

Days of Decision:

San Francisco's 1960 House Un-American Activities Committee Protest as a Turning Point of
the New Left

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HSTRY 492: History Honors Research Seminar

March 17, 2021

Abstract¹

After the degradation of labor union power throughout the postwar era, a new politics took hold among young Americans, and its academic roots and appeal to student demographics established the university as the new institutional mediator for left-wing activism in the 1960s. The university provided the infrastructure for college students to promote antiwar, civil rights, and civil liberties campaigns both on and off campus. Years before the major events that are tied to the New Left in American collective memory, however, Bay Area college students' protests against the House Un-American Activities Committee garnered national media attention for their perceived radicalism in the face of repression from the federal government. Student protesters' altercation with police at San Francisco City Hall in May of 1960 became a turning point at which the Old Left, New Left, and McCarthyism converged, providing valuable insight into the transition of broad left-wing activism from union-based to direct action protest. These student protests prompted outrage from the public and the federal government, and students across the nation soon adopted not only their protest strategy, but also the structure of the student organizations that promoted the demonstration. These protests, the first of their kind and a major precedent for what would become the student New Left movement, complicate the historical understanding of the university as the postwar institutional mediator for left-wing protest, revealing the disparities and power relations between students, professors, and administrators in the pursuit of their respective political agendas.

¹ Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many potentially relevant primary source materials, and to a lesser extent secondary source materials, are inaccessible at the time of this research. This is noted at points where specific primary source collections, cited in their respective footnotes, would likely be relevant should they become available in the future.

Introduction

“400 Cops Battle Mob at City Hall,” in bold text across the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, was its readers’ introduction to the drama that unfolded during student protesters’ attempts to disrupt the May 1960 field hearings convened by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), whose efforts to sniff out suspected communists had made its affairs headline news since the late 1940s.² Newsreels captured images of firehose-drenched students standing in defiance on the second floor landing, policemen dragging a young man by the shoulders of his suit jacket, and a young woman’s head hitting each slick marble step as she was dragged by her feet down the grand staircase.³ Photos of the bloodied demonstrators in the rotunda ran alongside those of Archie Brown and Harry Bridges inside the hearing room, with captions suggesting the witnesses may have choreographed the “riot.”⁴ As these “hostile” witnesses were forcibly removed from the courtroom, “you could hear the hollow smack of the club striking” outside the doors as Committee staff directed cops toward individual protesters, shouting “That one’s a Commie!”⁵ After police had dragged protesters through the shattered glass of the front doors and onto the sidewalk, paddy wagons carted sixty-eight arrestees down Polk street—out of sight, but unfortunately for the Committee, not out of mind.⁶ The approximately \$250,000 of damage to City Hall and newsreels detailing the police’s brutality against protesters would be used to argue that HUAC was inciting more trouble than it was

² Van Niekerken, Bill. “Dawn of Bay Area Protest Movement: 1960 Photos Show SF ‘Riot’ over Communist-Hunting Committee.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 13, 2020.

³ *City Hall Demonstrations, Reel II (1960)*. Bay Area Television Archive, 1960; Lawrence, Bob. “Christopher Warns of ‘Black Day,’ Lays Ground Rules for Picketing.” *The Daily Californian*. May 16, 1960. Bancroft Library; “Eyewitnesses Exonerate Students.” *The Daily Californian*. May 19, 1960. Bancroft Library.

⁴ “Various Publications on San Francisco Demonstrations Against the House Un-American Activities Committee,” 1961. Box 915, Folder 10, Item 976. Mudd Library, Princeton University, 20, 57.

⁵ “Various Publications,” 15–16.

⁶ Though there is some inconsistency between sources regarding whether the number of arrestees totaled sixty-four or sixty-eight, sixty-eight is the most common number cited by contemporary organizations including the ACLU. “Various Publications,” 17.

investigating, and San Francisco Mayor George Christopher prohibited the Committee from returning to any municipal building in the city.⁷

The 1964 Free Speech Movement (FSM) established Berkeley's leading role in the New Left student movements of the 1960s and '70s, but its myriad organizational and ideological precedents tend to be disregarded in analyses of student social movements.⁸ The FSM was not the spontaneous creation of a generation in the midst of a political awakening; rather, political awareness among Berkeley students had been evolving over the previous decade. The pressures of federal anticommunism and its manifestations at the university level had already been mobilizing students to organize throughout the 1950s, forming student political groups that grew in opposition to increasingly restrictive university policies. The May 1960 demonstration at San Francisco City Hall reveals early student activism situated on the precipice of what would become the New Left. These student activists' organizational structure, protest tactics, and principled goals not only reflect later developments like the FSM but also constitute the foundations upon which future New Left movements were built. Like the FSM, the City Hall protest was born from a tension between student political demands and the agenda of university administration, which was in the process of defining a new institutional and political identity for what Clark Kerr dubbed "the multiversity." Kerr, Berkeley's president from 1958 until 1967, played a decisive role in the trajectory of both protests, and his ambitions for the university as a uniquely American institution inform the conflict that arose between students and administration. This dynamic was central to the escalation of student protest, and it speaks to the complexities of using the university as an institutional support for student political activism.

⁷ "Giant Bay Area Protests Hit Un-American Circus." *The Dispatcher*, May 20, 1960.

⁸ "New Left" is the terminology by which the student movements discussed in this analysis define themselves. This terminology is consistent from SLATE, the organization responsible for the City Hall protest, to Students for a Democratic Society, the organization that popularized "New Left." However, "New Left" is not necessarily an accurate description of the totality of the social movements that arose in the 1960s, and this analysis will define "New Left" as the university-based student activism focused on federal policy throughout this period.

Background

The House Un-American Activities Committee was aware of the opposition it faced in the Bay Area by the spring of 1960: the Citizens Committee to Preserve American Freedoms had developed specifically to promote the abolition of the Committee,⁹ the ACLU of Northern California had condemned it, and it faced continued hostility from the union workers whose peers and leaders were being subpoenaed under suspicion of involvement with the Communist Party.¹⁰ However, because of HUAC's determination that these entities were at least sympathizers if not "communist fronts," its supporters had ample fodder to accuse protesters of being soft on—if not aligned with—communism.¹¹ These tensions came to a head in the Bay Area one year before the City Hall protests: in the summer of 1959, HUAC's subpoena of 110 California public school teachers under the Tenney-Burns-Levering Bills sparked outrage, causing even the conservative *San Francisco Chronicle* to criticize this type of public accusation as, ironically, un-American.¹² One year later, this slow shift in public opinion was challenged by the City Hall protests, drawing national attention to both the failures of the Committee and the political consciousness and dynamism of emerging student activists.

Educational institutions faced unique pressures under these zealous national anticommunist initiatives: the narrative of young people's susceptibility to communist influence and the accusations of subversive professors indoctrinating students both cast suspicion on universities in particular. Nationwide initiatives to root out "subversives" in education drew criticism for their infringement on civil liberties and academic freedom in the name of national

⁹ House Committee on Un-American Activities. "'Operation Abolition': the Campaign against the House Committee on Un-American Activities, the Federal Bureau of Investigation [and] the Government Security Program by the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee and Its Affiliates." Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 8, 1957, 12.

¹⁰ "Giant Bay Area Protests," *The Dispatcher*, 1960.

¹¹ House Committee on Un-American Activities, "Operation Abolition," 12.

¹² "Various Publications," 13.

security. These measures began with mandatory reporting of on-campus club membership lists, mimicking HUAC's tactic of publicly exposing members of organizations suspected of being sympathetic to the Communist Party.¹³ Despite university administrators' claims that such lists were solely bureaucratic, they functioned as a deterrent, even gaining the recognition of HUAC for their effectiveness. Around the same time, campuses were subjected to new policies barring political speakers that became increasingly strict over the course of the 1950s.¹⁴ These, among other veiled anticommunist policies, tended to be most stringent at public colleges and universities, which were more politically vulnerable than their private counterparts.¹⁵

Over the decade leading up to the City Hall protest, the Red Scare politics of the postwar era had devastated left-wing activism in the United States to an extent that was unique among its WWII allies. Whereas the left in other capitalist countries had become associated with dedicated infrastructures like labor parties, American unions and the Democratic Party had been the primary outlets promoting left-wing agendas.¹⁶ Throughout this era, in no small part due to the extralegal capacity of HUAC, the federal government systematically defamed and discredited union leadership with accusations of various associations with the Communist Party. The dismantling of unions' political capacity necessitated a new institution to develop and promote left-wing agendas. Historian James Gregory establishes this argument in "Remapping the American Left," basing his arguments off of Ellen Schrecker's extensive analysis of the Second Red Scare in *Many Are the Crimes*.¹⁷ Gregory's framework is critical to understanding the university as a mediating institution in the development of the "New Left," incorporating the sociological concept of "movement diffusion" through established support structures, even those

¹³ Schrecker, Ellen. *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, 88.

