the cutting of the old-growth forest, Redwood Summer did educate the nation about the logging of old-growth redwood forests. Eventually, after continued protests and lawsuits, the company grew tired and sold the remaining forests to California and the federal government, while court rulings ended up strengthening California laws to require stronger environmental protections.¹⁴

Back on the campus, students continued to work on environmental issues by focusing on getting universities to divest from fossil fuels, such as coal and oil. Endowments from US colleges and universities total \$600 billion, with the average investment in fossil fuels being 7.7% per school; thus, colleges are investing about \$46 billion in fossil fuels. Started by students at Swarthmore College in 2011, the college divestment movement has spread to 300

¹³ Laura Snider, “CU-Boulder Celebrates 40 Years of Student Activism in the Environmental Center”, *Daily Camera*, April 15, 2010, www.dailycamera.com/2010/04/15/cu-boulder-celebrates-40-years-of-student-activism-in-the-environmental-center/ (accessed February 22, 2021).

¹⁴ Mark A. Stein, “‘Redwood Summer’: It Was Guerrilla Warfare”, *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1990, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-09-02-mn-2050-story.html (accessed February 22, 2021).

colleges across the nation. As part of this campaign, students held a month-long sit-in in front of the president's office. Sara Blazevic, class of '15, laid out the students' demands: "We're asking for our school to sell its holdings in the top 200 coal, oil and gas companies". Upon reflection, she noted that "when our campaign started, it was sort of scrappy... It didn't have a ton of support, we didn't have a network the way that the divestment movement has a network now, and then it grew really quickly". The student divestment campaign has won over 40 victories, getting universities to divest from fossil fuels at such institutions as Georgetown, Middlebury, USC, and the University of California. The student divestment campaign continues to this day, with 500 students from Harvard and Yale recently taking over the football field during a game for 30 minutes, and at the University of Minnesota students occupying an administration building and protesting at monthly meetings of the Board of Regents. In addition, the student mentioned above, Sara Blazevic, has gone on to co-found the Sunrise Movement, a youth movement that has introduced the Green New Deal into the national conversation.¹⁵

In addition to gender and environmental issues, economic justice issues have also been at the forefront of college students' social action over the past 50 years. In the late 20th century, students began working together with janitors and other service workers on campus to help them win living wages, health and retirement benefits, and unionization. In one of the first campaigns in 1997, students and faculty at the University of Virginia demanded a wage increase for campus service workers after a report came out showing that these workers had some of the lowest wages on campus, and were mostly women and/or African American, with one-third of them qualifying for food stamps. After a three-year campaign, the students helped win an increase in the wage of campus service workers from \$6.10 to \$8 an hour. The "living wage" movement spread to 150 college campuses, with many student groups using

¹⁵ Carolyn Beeler, "Students Push College Fossil Fuel Divestment to Stigmatize Industry", *National Public Radio*, April 11, 2015, www.npr.org/2015/04/11/398757780/students-push-college-fossil-fuel-divestment-to-stigmatize-industry (accessed February 23, 2021); "Divestment", *Sierra Club*, www.sierraclub.org/Youth/divestment (accessed February 23, 2021); Matt Wirz, "Universities Cut Oil Investments as Student Activism Builds", *Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 2020, www.wsj.com/articles/universities-cut-oil-investments-as-student-activism-builds-11594719181 (accessed February 23, 2021); Nick Engelfried, "How a New Generation of Climate Activists is Reviving Fossil Fuel Divestment and Gaining Victories", *Waging Nonviolence*, March 3, 2020, <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2020/03/climate-activists-reviving-fossil-fuel-divestment/>, (accessed February 23, 2021); Jane Donohue, "Why University Students Are Uniting for Divestment This Week", *Divest Ed*, February 12, 2020, https://divested.betterfutureproject.org/oped_2020212_bostonglobe (accessed February 23, 2021).

