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Kay Boyle / Rachel Cusk: (Neo)Modernist Voices

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'On strike! Shut it down!' An Interview with Helene Whitson on the San Francisco College Strike and Strike Collection

Helene WHITSON

EDITOR'S NOTE

The following interview was initiated at the Kay Boyle Society panel at the American Literature Conference in San Francisco, in 2012, and was conducted for the most part by email between Helene Whitson and Anne Reynes-Delobel from January to March 2013.

Introduction: Dissent by the Bay, Kay Boyle in San Francisco

- ¹ In September 1963, Kay Boyle became a resident of San Francisco in quite dire personal and financial circumstances. With her husband, Joseph von Franckenstein, in the throes of cancer, she had accepted a job teaching creative writing at San Francisco State College. Although this decision was prompted by the need to support her family, she was given full professor status and joined other distinguished writers on the faculty, including Wright Morris, Ray B. West and Mark Harris. In November she set house at 419, Frederick Street, a few blocks from Haight Street.
- ² In San Francisco, Boyle, now in her mid-sixties, launched into political activism and open dissidence. In 1964, she marched with Cesar Chavez's farm workers a hundred fifty miles, from Delano to Modesto. The same year, she founded the U.S. Group 80, the local chapter of Amnesty International, at her house on Frederick Street. A fierce opponent to the American presence in Vietnam, she picketed the Mission Funerary Home where the

remains of the soldiers killed in Vietnam were taken every day, observing a solitary vigil outside the mortuary every morning for several weeks. In October 1967, she was arrested and sentenced to ten days in jail in the Santa Rita Rehabilitation Center, Alameda County, after taking part in a non-violent sit-in outside the Oakland Army Induction Center. Arrested a second time for blocking the entrance of the Oakland Induction Center, she received a forty-five-day sentence which she served at Santa Rita in April 1968. She recounted her time in prison in "Report from Lock-Up."¹ From November 1968 to March 1969, she took part in the five-month strike at San Francisco State College as she joined the protesters' demands for more social justice and equitable education. Her three essays about the strike were published in *The Progressive* and *The Evergreen Review* before being reprinted in 1970 by Grove Press in *The Long Walk at San Francisco State* along with "Seeing the Sight of San Francisco," a short, ironical piece meant to focus public attention on the machinery of the Vietnam War.

- 3 The San Francisco State Strike was the longest academic student education strike in American higher education history. It erupted on November 6, 1968 and was led by the Black Students Union (BSU, founded in 1966) and the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) members who felt that "education from kindergarten to college under the authority of the white community failed to focus on subject matter that was germane to the life experiences of the people in the minority community," as John Bunzel has observed.² The BSU and TWLF issued a list of fifteen strike demands, including the rights of minority students to an education, the formation of a school of Ethnic Studies and the hiring of third world faculty. On November 8, class attendance had dropped by 15%. After a week of confrontation between striking students and the police—who were called in after students marched on the Administration Building—the campus was closed and President Smith asked the faculty and administration to consider plans under which it could be reopened. The faculty did not want to reopen the campus but wanted a meeting to be called to discuss the issues. On November 26, President Smith resigned and Dr. Hayakawa, a noted semanticist, was named Acting President. His first official act was to close the campus. On December 2, it was reopened. Striking students urged students not to attend classes. They positioned a sound truck at the corner of 19th and Holloway avenues. President Hayakawa climbed on top of the truck and disconnected the wires from the speaker. On December 10, Ronald Haughton, a University of Michigan professor and labor arbitrator, was called in to mediate the strike. Mayor Joseph Alioto organized a citizens' committee to help settle the strike. On December 11, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Local 1352, sought strike sanction from the San Francisco Labor Council. More than fifty members set up a picket line around the campus, while waiting for the official strike sanction from the Council. On December 15, the Trustees met with them to hear their grievances. On January 6, 1969, they began their official strike.
- 4 The AFT strike issues directed to the President and Administration of SFSC supported the resolution and implementation of the BSU and TWLF grievances, and were concerned about the protection of Constitutional Rights (they asked that no disciplinary action be taken against striking students or faculty). The main body of their demands concerned personnel decisions (hiring, firing, tenure, promotion, demotion, suspension, lay-off); pay; sick leave; units and class loads assignments for full and part-time faculty; faculty involvement in decisions on academic matters; guidelines and standards for professional perquisites (sabbatical, travel, research leaves); faculty involvement in decisions governing all local administrative matters; and the recovery of faculty positions

bootlegged for administrative purposes. The AFT strike issues directed to the Trustees of the California State Colleges demanded that sufficient funds be provided from current reserves and emergency funds to maintain present faculty positions (and thus prevent the lay-off of 100-125 faculty in the Spring of 1969), gain new positions to replace those given to staff a Black Studies Department and School of Ethnic Studies, and protect the workloads scheduled in many departments for Spring 1969. The AFT issues directed to the Governor (Ronald Reagan) and the Legislature demanded that a special joint committee of the California State Assembly and Senate be appointed to conduct negotiation with the Board of Trustees and the Union and guarantee continual financing for the proposals, and the necessary increase of salary to maintain a qualified faculty at SFSC.