¹⁴ Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 89.

¹⁵ Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 90–91.

¹⁶ Gregory, James N. "Remapping the American Left." *Labor* 17, no. 2 (May 1, 2020): 25–28.

¹⁷ Schrecker, Ellen. *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1998.

that are not fundamentally left-wing.¹⁸ Although Gregory briefly recognizes some schools as havens for activism, he does not delve into the university's strengths and pitfalls as a mediating institution or its development prior to the Vietnam War era.¹⁹ The case of San Francisco's City Hall HUAC protests illustrates these early developments: the foundation of student political organizations, their proliferation, and the institutional obstacles that influenced their production and reproduction. The university was not a willing or natural support structure for left-wing activism, and its use as one was fraught with institutional conflict that shaped the way student activism materialized in the late 1950s and '60s.

Student narratives are crucial to providing a counter-perspective to popular images and media portrayals of the protest, which tend to overlook student groups' collaboration, organizing, and strategy. Student publications like the *Daily Californian* give numerous individuals' and groups' eyewitness accounts and timelines as well as their criticism of the university's response to both the protest and the student groups that organized them. These articles, as well as records from university faculty and administration, also illustrate the power dynamics between these three groups.²⁰ Furthermore, local and regional organizations' records—including those of the ACLU, educators' academic freedom coalitions, and Bay Area anti-HUAC groups—offer their own narratives of both the events of the protest as they unfolded and their aftermath, each demonstrating external organizations' perspectives and agendas. These methods of analysis provide insight into the structural elements of the university that made it a complex but

¹⁸ Gregory, "Remapping the American Left," 13.

¹⁹ Gregory, "Remapping the American Left," 29.

²⁰ Due to the impacts of COVID-19, the internal communications of student groups with one another and with activist organizations off-campus are currently inaccessible. Should they become available in the future, these documents would provide greater insight into early student activist groups' understanding of their own political power, social dynamics, and material goals. Further, they might contain additional information about student activists' demographics, positions of privilege, and affiliations with off-campus civil liberties organizations, which would contribute to the historical understanding of early- to mid-1960s student activism as a largely white, middle-class phenomenon precipitated by strategies and language of the civil rights movement.

formidable institution for left-wing politics. For example, while the University of California administration tended to align with state and federal government directives, faculty records indicate support for student protesters and their associated off-campus organizations. Historians have often centered national social trends to contextualize students' "political awakening" in this era. By centering student organizations and the university systems that either empowered or frustrated them instead, this analysis provides insight into the historical use of the university to promote political agendas. The tension between faculty, students, and administrators problematizes the popular understanding of college campuses as havens for student activism: the university had been complicit in efforts to blacklist academics, suppress student and faculty dissent, and uphold the academic-military-industrial complex, all of which had defined the role of universities since World War II. The late 1950s and early '60s were transformative years for American universities and formative years for student political activity as professors, guest speakers, and campus organizations challenged McCarthy-era restrictions. In analyzing this transitional period, student publications are critical to understanding how early student activists understood their political power, their broader goals, and their relationship to regional organizations, particularly other support structures for left-wing groups, including the ACLU of Northern California.

These themes and questions are pertinent to the broader historical debate over the trajectory of left-wing movements over the course of the twentieth century. Emphasizing this event, its key players, and how they reflected transformations in left-wing activism during this period highlights the continuity of these movements, disrupting the accepted narrative that the 1950s through early 1960s was a period of stagnation for activism. Ellen Schrecker's *No Ivory Tower* provides the most detailed account of the operations of colleges and universities during

the McCarthy era, tracing anticommunist policies' impact on research, academic freedom, and academia's relationship to state and federal governments. Schrecker's argument that the academy did not oppose McCarthyism but in fact contributed to it is critical to understanding the motives of university administrators as collaborators with government institutions. Her argument, however, aligns the university as an institution with the agenda of its administration.²¹

Examining students and faculty as equal actors in the function of the university complicates the question of its role as an institution of political change. Berkeley's administrators—particularly Clark Kerr—provide particularly rich sources that demonstrate the institutional forces that influenced the university's conservative and reactionary policies. Situating students' organization of protests within Gregory's framework and in opposition to the conservative policy of the administration, the university served as a space for left-wing political ideas to develop, proliferate, and catalyze direct action. San Francisco's series of student protests in May of 1960, the first of their kind and a major precedent for what would become the New Left, therefore problematize the university as the postwar institutional mediator for left-wing protest and radicalism, revealing the disparities and power relations between students, professors, and administrators in the pursuit of their respective political agendas.

An American Brand of Radicalism: Escalation of Student Political Engagement²²

By the spring of 1960, Berkeley's administration had long established itself as an opponent of student activism or any other politicization of the university. Upon the ratification of the infamous "Rule 17" in 1937, the UC system banned political organizations, meetings, and events from its campuses, specifically restricting political speakers unless they were granted

²¹ Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 340.

²² Franck, "SLATE, Law, and Politics on the Berkeley Campus." Interview by Martin Meeker. Transcript, 2018. Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 26.

special permission by university officials.²³ As part of the slow rise of student politics in the mid-1950s, Rule 17 was formally amended to permit “off-campus” groups to hold meetings on campus, but they could not claim affiliation with the university. In response to the continuation of student activism, however, then-Chancellor Clark Kerr issued what came to be known as the “Kerr Directives.”²⁴ These regulations restricted student government’s authority to “on-campus issues,” and all campus organizations had to be determined to be “compatible with the educational objectives of the University,” both subject to the discretion of administrators.²⁵ In practice, the administration weaponized these amendments against activist organizations, generating criticism from faculty members.²⁶ Additionally, in the spring of 1959, Dean Stone banned spontaneous student rallies, prompting swift student rebellion. These restrictions introduced throughout the 1950s, and the 1959 additions specifically, were directly antagonistic to student activists; not only were they in response to increasingly public demonstrations, but their enforcement targeted left-wing activism.

Berkeley’s earliest political student organizations were born out of two national controversies: the actions of the House Un-American Activities Committee and the ongoing struggle for civil rights. The centrality of these two issues enabled student groups that were not explicitly partisan to arise. Students to Combat McCarthyism (STCM, est. 1954) took a constitutionalist approach, arguing that HUAC’s oversteps were a threat to the civil liberties of all Americans.²⁷ Toward an Active Student Community (TASC, est. 1957), although it was

²³ Kerr provides his own analysis of the legacy of Rule 17 as it applied to student protest movements in his personal memoirs. Though his account is necessarily biased, it provides the most complete record specifying the inheritance of Rule 17 by the UC Administration of the 1950s and 1960s. Kerr, Clark. *The Gold and the Blue, Volume Two: A Personal Memoir of the University of California, 1949–1967*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001; SLATE: The Beginning of the New Left, UC Berkeley. “SLATE Archives,” 2010.

²⁴ “The Kerr Directives,” Fall 1964.

²⁵ Goines, David L. *The Free Speech Movement: Coming of Age in the 1960s*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1993, 69.

²⁶ Armor, Dave. “SLATE Leadership and ASUC President, 1959–1960.” Interview by Todd Holmes. Transcript, 2018. Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 25.

²⁷ Students to Combat McCarthyism. “History of Students to Combat McCarthyism,” 1954. Bancroft Library.

organized by a socialist graduate student, identified its goal as encouraging students to utilize the Associated Students of the University of California as a platform for advocating off-campus issues—or, as its founder argued, moving beyond inconsequential “sandbox politics.”²⁸ The “off-campus” issue that mobilized a broad base of students in the UC system at the time was the civil rights movement, specifically desegregation, and this allowed TASC to garner bipartisan support on campus. TASC’s tumultuous beginnings, clashing with UC administrators over the question of whether student political parties complied with campus regulations, led to its 1958 rebranding as SLATE,²⁹ semantically defined as an official student organization rather than a campus political party.³⁰ Though still in its infancy, SLATE established a preliminary infrastructure for political organizing on campus.