sit-ins and building occupations. At Wesleyan University, 24 students held a sit-in at the admissions office in 2001, demanding that the university president pay a living wage, provide health and retirement benefits, and allow for unionization by the campus janitors and other service workers. Several days after the sit-in started, the president agreed with the students' demands. Students also participated in living wage campaigns at Georgetown (2006), Harvard (2002 and 2016), and Williams and Mary (2011). During the Georgetown campaign, Silvia Garcia, a Georgetown janitor stated "We are very happy that the students have decided to help us, because no one will listen to us. The university has to listen to the demands of the students". Interestingly, students where schools had won victories traveled to other campuses to explain how they did it, as when Georgetown and Harvard students travelled to the University of Miami to help the students and janitors win their successful campaign for better wages and unionization. The campaign for living wages for janitors and other campus service workers continues to this day in colleges across the country.¹⁶

A campaign that is both ideologically and practically connected to the living wage campaign is the fight against sweatshop labor. The student sweatshop labor campaigns are connected to the living wage campaigns as they are both concerned about better wages and working conditions, but now the students are focused on workers in the developing world who are making university apparel worn by the students. Students at Duke University started the campus anti-sweatshop movement in 1998, and it spread to over 225 college campus within a few years. The students named their campaign United Students Against Sweatshop (USAS), and their focus was on the \$2.5 billion collegiate licensing industry, which was led by Nike, Fruit of the Loom, Champion, and Gear. These companies pay large royalty fees to the

¹⁶ "1999–2000: The US University Living Wage Campaign", *Libcom.org*, September 13, 2006, <http://libcom.org/history/articles/us-university-living-wage-campaign-1999> (accessed February 24, 2021); "Student Living Wage Movement", *Global Nonviolent Action Database*, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/student-living-wage-movement-late-1990s-mid-2000s> (accessed February 24, 2021); Elizabeth F. Farrell, "Starving for Attention: How Hunger-Striking Students at Georgetown U. Lost 270 Pounds and Won a 'Living Wage' for Campus Workers", *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 1, 2005, www.chronicle.com/article/starving-for-attention/ (accessed October 2, 2021); Jason Albright, "Contending Rationality, Leadership, and Collective Struggle: The 2006 Justice for Janitors Campaign at the University of Miami", *Labor Studies Journal*, January 18, 2008, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0160449X07311856> (accessed February 24, 2021); David Swanson, "Hunger Striking for a Living Wage at Georgetown", *Counterpunch*, March 18, 2005, www.counterpunch.org/2005/03/18/hunger-striking-for-a-living-wage-at-georgetown/ (accessed February 24, 2021); Matt Murtagh, "Campus Workers Unionize, Get Raises", *Georgetown Voice*, September 7, 2006, <https://georgetownvoice.com/2006/09/07/campus-workers-unionize-get-raises> (accessed February 24, 2021).

colleges; for example, the University of Michigan received \$5 million and Duke received \$500,000 in 1999. In return, the companies were authorized to put the campus logo on their jackets, sweatshirts, and caps. Incredibly, the workers who made the university apparel received 7 cents an hour in Bangladesh and 29 cents an hour in Indonesia. The students had three demands: (1) to pay workers a living wage; (2) to disclose publicly the name and site of the factories; and (3) to create an independent monitoring system that excludes factory representatives and includes unannounced factory visits. To make their point, students held teach-ins and knit-ins to highlight sweatshop conditions, staged a mock factory to show the harsh working conditions, and mock fashion shows where students walked down the runway wearing school apparel while describing the horrific labor conditions under which they were made. As Snehal Shingavi, UC Berkeley graduate student and USAS member stated, “It has become clear that something has to be done, and the students on our campuses have the power to change the way the universities do business”. By 2007, 166 college campuses had agreed to the students’ demands.¹⁷