- 5 From January to March, the strike continued with daily—often violent—confrontations on campus and negotiations going on behind the scenes. Kay Boyle, who was a member of the coordinating committee for the Faculty Organization for Responsibility in College Education set up by December 2, 1968 to “insure that education [did] not become the political tool of willful, self-seeking authorities,” participated in the daily marches around campus. She also enrolled in the Faculty Action Committee whose aim it was to protect students as much as possible from the ruthlessness of the Tactical Squad Unit by putting themselves between the police and the students. Like other faculty members, Boyle chose not to conduct her classes on the campus, even when it reopened, meeting them instead at her home. On several photographs and films she can be seen holding signs (one of them reads: “Now is the time! For all good men! To stand with us for a college free from political tyranny! For a college free from racism! Support the faculty strike”) and acting with other faculty members as a buffer between students and police special units so as to prevent “real violence.” On December 2, when President Hayakawa furiously disconnected the wires of the students’ sound truck, she shouted up “Hayakawa, Eichmann!” from the picket line. The President, pointing his finger at her, shot back: “Kay Boyle, you’re fired.” The confrontation led her to bring suit against Dr. Hayakawa with another professor and a student. They won after a long academic senate hearing. In a poem entitled “Testament for my Students, 1968-1969,” she associated the fervor of her students at San Francisco State with her lifelong belief in the bond between poetry and politics, and her own uncompromising quest for the “true meaning of democracy”:

Lodged in the red particles of you hearts
 (Where your fathers reigned for a brief time)
 On the palpitating thrones of auricle left or ventricle right
 Legs crossed, fluently at ease, sat such brothers as Baudelaire,
 Melville, Poe, sometimes Shakespeare, Genet, Rimbaud; or sisters
 Like Dickinson, Brontë, Austin, needlepoint set aside for that afternoon,
 Or Gertrude stein telling you over and over how Americans were doggedly made
 Your fingers, even though broken, crazily beckoned
 These brothers and sisters and others to you, in your lungs
 Enough breath remained to summon them all by name.
 These lines are set down for a reason that’s suddenly gone out of the window
 For I can recall only your faces: Woody Haut, Shawn Wong, Rebhun, Turks, Alvarado
 And how many more. Or I catch now and then the sound of a voice
 From a long way away, saying something like: “Poetry is for the people
 And it should represent the people.” (You can say that again, Woodie)
 Or saying: “If the academic poets want to keep poetry for themselves, then
 They’re no different from the administration of this college
 Which wants to keep education for the select few. I am inclined

To agree with Eldridge Cleaver and the BSU that you are part of the problem
Or else you are part of the solution.”³

- 6 On March 20, 1969, after several tentative agreements, a joint agreement was signed between “representatives of the Third World Liberation Front, the Black Students Union, and the members of the Select Committee concerning the fifteen demands and other issues arising from the student strike at San Francisco State College.” The settlements of the ten demands of the BSU included the creation of a Black Studies Department (September 17, 1968) with full faculty power and the granting of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Black Studies (October 24, 1968); the establishment of a community board to provide community support and encouragement for minority programs; the admission of one hundred twenty-eight Economic Opportunity Program students for the Spring semester 1969; and the appointment of a black administrator to the newly created position of Associate Director of Financial Aid. The settlements of the five demands of the TWLF demands included the establishment of a College of Ethnic Studies (to begin operation in the Fall semester 1969) and additional admission spots for underrepresented students. On March 21, the strike ended.
- 7 Helene Whitson, who had been working as a librarian at San Francisco State College since 1966, began collecting items during the strike, just because “[she] thought they should be collected, not because [she] was assigned to do so.” After two years she began to organize what is now known as the Strike Collection and in 1979 published *Strike! A chronology, bibliography, and list of archival materials concerning the 1968-1969 strike at San Francisco State College*. In 1982, she established the San Francisco Bay Television Archive at SFSU,⁴ a moving image collection presenting sixty years of social history and cultural revolution in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Interview: ‘On strike! Shut it down!’

Anne Reynes: What were you doing on Wednesday, November 6, 1968, in the afternoon?

Helene Whitson: On Wednesday, November 6, 1968, at 2 pm, I had just alighted at 19th Avenue and Holloway Street from the M car, one of San Francisco’s municipal trolleys, and was starting to make my way down the main pathway through the campus, since I was scheduled to work in the library that night. As I started my way down the path, I saw a huge number of people—students and others—coming in my direction. I asked someone what had happened, and the person said the campus had been closed. I made my way down to the Library and checked into my department. The Department Head explained that President Smith had closed the campus, and that the Library was closing. So, I turned around and joined the crowd leaving the campus.