SLATE was strictly egalitarian: its horizontal structure required unanimous decision-making, accountability of representatives to a unified platform, and public neutrality on issues that were not agreed upon.³¹ The organizers strategically defined themselves as issue-specific and non-ideological, curbing debates between the broad coalition of both undergraduate and graduate students identifying as liberal, socialist, Trotskyist, and even communist, among other ideologies. These precautions appealed to SLATE’s “big tent” philosophy, garnering support from a politically diverse student population. SLATE pulled their membership from a broad array of campus groups with the strategy of, as founding member Peter Franck explained, “meld[ing] all those groups into working together with this mantra: least

²⁸ Miller, Mike. “Establishing SLATE on the Berkeley Campus.” Interview by Martin Meeker. Transcript, 2018. Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 13.

²⁹ SLATE is not an acronym, but rather the de facto title of a “slate” of candidates establishing a collective, issues-based platform. Armor, Dave. “SLATE Leadership and ASUC President, 1959–1960,” 9.

³⁰ Franck, Peter. “SLATE, Law, and Politics on the Berkeley Campus,” 31.

³¹ Armor, “SLATE Leadership and ASUC President, 1959–1960,” 9; Lenske Kalaki, Aryay. “SLATE and the Birth of Student Political Consciousness.” Interview by Martin Meeker. Transcript, 2018. Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 18.

significant common denominator.”³² Critically, SLATE’s commitment to a relatively apolitical stance established greater collective power. Preventing factionalism not only discouraged expressions of radicalism that may have further alienated them from the administration, but cohesion also established students’ strength in negotiations with university leadership. The “big tent” strategy was a tactical approach to conform to the demands of the institution. Particularly in the context of the Cold War, under which universities defined themselves by the research they produced and competed for federal funding for that research, it benefitted student organizations to minimize their political ideologies, which would be considered a threat to the lucrative status quo. This “strength in numbers” strategy, however, was recognized and targeted by administrative regulations. As many other semi-formal activist organizations would do throughout the 1960s, SLATE published an independent newsletter, the *Cal Reporter*, as a central mode of campus communication.³³ Shortly after its release in the spring of 1958, university administration prohibited its distribution on campus.

In May of 1959, as SLATE’s demonstrations gained momentum despite the obstacles imposed by administrators, the chancellor’s office barred graduate students from participation in student government.³⁴ During the preceding two years, graduate students had been integral to organizing: founding TASC, establishing the group’s democratic structure, challenging university regulations, and mobilizing formerly under-involved undergraduates. The last of these functions was crucial to the political landscape of the university at the time, as young adults of the 1950s had been deemed “The Silent Generation,” a moniker they were just beginning to push back against. Undergraduates admitted to their naiveté when it came to politics, while others had been

³² Franck, “SLATE, Law, and Politics on the Berkeley Campus,” 45–46.

³³ SLATE: The Beginning of the New Left, UC Berkeley. “SLATE Archives,” 2010.

³⁴ “Chancellor’s Office Releases Grad Disassociation Statement.” *The Daily Californian*. May 4, 1959. Bancroft Library.

intentionally diverted from activism. Graduate students' organizing skills, authority, and connections were critical to SLATE's establishment, functioning, and protection from institutional attacks. Graduate students' unique position in the university—as mentors to undergraduates and mentees to faculty—contributed to solidifying a de facto alliance between faculty and student organizations.³⁵ Graduate students were crucial to the functioning of a research university, granting them additional institutional leverage to challenge the administration. Students recognized the political nature of the chancellor's policy change immediately: the *Daily Cal* published scathing opinions accusing the administration of curbing free speech, drawing increased attention to the student–administration power struggle.³⁶ This unilateral policy shift was clear in its reactionary intent: “the administration changed the rules on us... they wanted to get rid of the people who were supporting SLATE, so they stripped them out.”³⁷ This cycle of student action met by administration suppression generated an escalation of student acts of defiance, garnering attention and support from increasingly wider populations of students. By late 1959, student activists and university administration's mutual hostility had popularly established them as rivals.

San Francisco's 1960 House Un-American Activities Committee Protest: Facts of the Case

In 1958 and 1959, SLATE recruited students to participate in local civil disobedience demonstrations in collaboration with the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), the earliest of these being sit-ins at segregated shops and restaurants both on and off campus, including the notable sit-in at the local Woolworth's department store.³⁸ As SLATE gained traction in the

³⁵ “Sociology Graduates Challenge Police Techniques, Ask Inquiry.” *The Daily Californian*. May 17, 1960. Bancroft Library.

³⁶ “Chancellor's Office Releases Grad Disassociation Statement.”

³⁷ Franck, “SLATE, Law, and Politics on the Berkeley Campus,” 18.

³⁸ Griffin, Susan. “The Joy and Power of Community.” Interview by Amanda Tewes. Transcript, 2019. Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 26; Tigar, Mike. “From SLATE Leader to Civil Liberties Attorney.” Interview by Martin Meeker. Transcript, 2018. Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 16; “Various Publications,” 18.

student community, the group began taking on increasingly controversial issues relative to the politics of the Bay Area as a whole: Bay Area students' demonstration opposing the impending execution of Caryl Chessman³⁹ at San Quentin became SLATE's most notable project by late 1959.⁴⁰ Former SLATE members described these two campaigns as the major precedents for their (in)famous 1960 HUAC demonstration.⁴¹

In their series of civil rights demonstrations and the Chessman protest, SLATE maintained their commitment to remaining non-ideological and issue-specific, aligning with numerous non-partisan organizations like the ACLU in both instances. Their strategy to extend this to the City Hall HUAC demonstration depended upon the explicit articulation of their objectives: supporting free speech and opposing both the Committee's exposure of private citizens suspected to be communists or communist sympathizers and HUAC's very existence as a symbol of judicial overreach.⁴² Although Berkeley students had varying degrees of sympathy for the individuals on trial, SLATE publicized the protest as a First Amendment action carefully organized to center free speech, regulating language in picket signs and stationing monitors to lead pre-approved chants and de-escalate if necessary. Student resentment for the Committee was compounded by the fact that a fellow Berkeley student, sophomore Douglas Wachter, was one of the subpoenaed individuals being questioned by the Committee in its May 1960 hearings.

Demonstration leaders emphasized that their support of Wachter was on the basis of his First Amendment rights, declining to comment on accusations of his membership in the Communist

³⁹ The details of Chessman's case are not necessary to understand SLATE's platform or methods of organizing in this context; however, information regarding the widespread opposition to Chessman's execution is overviewed in the FBI's official document collection. Federal Bureau of Investigation. "Caryl Chessman." Freedom of Information/Privacy Acts Section. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954.

⁴⁰ "Various Publications," 18.

⁴¹ Armor, "SLATE Leadership and ASUC President, 1959–1960," 25; Franck, "SLATE, Law, and Politics on the Berkeley Campus," 43; Lenske, "SLATE and the Birth of Student Political Consciousness," 32–33; Tigar, "From SLATE Leader to Civil Liberties Attorney," 13–16.

⁴² "Various Publications," 18–21.

Party.⁴³ Wachter's assessment that "the committee [was] closer to being dangerous to America than most of what it investigates," published one week before the hearing, illustrates both the platform on which he would defend himself and that which mobilized student demonstrators.⁴⁴

The *Daily Cal* publicized the student-led demonstrations scheduled for Thursday, May 12, 1960, shortly following HUAC's announcement that it would hold a series of hearings in San Francisco just three weeks in advance. SLATE collaborated with a number of other student activist groups throughout the Bay Area, including the Student Civil Liberties Union (an affiliate of the ACLU), most of which were affiliates of local organizations rather than universities.⁴⁵ This coalition of student-led groups became the Ad Hoc Committee, circulating a petition calling for the cancellation of the hearings and organizing the demonstration at City Hall. The two thousand signatures Ad Hoc Committee volunteers collected over the next four days made it clear that a protest would be viable and popular among students and faculty.

After a relatively small picket line of approximately one hundred students outside City Hall on Thursday morning, the coalition of student groups held a rally at Union Square that attracted over one thousand supporters, five hundred of whom joined the picket that afternoon.⁴⁶ This group sought admittance to the hearing room, which had been advertised as open to the public. Upon the protesters' arrival, they found the Committee had implemented a system that became central to the escalation of events: committee leaders had issued "white cards" as passes to prominent anti-communist San Francisco residents and members of organizations sympathetic to HUAC. Picketers who had respectfully awaited entrance to the hearing room were bypassed by cardholders and promptly turned away.

⁴³ Wood, Jim. "Student Invokes the Fifth." *Daily Californian*. May 13, 1960. Bancroft Library.

⁴⁴ Duren, Joan. "Subpoenaed Student Tells 'Why.'" *The Daily Californian*. May 4, 1960. Bancroft Library

⁴⁵ "Various Publications," 18.

⁴⁶ "Various Publications," 13–14.