Student campaigns around economic justice have also focused on the high cost of higher education, as students participated in campaigns to block tuition increases, to enact free tuition at public universities, and to cancel student debt. Between 2006 and 2014, student debt for college doubled, from \$600 billion to \$1.2 trillion. In response, students on over 100 college campuses held the Million Student March in 2015 to protest high student debt and push for free tuition at public universities. On campuses, students from Northeastern University carried signs reading “Is This a School or a Corporation?” and “Degrees Not Receipts”, while UC Berkeley students raised placards that had the price of their student debt, which ranged from a few thousand dollars to over \$100,000. Elan Axelbank, a student from Northeastern and co-founder of the Million Student March, stated, “The student debt crisis is awful. Change starts when people demand it in the street. Not in the White House”. In the same year, about 60 UC Santa Cruz students protested against upcoming tuition hikes by blocking all entrances into the campus and held signs that read “Education is a Right, Not a

¹⁷ Steven Greenhouse, “Activism Surges at Campuses Nationwide, and Labor Is at Issue”, *New York Times*, March 29, 1999, www.nytimes.com/1999/03/29/us/activism-surges-at-campuses-nationwide-and-labor-is-at-issue.html (accessed February 25, 2021); Peter Dreir, “The Campus Anti-Sweatshop Movement”, *American Prospect*, December 19, 2001, <https://prospect.org/education/campus-anti-sweatshop-movement/> (accessed February 25, 2021); Alvin Morgan, “Groups Rally for WRC Support”, *Spartan Daily*, April 5, 2002; Mitchell Alan Parker, “SJSU Signs with Labor Rights Group”, *Spartan Daily*, January 25, 2007, vol. 128.

Privilege”. In 2019, students demanded that the University of Texas at Austin pay for tuition costs for low-income students, and within months, the university responded by creating a program to cover tuition for any student’s family making less than \$65,000. Joseph Cascino, a third-year UT Austin student stated, “This movement was fueled by the stories of students who spoke out”. Finally, during the Covid-19 pandemic, students across the nation have been demanding tuition refunds and housing support. In one set of actions, a “tuition strike” broke out in the spring of 2021 at Columbia University where 1,100 students have refused to pay the \$60,000 tuition fees for online education. In another action, thousands of students from more than 25 colleges have asked for partial refunds on tuition and campus fees arguing that online learning is far inferior to in-class education. These actions are in progress, so it is unclear how they will turn out. But as Kelly Garcia, a DePaul student who is active in trying to get the university to respond to student concerns during this pandemic, states: “Time and time again, students have proved that when they are at the forefront of confronting institutional oppression, effective change can happen”.¹⁸

As in the 1960s and before, two other main areas of student social action have been in the areas of anti-war and racism. In the 1980s, a decade after the end of the Vietnam War protests, students were once again involved in anti-war protests, but this time focusing on the Central American wars, as the US backed brutal regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala in their civil wars, and supported a counter-revolutionary force against the leftist Sandinistas in Nicaragua. As a part of this effort, students were asking their colleges not to allow the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to recruit on campuses, since they were involved in supporting some of the worst human rights abuses in Central America. One of these efforts to stop CIA recruitment led to the arrest of 51 UMass Amherst student activists in 1986. The students held signs that read “Ban the CIA” and “CIA: Covert Inhuman Atrocities” and occupied a

¹⁸ Curtis Skinner and Valerie Vande Panne, “Students across US March over Debt, Free Public College”, *Reuters*, November 12, 2015, www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-college-protests-idUSKCN0T116W20151113 (accessed February 24, 2021); Kara Guzman, “UC Santa Cruz Entrances Blocked by Student Protest”, *San José Mercury News*, March 5, 2015, www.mercurynews.com/2015/03/05/uc-santa-cruz-entrances-blocked-by-student-protest/ (accessed February 24, 2021); Natalie Venegas, “Fueled by Stories of Students Who Spoke Out”, *Texan Daily*, July 15, 2019, <https://thedailytexan.com/2019/07/15/fueled-by-stories-of-students-who-spoke-out-how-student-activists-helped-get-free> (accessed February 24, 2021); Carlton, “Student Activism in College: A History of Campus Protests”; Elliott Murtagh, “The Columbia University Tuition Strike and the Fight for Socialism”, *World Socialist Web Site*, February 11, 2021, www.wsws.org/en/articles/2021/02/11/colu-fl1.html (accessed February 24, 2021).

campus building to stop the university from allowing the CIA to recruit on campus. In the following year, all students were acquitted of their charges by a jury, when they introduced evidence showing that the CIA supported death squads, assassinations, and other illegal activities, and pointed to a Commonwealth law which exonerates anyone charged with a crime if they reasonably believe that their activities prevent a “clear and immediate threat” of greater harm.