AR: San Francisco was a place of social and political action long before November 6. As a resident of the city and a UC Berkeley student in the early 1960s did you feel that the Bay Area was a privileged locus for a change of mind towards authority and action?

HW: I certainly do now. But, it took me a while at the time to begin to understand and/or comprehend some of the elements that made the Bay Area so very special. Often, when one is in the middle of an event, one cannot see beyond that event to all of the parts. I was a student at the University of California, Berkeley, during the Free Speech Movement, but I did not understand the complexities at the time. I was living in the event. My concerns were more about getting through the huge crowds in Sproul Plaza

to my Library School classes so that I could graduate and get a job, or making my way back through those huge crowds, so that I could go home.

The same is true of the strike. My immediate experiences were with what happened in the Library. During the strike, the Library was still opened and functioning every day. Some of my colleagues chose to go out on strike and walked the picket line every day. There were all sorts of strike-connected events happening in the Library, from students rushing in the front door while being chased by police, students pouring glue into the card catalog, to striking students pulling large numbers of books from the library shelves and piling them on the floor, bomb threats to the Library, etc. Everything was unsettled, and one never knew what to expect from day to day. Some things seemed to happen on a regular basis, *e.g.*, the daily marches from the Speaker's Platform to the Administration Building, but one never knew.

As time passed from the actual experiences of the strike, or even all of the events of the 1960s, I could see more and more how events in the Bay Area fit together as bellwethers of change in the United States and elsewhere. What happened in the San Francisco Bay Area wasn't just a wave of change. It was a tsunami, a giant wave which pushed our area and much of the country out of a familiar social and cultural orbit into something new and unknown.

AR: What was San Francisco State College back then?

HW: When I arrived on the San Francisco State College campus in March 1966, I was a bit surprised. Although I am a native of San Francisco, I had lived in Berkeley since 1962 and had been aware of student activists involved in all sorts of activities, from civil rights to anti-war protests, as well as social changes—the jeans, sandals, and long hair. At San Francisco State, I found well-dressed young men and women going about their academic activities. The student population appeared mostly white, although there certainly were students of color. I felt as if I had been transported back to high school. Academic programs appeared to be thriving, and there was an educational excitement on campus in terms of the curriculum. There were not many courses or programs that addressed the specific needs of students and communities of color. William Barlow and Peter Shapiro address this issue in their book, *An End To Silence*.⁵ On the surface, everything seemed fine to me. I did not know what was bubbling underneath. I worked in the Library and served those who came in with questions. I did not have opportunity to interact with a broad range of faculty members from across the campus.

AR: You seem inclined to believe that the 1968-69 strike was the result of a number of elements coming together at San Francisco State around 1965.

HW: Yes, the strike did result from a number of issues coming together. A major one was that many students of color really wanted and needed specific information that they could learn and take back to their communities, in order to help the members of their various communities. They also felt that the histories of their various communities were being ignored. I think that students of color also felt that the administration and perhaps even some of the faculty members were dismissive of their issues and problems. They wanted to be heard, and many administrators did not take their needs seriously.

1964 was the year of the Civil Rights Act, which shows how close change in the San Francisco Bay Area was to a major piece of American human rights legislation. In 1962-1963, San Francisco State students joined students from the University of

California, Berkeley, and others in going to the south on the Freedom Rides, to protest segregation.

Students of color formed various organizations in which they could discuss the needs of their communities, and then take action, especially programs where students could go back into the community and tutor young people.

Many Bay Area students also were beginning anti-war protests, from protesting military recruitment on campus, to protesting the draft, and to protesting the Vietnam War itself.

There also were students who were politically aware, and they, too, wanted to have their voices heard—members of the Students for a Democratic Society, the Progressive Labor Party, the Young Socialists, as well as conservative groups such as the Young Republicans. The middle-1960s did not have the same constrained economic circumstances that we have today, so I think that politically active students had the choice to spend more time on political activities instead of absolutely having to graduate and get a job—if one were available.

Some students felt that the standard/traditional academic programs and courses did not address the various world problems and issues of the day, so they worked with a group of faculty members to establish the Experimental College, a student-run alternative set of course that explored a variety of topics not covered by the general curriculum, from philosophy to revolution. Some of the courses made campus administrators and those outside the campus rather nervous.

AR: 1965-66 was an important academic year at San Francisco State with the establishment—under the administration of President John Summerskill—of the Experimental College, the Community Involvement Program and the Tutorial Program. Would you go as far as saying that it was the year of the student revolution at SFSC?

HW: 1965-1966 was more like the prequel. As various groups of students and others came together and shared information, I think they began to compare notes to see how their needs were being met. I think many of the groups tried to use established channels to share their issues and grievances, but the various administrators didn't understand the seriousness of their issues or the depth of their frustration. John Summerskill was a psychologist by trade, and was used to working with people and problem solving. But none of the administrators could understand the depth of frustration, the fact that the world and society were changing, and that something in academia had to give in order to address the unsolved issues of the times.