The students' outrage at this exclusion incited a larger crowd of approximately two thousand (again, largely students) to participate in further demonstration on Friday, May 13. Further confrontation regarding the white cards on Friday morning led protesters to consult Sheriff Matthew Carberry, who reportedly assured them that new audience members would be allowed into the hearing room following the Committee's afternoon recess.⁴⁷ Carberry failed to return after the recess, and students were once again bypassed by cardholders, at which point arguments broke out between protesters and the police line guarding the hearing room entrance.

Although the details of the rapid escalation of events are disputed, a preponderance of sources suggest that, as students sang in disobedience of the police command to quiet down, officers displayed their billy clubs and unravelled courthouse fire hoses, provoking uproar from protesters. Prosecutors later claimed that Berkeley student and SLATE member Robert Meisenbach then snatched an officer's baton, using it to club the officer over the head, thereby instigating the use of the fire hoses.⁴⁸ Submerging the marble staircase in a layer of water and rushing the group, police proceeded to drag protesters down the steps by their clothes, limbs, and hair, while others slid uncontrollably down the stairs amidst the deluge. Those remaining on the landing sat in order to avoid falling or being dragged away. At this point, as one journalist reported, "The hoses were turned on again. But the crowd was not moved—by the hoses. It continued to sing 'We shall not be moved,' even while the police dragged its members down the stairs. I don't believe it ever was moved."⁴⁹ The scene was immortalized on the cover of the *Chronicle* the following morning, swiftly drawing national attention, with reactions ranging from outrage at the protesters to criticism of the Committee to charges of police brutality.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Krause, Marshall. ACLU of Northern California Attorney and Civil Liberties Advocate. Interview by Martin Meeker. Transcript, 2018. Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 28.

⁴⁸ Duren, "Subpoenaed Student Tells 'Why.'"; "Various Publications," 30–31.

⁴⁹ Brewer, Joel. "Students Passive During Friday 'Raid.'" *Daily Californian*. May 16, 1960. Bancroft Library.

⁵⁰ "Eyewitnesses Exonerate Students"; "Various Publications."

Approximately sixty-eight protesters were arrested during this incident, the majority of whom were Berkeley students.⁵¹ On June 2, Judge Albert Axelrod dismissed the charges against the arrestees, with the exception of Meisenbach, who was charged with inciting a riot. Despite Axelrod's intent to spare the students from future stigma and his confidence that they had "learned the errors of their ways," fifty-eight of the arrestees signed a collective statement shortly thereafter insisting that they still "shall not be moved." The May 1960 hearings in San Francisco would be the last time the House Un-American Activities Committee ever traveled outside of Washington, DC.



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⁵¹ "Various Publications," 12–31.

⁵² Campbell, Bob. *Police Blast Protestors with Fire Hoses, and the Remove Demonstrators from City Hall Steps*. May 14, 1960. Photograph. San Francisco Chronicle.

Operation Abolition & Operation Correction

Bay Area students' controversial protest was met with an equally controversial reaction: J. Edgar Hoover, in collaboration with Committee Investigator Wheeler, produced the HUAC propaganda film *Operation Abolition: The Story of Communism in Action*, which presented itself as a documentary detailing the events of May 12–14, 1960.⁵³ The film is composed of subpoenaed newsreels from local television stations stitched together and overlaid with original narration. The narrator avoids accusing students en masse of being communists, Party affiliates, or even communist sympathizers, instead categorizing student protesters as naive “dupes” of the Party, succumbing to their sophisticated subversive tactics.⁵⁴

By accusing the students of acting as unwitting “puppets” of communist agents, the film villainizes the students while placing ultimate blame on the “common enemy” and offering the students a means of redemption. The FBI designed the film’s rhetoric to promote public outrage, suppress further student protest, and reinforce the need for HUAC as a matter of national security. Not only does the film imply the students were recruited by undercover communists, but it also argues that members of the Communist Party played a strategic role as “agitators” among the picketers.⁵⁵ The film claims that these agitators operated under the direction of civil liberties activist Frank Wilkinson as well as labor leader Archie Brown, a subpoenaed witness who, the film asserts, played a “major role in inciting the demonstrations against the Committee.”⁵⁶ Paired with selective footage of subpoenaed witnesses’ objections within the hearing room, the film creates the illusion that the two modes of resistance were organized in collaboration rather than reacting to one another in the moment.

⁵³ *Operation Abolition: The Story of Communism in Action*. Series: Motion Picture Films and Video Recordings, 1896–2008, 1960.

⁵⁴ *Operation Abolition*, [1:55–2:06].

⁵⁵ *Operation Abolition*, [8:35–8:55, 20:50–21:17].

⁵⁶ *Operation Abolition*, [6:45–6:50].



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More striking, however, are *Operation Abolition*'s attacks on other community leaders, specifically local clergymen speaking at the students' rally at Union Square, who "unleash[ed] bitter attacks... designed to incite further resentment against the Committee and to recruit more volunteers for action."⁵⁸ It is not clear whether the narrator's intention was to accuse the clergymen of being "dupes," similar to the student protesters, or to accuse them of being communists or sympathizers themselves; either way, however, this claim produces a sense that communists and their affiliates were hidden in plain sight, able to incite discord at their will.

In line with its implication that communists lurk around every corner, *Operation Abolition* promotes the idea that communist violence is a systematic and imminent threat based on the assumption that students' actions were choreographed by "hardcore communists." Within the first few minutes of newsreel footage, the narrator accuses the Communist Party of "activating trained agitators months before the scheduled hearings were to begin"—despite the

⁵⁷ Archie Brown voicing his opposition to the Committee in the hearing room during recess. *Operation Abolition*, [15:00].

⁵⁸ *Operation Abolition*, [12:00–12:30].

fact that the hearings were announced only two weeks in advance—emphasizing the protest’s purported level of organization in its goal to sow unrest.⁵⁹ In response, the film claims that a “specially-trained police squadron” was called to counter communist-led violence; yet it was of little use, as students purportedly dismissed police’s numerous warnings, acting “in open defiance of law and order.”⁶⁰ Despite a lack of corresponding footage, the film asserts that police only began using fire hoses after students rushed police officers and “stormed the doors” to the hearing room.⁶¹ It contends that police officers suffered injuries, including strokes and heart attacks, using these assertions to counter accusations of police brutality—accusations that the narrator asserts were being circulated and popularized by the “communist press.”⁶²



⁵⁹ *Operation Abolition*, [4:09–4:21, 5:45–6:05].

⁶⁰ *Operation Abolition*, [13:10–13:17; 21:40–22:55; 31:00–31:05].

⁶¹ *Operation Abolition*, [22:30–22:39].

⁶² *Operation Abolition*, [25:00–25:10; 23:54–24:40].

The film treats students' tactic of sitting with their hands firmly in their pockets—a stance encouraged by SLATE and designed by CORE to demonstrate peaceful defiance—as dangerous, referring to it as “*so-called* nonviolent resistance.”⁶³ Of course, these nonviolent means of protest are also attributed to the direction of communist leadership. Despite its complete lack of footage showing students inciting violence, *Operation Abolition*'s narration emphasizes the existential threat they posed to American national security, to which HUAC was “part and parcel.”⁶⁴

Operation Abolition centers the argument that communist agitators have targeted and will continue to target young adults, both as soldiers in a war of protest against the American government and as minds in a war of information. Describing Douglas Wachter, the Berkeley sophomore subpoenaed under suspicion of Communist Party membership, as “an agent trained to specialize in youth activities,” the narrative explicitly invokes the perceived susceptibility of students to participate in violent protest and implicitly invokes the perceived susceptibility of students to communist ideology.⁶⁵ Once removed from the “battlefield” of communist agitation, student arrestees, the narrator claims, seemed ashamed and confused at the police station, suddenly disillusioned with the principles that once invigorated their protest.⁶⁶ In this manner, *Operation Abolition* lends itself not only to initiatives to curb freedom of expression but also to accusations of youth indoctrination. Indoctrination, the film argues in its conclusion, is the Communist Party's greatest threat. The film contends that, having fuelled a “pattern of communist revolution and insurrection throughout the world,” the Communist Party had now “chosen the minds of our youth as the number one area for their insidious attack.”⁶⁷ This rhetoric emphasized the same fear that young people were more susceptible to coercion by communist

⁶³ *Operation Abolition*, [23:00–23:40].

⁶⁴ *Operation Abolition*, [5:10–5:45].

⁶⁵ *Operation Abolition*, [9:55–10:03].

⁶⁶ *Operation Abolition*, [28:23–29:00].