In the 1980s, students also responded to the nuclear threat posed by the two superpowers—the USA and USSR—each possessing over 20,000 nuclear weapons. Students on over 50 campuses joined the Beyond War College Network, and educated the public, congress, and presidential candidates about the need to resolve international conflicts without using military force. Out of this work, students (including myself) started a non-military alternative to ROTC entitled the International and National Voluntary Service Training (INVST) program in 1989, which spread to three colleges, and is still active at the University of Colorado at Boulder. During the first summer, students engage in community work on the Diné (Navajo) Nation and live in a local homeless shelter to understand inequality. In addition, INVST hosts a series of academic courses focusing on community change that are tied to a service-learning experience. Students also participate in a second summer program, which has taken them to work on community projects in Kingston and San Salvador.

In the early 2000s, students were involved in such anti-war activities as trying to stop the United States from going to war with Iraq. In March of 2003, the US was gearing up to attack Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein from power for supposedly possessing weapons of mass destruction (they were never found). In response, thousands of students from 300 college campuses joined students from around the world and rallied for “Books not Bombs”. Coming just a few weeks before the invasion of Iraq, students called for a campus strike. Rather than attend class for the day, students urged others to attend campus rallies to show the US administration that they did not support the upcoming war. Manon Terrell, a Stanford student, decided to not attend three of his classes to attend a rally of 300 people, stating, “This is a personal thing for me because my friends are going to fight this war. It’s not going to be Bush

and his cronies in business suits on the front lines. They're going to take people of color and poor people".¹⁹

Over the past 50 years, college students have continued their focus on combatting racism, participating in the anti-apartheid movement, Black Lives Matter, and responses to racist incidents on their campuses. In 1976, 20,000 Soweto high school students were peacefully protesting against the apartheid's decision to have instruction in Afrikaans rather than English, and were violently crushed by the government with several hundred students killed. US college students had been involved in anti-apartheid campus organizations for the past decade by holding rallies and education sessions, but they decided to become much more aggressive in their actions. The students decided to adopt the strategy encouraged by the UN General Assembly and by national religious and civil rights organizations, and that was to push for divestment, and more specifically for college campuses to divest from investing their college endowments into corporations that did business with South Africa, with the goal of pressuring the South African government to end apartheid. US students believed they could have an effect since the main trading partner of South Africa was the United States. The students' anti-apartheid divestment movement started at Stanford in 1977, when students asked the university to vote on a resolution to divest from Ford Motor Company. After they refused, students held a sit-in protest where 294 students were arrested. This provided national attention to the students' more aggressive stance, which led to the anti-apartheid divestment campaign spreading to over 150 campuses. This nationwide student campaign led to universities divesting billions of dollars from companies doing business in South Africa, and playing a significant role in the end of legal segregation in the early 1990s. As part of this decade-long campaign, students built shantytowns in the middle of campus, held sit-ins, occupied buildings, and protested speeches by South African politicians on their campuses. In October of 1985, students held a National Student Action Day on 100 campuses, with thousands of college students participating and 141 arrests. The students' social action led to victories, first when Hampshire College decided to divest from South Africa in 1977, and

¹⁹ Benjamin Waldman, "51 Activists Arrested at UMass: Police Take Protesters to Jail", *Harvard Crimson*, November 26, 1986 www.thecrimson.com/article/1986/11/26/51-activists-arrested-at-umass-pfifty-one/ (accessed February 25, 2021); "Activism of the 1980s Photograph Collection", *UMass Amherst Libraries*, <http://findingaids.library.umass.edu/ead/muph012> (accessed February 25, 2021); Lloyd Vries, "Students Cut Class to Protest War", *CBS News*, March 10, 2003, www.cbsnews.com/news/students-cut-class-to-protest-war/U (accessed February 25, 2021).