AR: What was the main idea behind the implementation of a Black Studies Department and a School of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State?

HW: Students of color felt that the general campus curriculum did not address their particular needs. Their families paid taxes just like everyone else, and some of those taxes went to support public higher education. But, students of color weren't getting the types of courses they needed. In addition, they wanted to have faculty members from their communities, who had the academic credentials and the knowledge to address their specific needs. They also wanted the subject matter that could address those needs. There were scatterings of courses addressing African-American issues, *e.g.*, Black Psychology, but those courses were scattered throughout different programs, instead of all being together in one department. The same sorts of ideas happened with

other students of color. Having a School/College of Ethnic Studies meant that like programs could be together in one school.

AR: Was the issue of separatism a matter of division between the faculty?

HW: If by separatism you mean that some faculty members might not understand why a particular group of students should have control of a particular curriculum and choose the faculty members who would teach it, yes. Many on campus, as well as around the country and the world did not at that time realize the need of diverse groups to have a setting where members of those groups could study, learn, and discuss specific topics in the context and safety of their own group.

AR: By a strange coincidence, the first salvo of what was to become the San Francisco State strike was fired a year before, on November 6, 1967, when a group of African-American students attacked the editor of the student newspaper *The Daily Gater*, is that correct?

HW: Coincidences, yes. It is rather amazing, isn't it, how events seem to flow, one into the other. The Death of Hippie, the end of the 100,000 person 'invasion' of the Summer of Love, occurred on October 6, 1967. One month later, on November 6, 1967, the first major event occurred in what was a year later, November 6, 1968, to become the first day of the strike. The Gater Incident occurred when a group of African-American students attacked James Vaszko, editor of *The Daily Gater*, the Associated Students-sponsored student newspaper, and Lynn Ludlow, a Journalism professor. Vaszko had written an editorial for the *Gater* in which he asked the Carnegie Corporation not to give grant money for the Black Students Union's proposal for funding classes in Black history and culture. He alleged that the BSU had not really explained what it had done with the Associated Students funds already given to them.

AR: Who was George Murray?

HW: At the time of the strike, George Mason Murray was a graduate student in the English Department, as well as a part time instructor in the same department. He had been hired to teach special introductory English classes for minority students admitted to the college under a special program. He also was the Black Panther Party Minister of Education. He allegedly made remarks at Fresno State College concerning slaves killing the slave masters, referring to the oppressive behavior of American society towards African-Americans, as well as advising African-American students at San Francisco State to bring guns to campus to protect themselves from white administrators. The conservative California State College System Trustees were incensed (and were getting many comments from voters/taxpayers), and forced President Robert Smith to suspend Murray, even though Smith did not want to take that action. The suspension of Murray was the catalyst that brought all of the various issues to the surface. Students wanted Murray reinstated immediately, but Robert Smith could not do so. Activist students called for a strike, which began on that memorable Wednesday, November 6, 1968. Little did anyone on campus know that the campus would be in upheaval for the next five months, until March 21, 1969—the longest strike in American higher education history.

AR: Would you agree with Kay Boyle that Murray was "the main (and oversimplified) issue for the media in its reporting of the growing tension at San Francisco State"⁶?

HW: I would agree that Murray's alleged actions and comments were certainly important issues between September-November 1968, as well as the Trustees' demand to have him fired. I checked my inventory of the Strike Materials Collection and I saw

listed all sorts of memos and directives concerning Murray from the Chancellor's Office to San Francisco State administrators, as well as memos among and between a number of campus groups, including Deans and Department Chairs, Department members, and student organizations.

George Murray's statements and actions were in the public eye, as was the campus. Other campus groups, such as La Raza, or groups of Asian students, as well as political groups, both on the left and the right, also had issues.

AR: In her poems and essays Boyle quotes Stokely Carmichael and Eldridge Cleaver. She also unsuccessfully tried to interview Huey P. Newton, the co-founder of the Black Panther Party, while he was awaiting trial for alleged manslaughter in the Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo. What was the role of the Black Panthers in the strike? What was the effect of their presence on campus?

HW: The Black Panther Party may have figured in some of the philosophical discussions and/or actions of the Black Students Union, but I didn't really notice that much of a presence on campus. George Murray was the Black Panther Minister of Education.

AR: What was the percentage of the striking faculty? Would you agree to say that, unlike Kay Boyle, the great majority of the faculty was an uninterested and uninvolved "Silent Middle"?