⁶⁷ *Operation Abolition*, [29:38–31:15].

subversives that enabled HUAC to target educators, promoting further suspicion of left-wing activism on university campuses.

Having been vilified by both popular media outlets and the federal government's propaganda film, student activists sought external support in deflecting the negative attention *Operation Abolition* had incited and counteracting the narrative it posed. In response to an inundation of protest-supporting organizations' demands, Northern California's branch of the ACLU took on a central role in countering the FBI's propaganda efforts. by using the same footage as *Operation Abolition* to produce *Operation Correction*, imposing its own audio to provide a counter-narrative.⁶⁸

The basic elements of *Operation Correction* were simple rebuttals of *Operation Abolition*'s assertions and fabrications, and its central aim was to provide a counterbalance to the propaganda that was being distributed to television stations, colleges, and high schools across the country. The complicated reality of the City Hall demonstration revealed in *Operation Correction* lends credence to students' claims and casts suspicion on HUAC's innerworkings. *Operation Correction* contextualizes the edited and omitted newsreel footage featured in *Operation Abolition*, drawing attention to the original film's attempts to associate student protesters with communists. *Abolition*'s section on Douglas Wachter, for example, uses sequential footage of Wachter, other subpoenaed witnesses, and student protesters—captured on different days in multiple locations—to establish protesters' "guilt by association" and to imply that Wachter and other witnesses participated in the organization of the demonstration.⁶⁹ In reality, "the students were extremely careful to have nothing to do with the witnesses," wary of the fact that media outlets would likely vilify them on the grounds of their association with

⁶⁸ Besig, Ernest. *Operation Correction*. Quality Information Publishers, 1960.

⁶⁹ *Operation Abolition*, [9:50–12:00]; Besig, *Operation Correction*, [9:10–9:45; 11:45–12:40; 31:38–32:00].

suspected communists.⁷⁰ Much of the footage of resistant witnesses performing acts of protest similar to those of the students, including group chants and singing, was recorded during recesses on Thursday, entirely disconnected from the issue of outside picketing and the escalation of student protest on Friday, May 13.⁷¹ *Operation Correction* maintains its criticism that all parties involved were performing in order to capture headlines, but it also asserts that student protesters acted “with restraint and courage not always matched by their elders” among both the subpoenaed witnesses and the Committee.⁷²

Additionally, *Operation Correction* corrects elements of the timeline leading up to the height of the protest, such as the controversy over “white cards.” The overwhelming majority of seats were designated for passholders, with a maximum of seventy-five members of the public let into a hearing session, contrary to *Operation Abolition*’s insinuation that about three-quarters of the seats were open on a first-come, first-served basis.⁷³ Counter to *Abolition*’s claim that the students were repeatedly warned by a “specially-trained police squadron,” *Correction* clarifies that they were ordinary policemen and that they never warned the protesters as a group of the threat of arrest or the use of fire hoses.⁷⁴ Perhaps most significantly, *Operation Correction* dispels claims that demonstrators were engaging in violence. Not only is there no evidence of anyone jumping barricades or storming the doors to the hearing room, but Robert Meisenbach, who was accused of inciting a riot by attacking an officer, is filmed completely dry on the opposite side of the rotunda when the firehosing broke out, making it impossible for him to have been on the front line of the group of protesters who were hosed down.⁷⁵ In fact, Meisenbach was

⁷⁰ Besig, *Operation Correction*, [8:57–9:30].

⁷¹ *Operation Abolition*, [9:05–9:50, 13:30–19:35; 32:05–37:48]; Besig, *Operation Correction*, [3:50–4:00; 14:46–16:56; 27:27–28:08].

⁷² Besig, *Operation Correction*, [11:00–11:15; 19:55–20:25; 32:05–37:45; 41:06–41:15].

⁷³ Besig, *Operation Correction*, [10:10–11:00]; *Operation Abolition*, [7:33–8:35].

⁷⁴ Besig, *Operation Correction*, [23:22–23:55].

⁷⁵ Besig, *Operation Correction*, [24:55–26:13].

later acquitted based on this evidence and the officer's admission that Meisenbach had not in fact jumped barricades or assaulted him.⁷⁶ While playing up the injuries of police officers, *Operation Abolition* conveniently omitted footage of injured students—some unconscious—laying on the floor of the rotunda and on the ground outside.⁷⁷



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Not only did *Operation Correction* confirm the accounts of student protesters, but its rebuttals of the claims featured in *Operation Abolition* became key to disillusioning its student audience, mobilizing them in opposition to outright American propaganda.⁷⁹

In addition to its simple fact-checks, however, *Operation Correction* directly contended with HUAC's principles and tactics, ultimately advocating for the Committee's abolition.⁸⁰ The ACLU's rebuttals of *Operation Abolition* provided a "concrete example of the irresponsible manner in which HUAC operates," not only by persecuting alleged communists but also by

⁷⁶ Besig, *Operation Correction*, [24:50–25:30].

⁷⁷ Besig, *Operation Correction*, [28:14–28:42]; "Eyewitnesses Exonerate Students."

⁷⁸ A protester, seemingly unconscious, is carried outside by four policemen. *Operation Abolition*, [26:00].

⁷⁹ Harrison, Joshua G. "Operation Correction: The Rhetorical Battle Sparked by Film Footage of the May 1960 Student Protest at San Francisco's City Hall." *American Communist History* 12, no. 2 (August 2013): 137–45.

⁸⁰ Besig, *Operation Correction*, [42:55–43:13].

creating propaganda and inciting outrage in the communities it targeted.⁸¹ *Operation Correction* draws attention to one of HUAC's consistent propaganda tactics: issuing subpoenas to the same uncooperative witnesses over and over. These "hostile" witnesses garnered negative media attention, fueling public contempt for the witnesses and thereby reinforcing the perceived necessity of the Committee.⁸² Like the witnesses themselves, students protesting for "basic American rights and freedoms" were inevitably labelled communists or, in this case, communist "dupes" by the Committee.⁸³ To this end, *Operation Abolition* was "carefully and deliberately designed" to promote this narrative in order to discourage further student protest.⁸⁴ The ACLU analyzes this tactic as HUAC's attempt to discourage dissent in favor of "a silent, submissive, unprotesting America."⁸⁵ The combination of these ACLU criticisms, therefore, acted as de facto advocacy for university students' right or even their responsibility to organize in protest of unjust federal policy.

On Berkeley's campus, rumors regarding the protest and the subsequent release of *Operation Abolition* politicized SLATE and its smaller partner organizations to an unprecedented degree. Although SLATE leaders reasserted their First Amendment platform, the combined media and federal accusations against them superseded their own narrative of the events and undermined their intent. Despite SLATE's fervent rejection of political ideology, partisanship became more relevant to students in the protests' aftermath: the media, public, and federal criticism of student demonstrators as "dupes" of the Communist Party fostered increasingly leftist sentiment among demonstrators, and the perceived success of the protest by some factions cultivated a desire to promote multifaceted political organizations on campus.

⁸¹ Besig, *Operation Correction*, [42:40–42:55].

⁸² Besig, *Operation Correction*, [32:05–37:45].

⁸³ Besig, *Operation Correction*, [1:49–1:58; 40:08–42:09].

⁸⁴ Besig, *Operation Correction*, [41:46–42:09].

⁸⁵ Besig, *Operation Correction*, [2:00–2:15].

The protest's fallout radicalized some of its participants: the following school year, Burton White, one of the sixty-eight arrested at City Hall, founded the Bay Area Student Committee for the Abolition of the House Un-American Activities Committee, which would go on to report on Meisenbach's trial and disrupt future showings of *Operation Abolition*.⁸⁶ Counter to HUAC's intent, the distribution of *Operation Abolition* to high schools and colleges across the United States not only failed to deter participation in protest, but its propagandistic nature sowed student distrust in the Committee and the federal government. The film practically recruited students to organize future protests, and those student organizations modeled themselves after SLATE.⁸⁷ This shift emphasizes the City Hall protest and its legacy—realized in part through *Operation Abolition*—as a pivotal event in the evolution of student protest. The arrests would prove to be a turning point for individual protesters, who “describe it as a pivotal moment, an inflection moment in their lives, where they really kind of recognized... what they were up against and committed to fighting.”⁸⁸ Despite the fact that this protest was now subject to national scrutiny, public opinion was shifting in favor of the protesters. Ultimately, the reception of the film both proved that the new generation was resistant to traditional red-baiting tactics and catalyzed the establishment of new student political organizations on a national scale, making it effectively “HUAC's greatest contribution to its own abolition.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Lenske, “SLATE and the Birth of Student Political Consciousness,” 35; “The Meisenbach Case.” Bay Area Student Committee for the Abolition of the House Un-American Activities Committee, June 1961. Free Speech Movement Archives.