then across the country. By 1988, 155 universities had divested. It was the largest campus social action since the student actions of Vietnam, and it would inspire the fossil fuel divestment campaign a generation later. Maria Testa, Brown class of '86, reflected on her involvement in the anti-apartheid campaign by stating, "To be taken seriously, you need to be at the table, but without the protests and the groundswell, I don't think we would have gotten to the table".²⁰

Over the past 50 years, college students have also continued their fight against racism in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The BLM movement began in 2013 as a response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who had shot and killed Travon Martin, an African American 17-year-old. When Michael Brown, an African American 18-year-old, was shot and killed a year later by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, the BLM movement would make national news for its powerful street demonstrations against police violence towards Black people, which many college students participated in. It is in this context of the BLM movement that college students pushed for a variety of changes on their campuses. For example, at Georgetown University, 50 students held a sit-in at the president's office in their successful campaign to rename two buildings which had been named after college presidents who were responsible for the sale of 272 slaves in order to pay off the debt owed by the university. At the University of Missouri, just 110 miles from Ferguson, a group of African American students came together under the name Concerned Student 1950—1950 being the year that "Mizzou" first admitted Black students—after a series of racist incidents in 2015, including the student body president, Payton Head, who is Black, being called a

²⁰ Maggie Astor, "7 Times in History When Students Turned to Activism", *New York Times*, March 5, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/03/05/us/student-protest-movements.html (accessed March 1, 2021); One Bold Idea, "How Students Helped End Apartheid", *University of California*, May 2, 2018, www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/how-students-helped-end-apartheid/ (accessed March 1, 2021); Jennifer Aldrich, "Campus Protests: A Retrospective on the Unrest During Apartheid", *Vox Magazine*, February 23, 2017, www.voxmagazine.com/news/features/campus-protests-a-retrospective-on-the-unrest-during-apartheid/article_6fbc6bcd-6e12-509b-8078-208a7827bdbc.html/ (accessed March 1, 2021); Scott Williams, "Students across Nation Rally to Protest Apartheid", *AP News*, October 12, 1985, <https://apnews.com/article/5f750d81da296e0d8ff1eec93d26ca06> (accessed March 1, 2021); "Campus Anti-Apartheid Movements Intensify after Soweto", *Divest for Humanity: The Anti-Apartheid Movement at University of Michigan*, www.browndailyherald.com/2018/06/01/oral-history-student-activism-since-1980s/ (accessed March 1, 2021); "Hampshire College Students Win Divestment from Apartheid South Africa, US, 1977", *Global Nonviolent Action Database*, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/hampshire-college-students-campaign-divestment-south-africa-us-1977> (accessed March 1, 2021); Muriel Draaisma, "US Students Protest Apartheid", *The Ubyyssey*, October 11, 1985, www.library.ubc.ca/archives/pdfs/ubyssey/UBYSSEY_1985_10_11.pdf (accessed March 1, 2021).

racial epithet by a group of young people near campus. Concerned Student 1950 asked the university to help stop racism on the campus and work towards creating a more inclusive environment, but received little response from President Tim Wolfe. The students created a list of demands, which included the resignation of President Wolfe, as well as an increase in African American faculty and staff and for students to help select future college presidents. The actions the students took included the creation of a tent city on campus, a hunger strike by one student, and a mock tour that highlighted where various racist incidents had taken place on the same day there was a campus tour for hundreds of prospective students. In addition, the Missouri football team refused to play any games until President Wolfe resigned. Two days after the football players' announcement, President Wolfe resigned.²¹