HW: I would say perhaps one quarter of the faculty were on strike, if that many. Those who were not were mostly in the 'Silent Middle'. There also was another core of conservative faculty, perhaps 25%. They didn't want to support the strike. A large number of the faculty did not go on strike. Many of those in the middle were not uninterested or uninvolved. They had responsibilities, too—family, food, mortgage. I learned that fact from a week-long 1999 set of interviews with a variety of people involved in the strike. But, the public didn't really hear from the middle-of-the-roader. There really wasn't a place to go for the person who could see merit in both sides of the story. I remember receiving one flyer from the American Federation of Teachers that began, "Dear (fill in your name). This is no time for Byzantine niceties...". The letter was intimidating that if you weren't with the AFT, you were against them. But, as I spoke with colleagues years later, we didn't remember anyone coming around to ask the "Silent Middle" faculty members what they thought. Passions were hot, and often if you didn't agree with someone, you then were not a friend. For years after the strike, and perhaps to this day, some colleagues on different sides of the strike did not speak to each other. Both sides pushed on those faculty members in the middle, but there was nowhere to go.

AR: What were the main issues of the faculty members who decided to join the strike?

HW: There were official reasons for faculty members to strike, as well as non-official. Many faculty members sympathized with the student issues and causes, but sympathies were not an official reason for faculty members to strike. The faculty began their strike on January 6, 1969, after receiving support from the San Francisco Labor Council for a strike based on wages, hours, and working conditions causes, including the lack of binding grievance procedures, the control over personnel decisions, salary and benefits, the number of assigned teaching units and hours, curricular control, conditions for sabbatical and other leaves, and prevention for lay-offs.

AR: What was the attitude of the striking faculty and AFT, Local 1352, toward Governor Reagan and the State of California's legislature?

HW: They were angry and irritated.

AR: Did the demands of the faculty related to funding and working conditions result in significant change?

HW: Significant change? Until the faculty were granted collective bargaining rights, they couldn't really have lasting and significant changes, because the Trustees or others could impose whatever dictates they chose. But, there were some changes. The faculty received new and improved grievance procedures, a nine-unit teaching load, and guarantees against reprisals (although several faculty members had been fired). The faculty did not have collective bargaining rights, and would not have them until 1983.

AR: In "The Long Walk at San Francisco State" Boyle describes the long, exhausting marches around campus. How were those marches organized?

HW: I don't know that much about the actual organization of the picket line. I'm sure some AFT members had had experience on various picket lines. Five of my library colleagues went out on strike, and they were gone all day, every day (for the eight-hour work day), four days a week, walking on the picket lines. Title 5 of the California Education Code required that a California State College employee could not be out for five days or more without a doctor's excuse. My colleagues made sure they were working one day a week. I imagine when not on the picket line, my colleagues were involved in other strike-related activities. Librarians have a different work schedule than most teaching faculty. We are required to be on site five days a week. If a teaching faculty member had a two-day or three-day week, s/he did not have to be on campus every day. Some faculty members would not teach on campus, but did teach their classes at off-campus sites.

In terms of the picketing, I remember most the faculty picket line on 19th Avenue and another one on Holloway. Faculty members would march around in an oblong, often carrying signs. I don't remember them saying 'On strike, shut it down!' The students did that, but I don't remember faculty doing it. I can't imagine that they would have been on the picket line all day long. I imagine they had assigned hours, or stayed as long as they could, before they needed a break. I can't remember if they did go past the actual entrance pathways to the campus, so those wanting to cross the picket lines might have had difficulties or second thoughts. I don't think they were supposed to block those entrances.

AR: What did the student strikers (Black Students Union and Third World Liberation Front) think of the faculty strike?

HW: Many faculty members felt that students had legitimate demands and deserved support. I think the students were both grateful for the support, as well as suspicious. Was the faculty support genuine, or did faculty have their own motives? The students had paved the way in terms of going out on strike first, and I think that some of them felt faculty members were trying to come in for attention after the students had organized the strike and gained administrative and media attention. Also, I think that some of the BSU and TWLF students may have felt that the faculty were using the media attention so that the media also would notice the faculty needs of wages, hours, and working conditions. The groups had common goals—change was needed, but each group—faculty and students—had different ideas what that change should be. Faculty needed change in their working conditions, in their participation in governance, and in their curricular influence. The BSU/TWLF students also wanted curricular change, as

well as having faculty members with particular knowledge of their community histories and their community needs.

AR: In the conclusion of her essay, Boyle sadly observes that when the strike was finally settled in March: "Students and teachers alike were physically and spiritually depleted, and many of us had to borrow money off which to live. And so we had given in, in order to survive, with or without dignity. (...) [W]e could not win. For we were opposing a force that goes far beyond the limits of one college president, one campus, one state. We were opposing a nation's fear, a fear that has brought us to the passing of ruthless judgments on our children, and on the black man who has lived long in the dark basement of our other selves. (...) We call on the police to subdue them, and to protect our possessions, our glass windows, our complacencies, our handful of dust, because we are mortally afraid."⁷ Did you (do you) share this somber view about the outcome of the strike and the American society at large?