⁸⁷ Myerson, Michael. “Michael Myerson: Free Speech Movement Oral History Project.” Interview by Lisa Rubens. Transcript, 2000. Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 10; Price, Robert. “Robert Price: Free Speech Movement Oral History Project.” Interview by Lisa Rubens. Transcript, 1999. Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2.

⁸⁸ Kamler, Cindy. “Student Activism in SLATE.” Interview by Martin Meeker. Transcript, 2018. Oral History Center, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 27.

⁸⁹ Harrison, “Operation Correction,” 139; Simmons, Jerold. *Operation Abolition: The Campaign to Abolish the House Un-American Activities Committee, 1938–1975*. American Legal and Constitutional History. New York: Garland, 1986, quoted in Paddison, Joshua. “Summers of Worry, Summers of Defiance: San Franciscans for Academic Freedom and Education and the Bay Area Opposition to HUAC, 1959–1960.” *California History* 78, no. 3 (1999): 199.

Mediating the Multiversity: Behind the Administration's Response

The basis on and extent to which the administration opposed the escalation of student protest centers on a single primary figure: Clark Kerr, the former Berkeley chancellor who had become president of the University of California at Berkeley in 1958.⁹⁰ Kerr had earned his PhD in economics from Berkeley in 1939, a degree which he used over the following decade in his work as a labor negotiator and a researcher with the newly established Industrial Relations Research Association at the University of California.⁹¹ In 1952, upon the establishment of the new position of university chancellor, Kerr was jointly appointed to the position by the faculty senate and then-President Robert Sproul, beginning his controversial career as a university administrator. Kerr's concept of the "multiversity" established him as a leading figure in university governance, promoting administrative expansion as the most necessary development to accommodate the changing nature of higher education in the mid-twentieth century.

The multiversity synthesized two dominant university structures—the longstanding English liberal arts model and the Industrial Revolution's German research model—to accommodate the demand for both classical education as well as scientific research and professional training.⁹² Kerr's multiversity focused on providing undergraduates with liberal arts education while providing narrower, research-based education for graduate students.⁹³ This model's focus on liberal undergraduate education became the basis for Kerr's criticism of the expansion of student power over undergraduate education: the diversification of courses and the

⁹⁰ Due to the impacts of COVID-19, source material including Kerr's personal communications is inaccessible; however, the following collections would likely contain materials relevant to this research: Records of the Office of the Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley, 1952–1961, Records of the Office of the Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley, CU-149, University Archives; Clark Kerr Personal and Professional Papers, CU-302, Bancroft Library; University of California (System). Office of the President. Records: Routine Files, CU-5, Series 5, Bancroft Library.

⁹¹ Gade, Marian L., and George Strauss. "Clark Kerr," 2003.

⁹² Kerr, Clark. *The Uses of the University*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, 5–10.

⁹³ Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 13.

“elective system,” he believed, had lowered academic standards and given too much authority over course content to students and professors.⁹⁴ Kerr’s distaste for the expansion of student autonomy was critical to the trajectory of Berkeley’s student protest movements; as students became increasingly politically aware, their demand for political criticism in course content was met with a steady supply of professors inclined to teach it. This shift in course content contributed to the politicization of the university as an institution, entangling it in the “national political controversies of the moment” and creating what Kerr argues was an unnecessary and detrimental conflict with the public as well as the state. In other words, with the escalation of student protest, Kerr was witnessing over the course of his presidency the decline of the very multiversity model he devoted his career to promoting.

University administrators, under Kerr’s model of the multiversity, were “mediators,” weighing the demands of the students, the faculty, the public, and the state with the intent to promote progress, even at the expense of peace between these groups.⁹⁵ The administration was to be a moderate actor, curbing the power of “extremists” to dominate any single group within the university based on the belief that “when the extremists get in control of the students, the faculty, or the trustees with class warfare concepts, then the ‘delicate balance of interests’ becomes an actual war.”⁹⁶ Although the administration could use its authority over students and faculty to build an image acceptable to the public and the state, the university’s relationship to the latter became particularly unstable over the course of the late 1950s and ‘60s, as Kerr identified the federal government and escalating student protest as the “two great new forces of the 1960s.”⁹⁷ With the simultaneous expansion of federal funding for universities and student

⁹⁴ Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 16–17.

⁹⁵ Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 27–29.

⁹⁶ Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 30.

⁹⁷ Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 99–100.

criticism and protest of federal policy, Kerr chose the university's relationship with the state and federal government as the path to progress, even at the expense of peace between the student body and university administration. This multiversity principle drove the cycle of student action, reactionary administrative regulations, student rebellion, and student radicalization that emerged with the proliferation of student political organizations and protest, specifically as seen in the university's response to Berkeley students' role in the 1960 City Hall demonstration.⁹⁸

Institutional Accomplices: Faculty Support for Student Protesters

Over the previous decade, University of California professors had already been clashing with administrators, beginning with the Loyalty Oath and the mass faculty dismissals that resulted from it. California's 1950 Loyalty Oath controversy incited a particularly robust and coordinated resistance movement. Professors dismissed for their unwillingness to sign the Loyalty Oath refused to do so not because of an established history with the Communist Party but rather on principle.⁹⁹ While the administrators responsible for developing and implementing the oath saw it as a relatively inconsequential gesture to reaffirm the university's commitment to anticommunism, faculty identified it as a fundamental threat to academic freedom.¹⁰⁰ After multiple failed attempts by the faculty to veto the oath, thirty-one professors were dismissed for their resistance, and these non-signers went on to challenge and win their case against the university administration in the California Supreme Court.¹⁰¹ The need to develop new tactics of resistance to the Loyalty Oath revealed the relative lack of faculty authority over university policy, establishing a power imbalance between university faculty and administration that would continue to rear its head in campus controversies throughout the 1950s and '60s.

⁹⁸ Franck, "SLATE, Law, and Politics on the Berkeley Campus," 14.

⁹⁹ Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 117–118.

¹⁰⁰ Kerr, Clark. "University of California Crises: Loyalty Oath and Free Speech Movement." Interview by Amelia Fry, 1969. Bancroft Library, 1a–2a.

¹⁰¹ Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 121–123.

The shadow of the Loyalty Oath left a major obstacle for the future of politics on campus: it established an “atmosphere of fear” that had hindered speech and activism for both students and professors throughout the 1950s.¹⁰² Though this fear included faculty’s concerns about academic freedom, it went far beyond the classroom: the anticommunist fervor epitomized by the Loyalty Oath manifested as an institutional trauma that incentivized conformity and criminalized dissent. University of California students publicized their opposition to these anticommunist policies at the time: student socialist and labor organizations voiced considerable opposition, but they faced dismissal and even outright attack on the grounds of their political affiliations.¹⁰³ Not only were left-wing organizations susceptible to accusations of communism and censure, but students were also bound by university-level policies specifically designed to suppress political dissent.

After facing internal pressures brought by the administration in the early 1950s, University of California faculty and teachers had their own conflict with HUAC. In 1959, 110 teachers had been subpoenaed under the Committee’s suspicion that communist subversives had infiltrated the education system at all levels.¹⁰⁴ This move was protested by students as well as teachers’ unions, church organizations, the National Lawyers Guild, and the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU).¹⁰⁵ 300 professors at Berkeley alone signed a statement condemning the actions of the Committee on the grounds of fear mongering, limiting academic freedom, and putting the livelihoods of educators in jeopardy.¹⁰⁶ As a result of these collective efforts, the Committee was forced to cancel its 1959 hearings, driving its opponents to

¹⁰² Franck, “SLATE, Law, and Politics on the Berkeley Campus,” 42; Sosnick, Phyllis. “Editorial: ‘A Burden of Fear.’” *Daily Californian*. March 4, 1954, 145 edition. Bancroft Library.

¹⁰³ Labor Youth League. “McCarthy(Ism)? Its Effect on Campus,” September 1953. Bancroft Library.

¹⁰⁴ “Various Publications,” 12.

¹⁰⁵ “Various Publications,” 13.