Finally, there is the story of Donald "DJ" Williams Jr., a freshman student living in the dorms at San José State University (SJSU) in 2013, where he was the only African American in the suite. Over the course of the semester, DJ's roommates displayed the Confederate flag and swastikas in the suite, locked him in his bathroom, forcefully put a bike lock around his neck, and called him three-fifths (in reference to the three-fifths compromise in the US Constitution). When news broke about what had happened to DJ, students were outraged and held an emotional rally with over 200 students and the local chapter of the NAACP. They demanded that SJSU make major changes to the campus environment and for the district attorney to charge the students with a hate crime. Both of these things occurred with mixed results. The university responded to the student protests by expelling three of the roommates and by creating a Special Task Force on Racial Discrimination, composed of students, staff, and faculty, with the task force eventually making 54 recommendations to the university. One of the key recommendations was to hire a chief diversity officer, which occurred in April of 2016, with the hiring of Dr. Kathleen Wong(Lau). Importantly, Wong(Lau) has implemented a five-hour Freshmen Diversity experience, which trains more than 5,000 students a year, and

²¹ Susan Svrluga, "What the Student Body President Did after He Was Called the N-Word—Again", *Washington Post*, September 16, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/09/16/what-the-student-body-president-did-after-he-was-called-the-n-word-again/ (accessed March 2, 2021); Katherine Shaver, "Georgetown University to Rename Two Buildings that Reflect School's Ties to Slavery", *Washington Post*, November 15, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/local/georgetown-university-to-rename-two-buildings-that-reflect-schools-ties-to-slavery/2015/11/15/e36edd32-8bb7-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b_story.html?tid=a_inl_manual (accessed March 2, 2021); Alicia Lui, "What Is Concerned Student 1950?" *Bustle*, November 9, 2015, www.bustle.com/articles/122575-what-is-concerned-student-1950-the-university-of-missouri-peaceful-protests-were-led-by-a-standout (accessed March 2, 2021); Zeitz, "Campus Protesters Aren't Reliving the 1960s"; Lui, "What Is Concerned Student 1950?"; Rick Seltzer, "Missouri 3 Years Later: Lessons Learned, Protests Still Resonate", *Inside Higher Ed*, September 12, 2018, www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/09/12/administrators-students-and-activists-take-stock-three-years-after-2015-missouri (accessed March 2, 2021).

the university recently created the African American/Black and Chicanx/Latinx Students Success Centers. However, the three roommates were not convicted of hate crimes by an all-white jury, but rather were found guilty of misdemeanor battery, and were sentenced to probation and community service. Many students at SJSU, and the African American students in particular, were outraged by this decision, and they held further protests to denounce the verdict.²²

C Benefits of Social Action for Students, Campus, and Society

The benefits of college social action are many. First, there are positive outcomes for the student. Research shows that students who participate in social action increase their critical thinking skills. In addition, students who engage in social action develop a better understanding of how systems and structures work, and learn how to solve problems and overcome challenges. By raising their voices and advocating for the needs of the community, students learn about the importance of democratic participation and develop a greater sense of social responsibility. Research also shows that social action develops the students' leadership skills. In light of the challenge raised by anti-democratic forces in the United States and other democracies, these benefits have taken on even greater importance.²³

Second, there are positive outcomes for the campus. Students engaged in social action create, along with campus leaders, a discursive space for the ideas raised by the students to be discussed and analyzed, and where multiple campus stakeholders can be exposed to the

²² Tracy Kaplan, "San José State Expels Three Charged with Hate Crime", *San José Mercury News*, May 2, 2014, www.mercurynews.com/2014/05/02/san-jose-state-expels-three-charged-with-hate-crime/ (accessed January 18, 2018); "3 San José State Students Guilty of Battery on Black Freshman, but not Hate Crime", *NBC News*, February 22, 2016, www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/Jury-Verdict-in-San-Jose-State-Hate-Crime-Against-Black-Roommate-369701611.html (accessed January 13, 2018); Jodie Hernandez, "San José State University Students Protest against Campus Hate Crimes", *NBC News*, March 17, 2016, www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/San-Jose-State-University-Students-Protest-Against-Hate-Crimes-372499552.html (accessed January 17, 2018); Kate Murphy, "San José State Racial Bias Fixes Have Long, Unfulfilled History", *San José Mercury News*, April 19, 2014, www.mercurynews.com/2014/04/19/san-jose-state-racial-bias-fixes-have-long-unfulfilled-history/ (accessed January 17, 2018); Malia Wollan and Richard Pérez-Pena, "Racial Abuse Is Alleged at San José State University", November 22, 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/11/23/us/racial-abuse-is-alleged-at-san-jose-state-university.html (accessed March 2, 2021).