HW: I would agree that, by the end of the strike, members of the campus community were physically and emotionally exhausted. For those of us who were on campus all day every day, it was especially depleting. One doesn't realize how much tension there was in just not knowing what was going to happen each day. Many of the campus buildings had TAC Squad (a riot-control unit of the San Francisco police) officers stationed in various places around campus, including the Library and the Administration Building. Those working on campus never knew if students or police were going to rush into the buildings or block hallways. In the Library, we never knew if we would receive anonymous bomb threats, if library books would be pulled off the shelves by the thousands and just piled up on the floors, if someone would pour glue in the card catalog, stop up the plumbing in the rest rooms, or any number of unexpected actions. There also was the mental exhaustion of having to deal with daily stress. And, I think that Kay Boyle was correct about the spiritual depletion in terms of living in a time of idealism and realizing that one's ideals might not come to fruition.

Even though there were a number of us who did not go out on strike doesn't mean that we supported Hayakawa or the administration's point of view. Some members of the campus community simply did not have the ability to go out on strike. Many of our students were and are working students, going to school, working, and supporting a family. The same can be said for faculty, especially young faculty, new on the job. One could offer acknowledgement and verbal support without being 'on the line'.

The strike was a lesson for all of us. It was an educational experience. It certainly taught me a lot about the difference between fictional America—picket fence America—and the reality that I observed and experienced. I became much more aware of the larger universe—the haves and have-nots, the wars, the injustices, hypocrisy, the actual operation of the American government as opposed to how it is supposed to work, described in our national governance documents. Yes, there was a somber view of things at the end of the strike. People had their ideals and fought, and what did they get for all that effort? They had the satisfaction of knowing they stood up for principle. There also were tangible results in some cases.

I don't agree with Kay Boyle that students and faculty gave in. Granted, they couldn't obtain all the results they wanted. They were a small group of people challenging a huge, status quo bureaucracy. A flea may bite an elephant, and what is the result? Every time the elephant has to scratch (or try to scratch) the fleabite, it is reminded that the flea had been there. The San Francisco State strike made the entire world quite aware of issues and of the forces arrayed against change. Awareness is the first step. Shining

spotlights on the problems is the second. One hopes that discussion and change come next. The strike DID make changes in terms of recognizing minority rights in an educational setting. Our thriving School of Ethnic Studies and its various departments are visible examples that set precedents for the country.

Even though everyone was exhausted, there still was a small sense of hope and the possibility for some future change, given a new infusion of energy. The times meant that one still COULD hope. Participants made new alliances and met new people, all working to change the status quo. Those who were less knowledgeable, or who didn't really know anything at all about political boundaries, discovered where some of them were. Members of the San Francisco State community were able to push some of those political boundaries, however slightly.

We struggle still to achieve many of the goals of equality. What may be missing today is that sense of hope. At least, since the strike, I think many Americans have become much more aware of educational inequalities, racism and sexism, our political structures and their boundaries, and knowing what they have to challenge. They also learned not to give up.

AR: When one looks at pictures or films of the strike, one is amazed at the ruthlessness of the riot police, something which is also echoed in Boyle's essays. Was the presence of the police on campus a matter of consensus among the Administration, the Board of Trustees and Governor Reagan?

HW: I was not party to administrative decision-making, but I think that certainly Governor Reagan and the Trustees wanted to show that law and order would prevail. San Francisco State types of actions hadn't really occurred before in the California State College system, so local campus management didn't have that much experience in dealing with them.

The California State Colleges of 1968 were different from the California State Colleges before 1960. The California State College system was created in 1960. Before that time, the colleges were under the direction of the California Department of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Individual campus presidents had more autonomy than after the creation of the system. Individual campus presidents lost that autonomy after 1960.

Presidents Summerskill and Smith were more inclined to work with students to see if the situations could be sorted out through discussion, debate, and even some compromise. Summerskill was a psychologist and Smith was an educator, so they were more used to flexibility and working with people. Summerskill was a supporter of students and their rights, as was Robert Smith. Smith was a kind, thoughtful, philosophical man, interested in civil rights. It is unfortunate that the situation made life difficult for him so that he felt he had no choice but to resign. He did not want to suspend George Murray.

The students at that time were not ready to compromise. I think they felt they had compromised enough in the past, and no one had noticed or listened or cared. Now they wanted firm action. Summerskill and Smith were more willing to wait and see what unfolded, and they were willing to say no to the Trustees and the Governor until they were forced into action. I believe they did not want police on campus until they were forced to call them.

President Hayakawa felt that learning could not take place in a disrupted environment. He wanted to make certain that students were able to come to campus to get the classes they had signed up for and paid for. He was not as willing to compromise, so I think he was in agreement with the Trustees and Governor in the use of police to keep the 'law and order'.

AR: What was the attitude of Mayor Alioto's Citizens' Committee towards the strike? What was the impact of their mediation efforts?