¹⁰⁶ “300 Faculty Members Push Protest Petition.” *The Daily Californian*. May 12, 1960. Bancroft Library; “Petition Opposes Acts of House Committee.” *The Daily Californian*. May 11, 1960. Bancroft Library, 1.

continue building local support in the hope of driving HUAC out of the Bay Area permanently.¹⁰⁷ This explicit effort to target educators and the opposition it garnered laid the groundwork for HUAC's return in 1960. Students had gained political awareness as a result of the 1959 hearings' infamy on campus, and faculty from campuses throughout the Bay Area had rapidly established organizations, most notably San Franciscans for Academic Freedom and Education (SAFE), to escalate community opposition to HUAC.¹⁰⁸

When another round of hearings was announced by HUAC in 1960, student associations like SLATE and faculty organizations like SAFE were already part of a "network of resistance" in collaboration with external organizations.¹⁰⁹ Bay Area university faculty enlisted the support of K–12 teachers, with a coalition of educators' associations praising anti-HUAC demonstrations, organizing to raise money for legal counsel for the arrestees, and advocating on behalf of students. Just one day following the City Hall protest, the Executive Council of the California State Federation of Teachers, a branch of AFL-CIO composed of approximately forty teachers' unions, issued a statement committing their fundraising support to arrestees. Berkeley professors Hanan Selvin and John Otwell wasted no time in offering material support by setting up the Bay Area Students Legal Aid Fund and sending out eight thousand donation envelopes, primarily to fellow educators in collaboration with the Federation of Teachers.¹¹⁰ The Aid Fund's Steering Committee also promoted the fund through networks of local businesses and labor

¹⁰⁷ J. Edgar Hoover. "Communist Target: Youth. Communist Infiltration and Agitation Tactics. A Report by J. Edgar Hoover, Director, Illustrating Communist Strategy and Tactics in the Rioting Which Occurred During House Committee on Un-American Activities Hearings, San Francisco, May 12-14, 1960." Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960, 4; "Various Publications," 12–13.

¹⁰⁸ Paddison, "Summers of Worry," 188.

¹⁰⁹ Paddison, "Summers of Worry," 188.

¹¹⁰ Selvin, Hanan C. "Bay Area Students Legal Aid Fund: It Is Not All Over!," June 1960. Box 915, Folder 10, Item 976. Mudd Library, Princeton University; Selvin, Hanan C. Letter to Roger Baldwin, November 17, 1960. Box 915, Folder 10, Item 976. Mudd Library, Princeton University.

unions and pushed the ACLU for an investigation into the arrests and charges of police brutality, contributing to the production of *Operation Correction*.

Faculty members' ideological support of the students extended not only to their civil liberties platform but also to their direct-action organizing and their objection to HUAC's existence. The Federation of Teachers endorsed and "publicly thank[ed] the college students of the Bay Area for their dedication, and for the courage to protest even in the face of brutal and unjustifiable coercion and arrest."¹¹¹ Their statement also reverses the common media narrative of overzealous students embracing vigilantism, asserting that the Committee itself promotes "anarchy and frustration" among protesters. Furthermore, professors at Berkeley, San Francisco State, and other regional institutions formed the Advisory Committee of Bay Area University and College Faculty at the request of their students, advising those involved in the City Hall protest about their arrests and effective organizing practices for future demonstrations.¹¹²

Philip Selznick, professor of sociology at Berkeley, provides a portrait of some of the key roles faculty played in the development of student organizations and the insulation of those organizations from pressures within and outside the university.¹¹³ Selznick, who arrived at Berkeley in 1952 in the wake of the Loyalty Oath controversy, specialized in the sociology of organizations with a focus in political social theory. In 1960, Selznick was drawing attention within the department for his popularity among students as well as his novel examinations of organizational values, leadership, and structure that centered the individual. Under his model, individual members and leaders are dispensable so long as the values of the membership reflect the principles and direction of the organization as a whole. Mike Miller and Peter Franck,

¹¹¹ "California Teachers Praise Picketers." *The Daily Californian*. May 19, 1960. Bancroft Library.

¹¹² "Faculty Group to Aid Students in HUAC Fray." *The Daily Californian*. May 18, 1960. Bancroft Library.

¹¹³ Due to the impacts of COVID-19, further materials that would demonstrate Selznick's ideological commitments and actions at the time are inaccessible; however, archival materials including the Philip Selznick Papers collection are preserved by the Bancroft Library and would likely be relevant to research on his role in the aftermath of the City Hall protests: "Philip Selznick Papers, 1949–2010," 1949–2010. BANC MSS 2013/191. Bancroft Library.

founding members of SLATE, credit Selznick as one of the professors whose theory, influence, and support was vital to both their interest in and execution of organized campus activism.¹¹⁴ A group of aspiring activists, including Miller and Franck, adapted the organizational models they were studying in Selznick's sociology class into the foundations of SLATE, and upon its founding, they invited Selznick to advise them on effective, value-centered political organizing. Following SLATE's co-organized City Hall protests, Selznick became a leading member of the Aid Fund's Steering Committee and used his dominant role within the Academic Senate to advocate for students' right to organize.¹¹⁵

Selznick's ideological support for the students, however, is particularly revealing in contrast with Kerr's theory, and as such, it is representative of principled faculty resistance to the university administration at that time. Reflecting on the late 1950s and early '60s, Selznick connected his role as a faculty supporter for student protesters to his communitarian sociological theory, crediting his experience of the '60s for inspiring his interest in the intersection of law and sociology.¹¹⁶ Beyond the civil liberties arguments that dominated students' self-advocacy, Selznick was critical of the implications of reactionary administrative policy for the university as an institution: "I took the view that the university is an institution that requires a certain atmosphere... [that] is continuous with a communitarian view that would give a lot of emphasis on the distinctive character of institutions and their role in the community."¹¹⁷ Not only were the administration's policies suppressive from the perspective of freedom of speech, but by exploiting their position to promote conservatism for internal gains, administrators were also

¹¹⁴ Franck, "SLATE, Law, and Politics on the Berkeley Campus," 13; Miller, "Establishing SLATE on the Berkeley Campus," 23.

¹¹⁵ "Faculty Group to Aid Students in HUAC Fray"; Selvin, "Bay Area Students Legal Aid Fund," 1960; Selznick, Philip. "An Oral History with Philip Selznick." Interview by Roger Cotterrell. Regional Oral History Office, January 2002, 63.

¹¹⁶ Selznick, "An Oral History with Philip Selznick," 63.

¹¹⁷ Selznick, "An Oral History with Philip Selznick," 63.

complicit in suppressing political change and dissent throughout the local community. The administration, therefore, was acting in opposition to the espoused values of the university. In Kerr's own words, "[since] progress is more important than peace to a university, the effective mediator must, at times, sacrifice peace to progress," yet in the face of an opportunity for progress that had been building for over a decade, the administration acted in the interest of "peace," understood as the maintenance of the political status quo.¹¹⁸

Professors' support of student protesters, both inspiring their activism and defending it, established a temporary structure to insulate students from both internal and external attacks. This united front was critical to preserving outlets for students' political expression while resisting the centrality of administrators to the multiversity structure that Clark Kerr was attempting to implement. As one faculty member expressed, "when [a university's] student government is discouraged from speaking on 'off-campus' issues, education itself is curtailed."¹¹⁹ This understanding directly contends with Kerr's multiversity, framing it as a suppressive structure that prioritized reputation over education. This conflict—students and faculty posing principled opposition to administrators—represents the "network of resistance" as it relates to the university as an institution. Students' network of campus groups, educators' creation of support structures, and their mutual collaboration with external organizations were all critical to advancing students' capacity to organize in the wake of the City Hall protests.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 29.

¹¹⁹ Brewer, Joel. "Directives Protested, Meet with Kerr Set." *The Daily Californian*. May 11, 1960. Bancroft Library.

¹²⁰ Paddison, "Summers of Worry," 188.

Conclusion: “The Silent Generation is No Longer Silent”¹²¹

The university as the primary supporting institution of left-wing activism developed in active opposition to existing administrative structures, rendering it systemically unstable. Although students of the 1960s appropriated the radical potential of the university, their efforts were constrained by its resistance to change as well as its reactionary policies, trying to quell dissent to save its own reputation.

This systemic instability is just one of the many criticisms of the university as an infrastructure not only for left-wing activism but also for political theory broadly. Importantly, academia and the university are exclusionary institutions, reproducing exclusionary change. Both contemporary and historical accounts of the early student New Left credit the GI Bill as an essential precursor for student political engagement, having made higher education accessible to a new class of Americans. In the case of SLATE, this class difference emerges in its conflicts with the Greek system and its use of student government to perform social functions: sorority and fraternity members, who tended to come from upper-class backgrounds, resisted working class students’ aspirations to use student government to promote political initiatives and advocacy efforts. This was the type of diversity emphasized in contemporary *Daily Cal* articles and SLATE records, with little if any attention given to the incredible racial and ethnic disparities in access to student government, let alone admission to the university in the first place. Despite owing their existence and success to the developments in organizing and nonviolent direct demonstration tactics brought about by the civil rights movement, Berkeley’s student political organizations were led by and composed of almost all white, largely male, and predominantly middle-class students.¹²² Despite their early desegregation campaigns and collaboration with

¹²¹ “Various Publications,” 66.