²³ Lisa Tsui, "Effects of Campus Culture on Students' Critical Thinking", *The Review of Higher Education*, Vol. 23, Iss. 4, Summer 2000: 421–441, www.researchgate.net/publication/236815331_Effects_of_Campus_Culture_on_Students_Critical_Thinking/ (accessed March 2, 2021); Cassie Barnhardt and Kimberly Reyes, "Embracing Student Activism", *Higher Education Today*, March 2, 2016, www.higheredtoday.org/2016/03/02/embracing-student-activism/ (accessed March 2, 2021); Jeremy Dale Page, *Activism and Leadership Development: Examining the Relationship Between College Student Activism Involvement and Socially Responsible Leadership Capacity* (College Park: University of Maryland, 2010), https://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/handle/1903/10863/Page_umd_0117E_11517.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed March 8, 2021).

grievances raised. Moreover, how the administration responds to the students' social action helps the campus leaders define the values and commitments of the college, which will affect the students' experience and their understanding of the college, and provides the administration the opportunity to demonstrate whether their approach to equity, diversity, and freedom are effective. As Drs. Cassie Barnhardt and Kimberly Reyes reflect on the scholarship of college social action, they argue that the legitimacy of the university stems in part from its commitment to foster "excellence, integrity and a sense of community among their students" and that social action creates "a space for institutions to be thoughtful about enacting those very commitments". In addition, research shows that campuses that emphasize social action foster the larger student body to be more civically engaged.²⁴

Third, there are positive outcomes for the larger society. By examining the above history of student social action, and comparing it to what was happening in the larger American society, it is clear that in most periods of societal change from colonial times to today a complementary story has been playing out on college campuses. Thus, college student social action provides the opportunity to work out in a positive fashion some of the political dynamics of the country, but in a local and focused setting.²⁵

D The Vision: Bringing Social Action into the Classroom

The question is this: if social action has so many positive benefits for the students, campus, and community, why not bring it into the classroom rather than have it as a co-curricular activity? I believe the time is right to provide students the opportunity to do social action as part of the academic experience. In the 1980s and 1990s, in order to strengthen civic engagement and develop critical thinking skills, colleges brought community service into the classroom, and created a plethora of service-learning courses. I am advocating for the same type of integration, but instead of the student engagement focusing on such things as providing meals at a homeless shelter or tutoring a child, both of which are important,

²⁴ Barnhardt and Reyes, "Embracing Student Activism"; "Colleges that Emphasize Activism Have More Civically Engaged Students, New Research Shows", *Binghamton University*, July 7, 2020, www.binghamton.edu/news/story/2554/colleges-that-emphasize-activism-have-more-civically-engaged-students-new-research-shows (accessed March 8, 2021); Stephen G. Pelletier, "Engaging Learning through Student Activism", *Public Purpose*, Fall, 2016, www.aascu.org/MAP/PublicPurpose/2016/Fall/EngagingLearning.pdf (accessed March 8, 2021); Durward Long, "The Impact of Activist Students in Changing the Governance and Culture of the Campus", *American Association for Higher Education*, March 3, 1970, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED039852.pdf> (accessed March 8, 2021).

²⁵ Barnhardt and Reyes, "Embracing Student Activism".

students will also have the opportunity to enact policies that get at why people are hungry in the richest nation in the world or why the local kids attend underfunded schools.