HW: Joseph Alioto was a shrewd politician. He always was looking to protect and enhance his reputation. I think he was genuinely concerned about the strike, first of all because no mayor wants to have his/her city the focus of national/international attention because of strife and riots. All cities love to have tourists leave money in the local economy. He also would have been concerned because San Francisco's taxpayers had to pay for San Francisco police to come on to the campus.

Alioto also was an experienced lawyer, well versed in mediation. When tensions began to mount and could not be solved within the campus, or by the campus and other state authorities, he believed that a varied group of experienced citizens—clergy, labor leaders, and a trained mediator—might be able to help end the crisis.

I think that the Citizens' Committee did help. It certainly provided a group of neutral and somewhat unbiased parties to monitor and guide discussions and lead to solutions. Having a trained mediator involved also helped.

AR: On the whole, what did the strike change at San Francisco State?

HW: In terms of the needs of minority students, the strike made visible throughout the country the needs of minority students and their communities, acknowledging that academia had to address those needs. San Francisco State College began to address some of those needs.

Minority students had a right to have courses that focused on particular aspects of their community needs, as well as courses about the history of their cultures. Such topics were a legitimate part of the academic curriculum.

Those students also had a right to learn from academically qualified, experienced, and knowledgeable members of their communities. Such learning often had better results when concentrated in a particular department, e.g., Black Studies, La Raza Studies, etc. San Francisco State had some minority-focused courses, but they were scattered throughout the entire academic program, instead of solely in one department. Locating all of these related departments in their own school/college helped to strengthen the idea of education helping to solve the special needs of particular groups of students and ultimately, to help in solving some of the issues and problems of the communities from which those students came.

Could the college accede to all of the student demands? No, because the college is not autonomous. As was demonstrated by the Governor and Trustees requiring the use of police, the college was not free either by law or by authority to make certain decisions. Students wanted a certain number of faculty members for the Black Studies Department and for the School of Ethnic Studies, but that was not possible, because of funding, and because of administrators having to look at the academic needs of the whole campus.

Faculty members also could not resolve several of their issues, because the college did not have the authority to do so. Faculty members would have to wait until 1983 for collective bargaining rights.

The specific on-campus solutions included:

- creation of a Black Studies Department, which granted a B.A. degree in Black Studies
- creation of a School of Ethnic Studies, including Black Studies, La Raza, Asian-American Studies, and later, American Indian Studies
- continuing admission of underrepresented students
- funding and staffing of an Economic Opportunity Program
- departure of many faculty and students, who left to go elsewhere
- firing of several faculty members, who were later reinstated
- firing of several staff members, who were not reinstated
- placement of Associated Students' funds into receivership
- continuing tension even today among those who were involved and took positions
- increased involvement of students in campus governance
- amnesty for striking students

- 8 AR: *On November 15, 2011, San Francisco State University students were among the thousands California-wide to protest at public universities. At San Francisco State, the students' main focus was the seemingly never-ending tuition hike in the California State system.⁸ With student fees averaging \$5,500 a year some of them have indeed a huge financial burden to assume. Do you think the struggle for affordable education, one of the main issues of the 1968-69 strike, has failed?*

HW: Failed? No. The struggle still exists. We just have to have the fighters, and that many of those young people have that fighting spirit. Whether we get results depends on student knowledge AND on their age (we do have many re-entry students—men and women who return to school mid-career, or even after retirement—assuming there is space for them). I watched video of that protest and of young students' reactions to President Robert Corrigan as he tried to explain the funding problems to the students. They wouldn't listen. They were certain he was either holding back money or not interested and not fighting the Trustees, the Legislature, or the Governor. He was part of the problem! It was as if I were watching President Robert Smith all over again. I could see the exasperation on Corrigan's face. Many of today's students have no idea of the structure of the United States government, the special interests, partisan political attacks and actions on spending money for ANY public good, specific public unwillingness to pay taxes for public higher education, the siphoning off of funds by special interests, etc. Younger students probably don't even know anything about the California State University system and who can do what, in terms of making the system function. Any of today's California State University presidents certainly wouldn't have the same authority California State College presidents had before 1960.

KNOWLEDGEABLE persons CAN make a difference. Those students have to educate themselves, their friends and relations, their colleagues, their co-workers, etc. to become a pressure group within the state, to begin DEMANDING public funding for higher education. It's rather difficult these days, when many people don't have jobs or they are losing their homes or they don't have enough to eat. Such situations are influenced by large organizations and businesses—Wall Street, large corporations, etc.