¹²² Franck, “SLATE, Law, and Politics on the Berkeley Campus,” 23–25.

organizations like CORE and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, UC Berkeley's political groups catered to Berkeley's predominantly white student demographics, and its focus on resisting federal anticommunist policy was in part a reflection of their white homogeneity.¹²³

Students who cultivated the political consciousness that would stimulate New Left movements were breaking the boundaries of the "Silent Generation." Their silence was imposed by institutions and social expectations designed to suppress dissent, with the functional consensus achieved during and immediately following WWII idealized as the model for democracy and economic prosperity. Their silence was guaranteed by the lack of institutions promoting activism and the operation of entities like HUAC. The students who rejected those social standards by protesting at San Francisco City Hall drew attention not only to their mission but also to the apathy among young people imposed by the past decade, "an apathy induced in no small part by the relentless effort of the Un-American Activities Committee to silence dissent and extirpate every form of unorthodoxy."¹²⁴ Contemporary journalists who supported this phenomenon insisted that this "irresponsible and frightened apathy" marked a stain on the conscience of the previous generation, and by rebelling against the expectation of passivity, "the kids put the adults to shame."

Early New Left activism was novel in its tactics and goals and generational in its demographics and influences; however, this cannot be mistaken for spontaneity or inconsistency. Student activists were shaped by the history of union leftism and the political theory and

¹²³ Due to the impacts of COVID-19, further materials that would give insight into SLATE and other student groups' demographics, the roles of students of color, and the critical influence of figures and organizations of the civil rights movement are largely inaccessible; however, archival materials including but not limited to the following collections preserved and would likely be relevant to this research: American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California Records; MS 3580; California Historical Society. Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) 1960–69; BANC MSS 86/157 c; carton 5, reel 17–18, folder 16–34; Bancroft Library. Southern Regional Council 1960–71; BANC MSS 86/157 c; carton 6, reel 21, folder 18; Bancroft Library. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Region I, Records, BANC MSS 78/180 c, Bancroft Library.

¹²⁴ "Various Publications," 58.

institutional resistance of their professors. The popular perception of the 1950s as silent and stagnant is only a half-truth: although dissent was suppressed, it was not absent, and “it was those students who nurtured their political concern through the lean years... who provided the organizational outlet for this [new] political awakening.”¹²⁵

Historical accounts often reinforce this half-truth. In histories of the New Left, the 1964 Free Speech Movement appears to be an unprecedented student revolt, and in histories of academia, HUAC appears to have produced tumult met with little resistance. *No Ivory Tower*, despite its rigorous history of the McCarthy era in academia, minimizes the impact of student and faculty defiance, concluding, “When... the hearings and dismissals tapered off, it was not because they encountered resistance but because they were no longer necessary. All was quiet on the academic front.”¹²⁶ After San Francisco police washed student demonstrators down the steps of City Hall, Mayor Christopher barred HUAC from returning to the city, and having been met with such resistance, the Committee ceased traveling outside of Washington DC indefinitely. Perhaps it is true that HUAC felt its hearings were no longer necessary—a claim that assumes they were ever necessary—but it is also true that the massive resistance the Committee faced, including that from student protesters, inhibited its ability to continue causing upheaval in communities like the Bay Area. The “academic front” may have been quieter in the years between the Loyalty Oath controversy and the City Hall protest, but the political underpinnings of professors’ roles within the university were already prompting students to organize. Educators’ own history of resisting HUAC subpoenas and anticommunist administrative policies inspired students’ political awakening and informed their protest and organizational strategies.

¹²⁵ “Various Publications,” 21.

¹²⁶ Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 341.

Schrecker and other historians' analyses of universities' agendas during the mid-twentieth century, however, lend themselves to this understanding of the tensions between faculty, students, and administration. Their accounts address why the university tried so hard to retain its apolitical image: American universities "were becoming increasingly dependent upon and responsive toward the federal government" as a result of the academic-military-industrial complex, and their dependence on federal funding and desire for national prestige outweighed their adherence to principles of academic freedom and integrity.¹²⁷ The modern popular perception of universities as the *natural* partners of social movements, both critical of the status quo and generating new ideas for reform, developed in conflict with the agenda of the midcentury university—the multiversity. Academia was not and is not necessarily a haven for radicalism; in fact, as Kerr observed and maintained through his tenure, "a multiversity is inherently a conservative institution but with radical functions."¹²⁸ Kerr's vision of the administration as a university's "mediator" implies its resistance to dissent, favoring those with "legitimate interest in the status quo."

In 1966, Kerr revised some of the content of his lectures on the multiversity in reaction to the national student protest movement and the precedent set by Berkeley's 1964 Free Speech Movement. At this point, Kerr acknowledges the political significance of the university as an institution, one which "has even been said recently to be the 'paramount institution' in 'post-industrial society.'"¹²⁹ He mourns what he considers the multiversity's decline into factional warfare, citing the university's centrality to cultural and social change as the greatest contributor to its downfall.¹³⁰ Kerr's addendum—especially when paired with his interviews, lectures, and

¹²⁷ Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 340.

¹²⁸ Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 28.

¹²⁹ Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 97.

¹³⁰ Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 97–101.

written works over the following decades—highlights his apparent blindness to what had been developing on campus since the early 1950s. Despite the politicization of student organizations, cycles of rebellion against university regulations targeting those organizations, and a nationally controversial protest that drew the fury of the FBI, the narrative that views the 1964 Free Speech Movement as unprecedented, spontaneous, and unpredictable endures as much in popular memory as it did in Kerr's memory.

The San Francisco City Hall HUAC protest, overshadowed as it is by the Free Speech Movement, demonstrated not only the capacity for students to make national headlines through direct demonstration but also provided the organizational precedent for future student New Left action. Following their publicity for the City Hall demonstration, SLATE went on to publish an exposé on Kerr's conservative policies, catalyze the abolition of the UC's ban on political speakers, and sponsor a long-awaited lecture by Malcolm X, all the while holding pickets and sit-ins in protest of practices including racial discrimination and nuclear testing.¹³¹ It was only after this escalation of student protests and the ensuing series of struggles between SLATE and university administrators that a coalition formed, including SLATE representatives, calling themselves the Free Speech Movement. A year and a half after the dissolution of the FSM, SLATE also formally dissolved, having left a radical yet forgotten legacy of resistance, protest, and resilience. Michael Meyerson, a SLATE leader at the time of the City Hall demonstration, reflected on this phenomenon forty years later: "the result of all this, the Un-American Committee and our arrests at [City Hall]—we had this reputation nationally, so there were like-minded kids on different campuses that wanted to form SLATE-type things."¹³² SLATE's influence on Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which later became nationally (in)famous

¹³¹ SLATE Archives. "Chronology," 2010.

¹³² Myerson, "Michael Myerson: Free Speech Movement Oral History Project," 10.

for its radical protest tactics, also speaks to its enduring legacy. Tom Hayden, founder of SDS and notorious for his leading role in the 1968 Democratic National Convention protests, sought guidance from SLATE back in 1960, shortly following the City Hall demonstration.¹³³ Hayden sought to replicate SLATE at the University of Michigan, where he soon established SDS. SLATE, therefore, was the “impetus for a much bigger movement,” as it was remembered by David Armor, SLATE member and president of the ASUC in 1960. Armor, along with numerous other former SLATE members, credit the university administration with the escalation and proliferation of student organizations and protest movements.

Student political organizations like SLATE were designed to adapt to a conservative status quo, limiting their capacity to form their own ideologies and assert their autonomy, and these constraints were reproduced with the expansion of student political movements. In defiance of these systemic limitations, SLATE, like the organizations it inspired, succeeded in their broadest goal: “to turn the campus on, turn the campus outward.”¹³⁴ Student protest became one of the defining social and cultural themes of the 1960s, and the mobilization of student activism, as well as the university’s role in shaping it, became integral to the materialization of an international social movement: the New Left.

¹³³ Armor, “SLATE Leadership and ASUC President, 1959–1960,” 27; Franck, “SLATE, Law, and Politics on the Berkeley Campus,” 37; Kamler, “Student Activism in SLATE,” 32.

¹³⁴ Franck, “SLATE, Law, and Politics on the Berkeley Campus,” 67.

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