The United States is at a crossroads, as its democratic institutions are under attack. Scholars and think tanks are calling for a massive investment in social studies and civics education to respond to the breakdown of trust in our democratic institutions. What will be higher education's response? I argue that we need to develop academic curricula to help create the next generation of democratic citizens and residents by mainstreaming social action. Social action can help revive and breathe new life into our democracy by giving students the opportunity "to do democracy". Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that the "great wells of democracy" were dug deep by the founders of this nation. By mainstreaming social action in higher education, we can help our students learn the critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary to once again tap into these great wells. Democracy is like a muscle. It must be used or it withers. Social action allows students to utilize the muscle of democracy.

E Overcoming the Challenges of Teaching Social Action

Before explaining how to teach social action in the classroom, I would like to discuss the challenges a professor or staff member might face teaching it. First, you might never have done social action, and therefore feel uncomfortable teaching it. And yes, there is some truth that while having a background in something can be helpful, it doesn't exclude you from teaching it. I am reminded of the first Introductory to Sociology class I taught in graduate school. I had majored in Political Science as an undergraduate, and had gone on to get a Master's degree in Humanities; I had never even taken a Sociology class, but there I was, teaching one section a week of an Introduction to Sociology class. Not surprisingly, I was just one week ahead of the students in reading, but I taught the class pretty well. Did I get better with more experience? Of course I did, and you will get better at teaching social action after doing it for a while. The key point is that having limited knowledge of something before one teaches it does not disqualify you from teaching it.

Some might fear that social action is "political" and that their careers might be harmed by using it in the classroom. Yes, social action deals with power since by definition politics focuses on power relations between individuals. However, when using social action, the students select the campaigns, not the teacher, so it removes the faculty's political orientation from the equation. Thus, the students are motivated by their own political perspectives and

leanings, as the students may select a campaign with a liberal or conservative bent, or no bent at all. Social action teaches about democracy and power, and students' campaigns are based on the students' interests and value system. Importantly, students are never encouraged or coerced into a particular campaign. In addition, students have choice not only of their campaigns, but they can switch campaigns in the middle of the semester. Clearly, there is no "brainwashing" going on, nor are the students acting as puppets of the teacher.

Some faculty might worry that their peers will see social action as a non-academic endeavor. Research refutes this assertion since social action has been shown to develop students' critical thinking skills. In addition, social action lends itself toward an engaged pedagogy, which has been shown to be a best practice for teaching. Moreover, there are many opportunities to do research on the students' experiences. I have written numerous scholarly articles on my students' engagement in the classroom, as well as a previous book on social action. In addition, social action can help connect a professor's advocacy work to their scholarship. As Dr. Bernadette Roche from the Biology Department at Loyola University Maryland, and current participant in the Social Action Design Course webinar series, states:

The social action course did help me see that students would benefit from this "outside" work that I do—I had not made the connection that my advocacy was actually part of my scholarship—so I now have two student interns working on adding an environmental human rights amendment to the Maryland Constitution. I think that is a direct consequence of reframing my advocacy work as scholarship and very relevant to what I do at Loyola (and not just "personal life" stuff). It may seem strange to someone from the social sciences that a professor would not be able to connect the dots on these things, but in the sciences, we are not really given much mentoring on how advocacy relates to scholarship.

These are just some of the ways that social action is a scholarly endeavor. Importantly, this scholarship can be used to bolster a faculty's case in the rank and tenure process.²⁶

Finally, some might fear losing control of the class by using social action. There is some truth that with social action, teachers give up some control of how the class operates. In a class that uses social action, students become co-creators of knowledge, where they are bringing their

²⁶ Bernadette Rocha, Email message to author, August 1, 2017.

expertise to the table, rather than just the professor. However, the rewards are great, since students become active participants in the classroom, and become more engaged in the classroom and their assignments.

I believe that the above obstacles, challenges, and fears can be overcome, and that you can successfully use social action in your classroom. Let us now move on to a discussion of developing your social action class.

Reflection Questions

Before moving on to the next chapter, please answer the following reflection questions about the above reading. Your responses will help you develop your social action class.

1. 1 Why does social action interest you?
2. 2 How do you think social action will enhance your teaching?
- 3 What course or co-curricular experience will you be using social action in?