Corrigan told the students they had to engage the big bankers, and the students wouldn't even let him finish. He tried to explain who controls the money in this

country, and the students weren't listening. Until they listen and organize and begin pushing back, we'll have worse than the status quo. I think I've seen this sort of situation some time in the not-too-distant-past... somewhere around 1968. In fact, it is much worse, and the disparities between the haves and the have-nots are much larger. The monied interests are much stronger, although perhaps just as invisible. Young people cannot take their assumed freedoms for granted, because if they do, they will lose them. Know thine enemy. Know where the flea can bite. Only if the wretched skeletons of our once-beautiful-and-lauded California public higher education systems are laid bare for all the world to see, can we hope to bring pressure on the money holders, the legislators (who may have distinct relationships with the money holders), and the public and inspire or shame them into doing what is right and necessary. Pressure did work a little bit during the strike. We'll need much more today, because controlling interests are much more entrenched. But, it can be done. Maybe there is a little hope for change.

Note on the organization of the Strike Archive

- 9 The San Francisco State College strike is probably as well documented as any similar occurrence on American college campuses in the 1960's. Publications (books and periodicals), broadsides, flyers, scrapbooks, student newspapers, and other memorabilia of that event are available through Special Collections/Archives. Other materials are located elsewhere in the library.
- 10 Some archival items also have been scanned: <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/strike/2604>, <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/strike/2606>.
- 11 In addition, KQED, KPIX, and other newsfilms concerning the strike is available in the San Francisco Bay Area Television Archives: <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/2582>. Some of that footage also has been scanned.
- 12 During the strike, faculty groups, student groups, off-campus participants, and others inundated the campus with broadsides and leaflets explaining their points of view. Those materials which I received through the campus mail, bought from hawkers at the campus commons or in the student bookstore, or collected on the campus grounds after the day's activities, I put in a special file. As the strike continued, I began to organize the materials I had collected and arrange them. I first asked members of the library staff to donate any materials they had collected, and later requested faculty to contribute their files. Their generosity was so overwhelming that it took me two years to arrange the major portion of the collection. Materials are still being added as faculty or former students donate their files.
- 13 The ephemeral materials in the strike collection were arranged alphabetically by the name of the organization which published them or alphabetically by the name of the person who wrote them. Most of the materials are listed under the name of the organization, e.g., *AMERICAN FEDERATION*, *AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS*, *BLACK STUDENTS UNION*, etc. Those materials under the names of persons are mainly pronouncements by college administrators, e.g., *HAYAKAWA, S. I.*, or state officials, e.g., *DUMKE, GLENN*. I only used a subject category as a heading in a few cases, such as *FACULTY REFERENDUM AND RESOLUTIONS* and *FACULTY STATEMENTS*. As there was such variety

among the material, both in content and form, I found it easiest to put all faculty materials together under one subject heading.

- 14 Within each category, materials are arranged in one of two ways—alphabetically by title, or chronologically by date. The statements of the American Federation of Teachers, for example, seemed to fall easily into an alphabetical arrangement, while the statements of President Hayakawa seemed more appropriate in a chronological arrangement.
- 15 Other parts of the Library have complimentary materials. There are books in both Special Collections and in the Main Collection. There are many periodicals that include articles.
- 16 General information about the strike can be found on the San Francisco State College Strike College webpage: <http://www.library.sfsu.edu/about/collections/strike/>
- 17 For access to the collection, check with Meredith Eliassen, Senior Assistant Librarian/Lecturer, Special Collections at San Francisco State University:
San Francisco State University Library
1630 Holloway Avenue
San Francisco, California 94132
eliassen@sfsu.edu
415-405-4073
415-338-1856
- 18 For access to strike materials in the San Francisco Bay Area Television Archives, check with Alex Cherian, Film Archivist: acherian@sfsu.edu, 415-817-4261
- 19 I also am happy to answer questions:
Helene Whitson
hwhitson@choralarchive.org
510-849-4689

NOTES

1. Kay Boyle, "Report from Lock-Up" in *Four Visions of America* (Erica Jong, Thomas Sanchez, Kay Boyle and Henry Miller), Santa Barbara, Capra Press, 1977. Translated in French by Fabrice Hélon: "Nouvelles de sous les verrous," *Quatre Visions de l'Amérique*, Paris, Buchet/Chastel, 1978.
2. John H. Bunzel, "Black studies at San Francisco State," *The Public Interest*, 13 (Fall, 1968), 22-38.
3. *Collected Poems of Kay Boyle*, Port Townsend, Washington, Copper Canyon Press, 1991, 126.
4. San Francisco Bay Area Television Archive, J. Paul Leonard Library, San Francisco State University, <http://www.library.sfsu.edu/about/collections/sfbatv/index.php?over=1>
5. William Barlow and Peter Shapiro, *An End to Silence: The San Francisco State College Student Movement in the 1960s*, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971.
6. *The Long Walk at San Francisco State and Other Essays*, New York, Grove Press, 1970, 12.
7. *The Long Walk at San Francisco State and Other Essays*, 63.
8. "Protest at San Francisco State University, Nov. 15, 2011" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCpjuGOPS8U>

AUTHOR

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