

COMMENTARY

Policing the People's University: The Precarity of Sanctuary in the California State University System

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FOR MANY COLLEGE CAMPUSES IN THE UNITED STATES, 2017 WAS a tumultuous year. A series of aggressive executive orders, including the rescinding of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and the institution of a variety of so-called Muslim bans, dramatically affected students in the California State University (CSU) system. In Los Angeles, a Cal State LA student was picked up outside her home and spent over a month in immigration detention before being among the lucky to be released; in Hayward, 23 Cal State East Bay students were prevented from visiting countries covered in various versions of the Muslim ban. Amid widespread panic, the authors—current and former faculty at Cal State LA—received an email from the university's president, William Covino, designating the Department of Public Safety as the “liaison between the campus community and state immigration authorities.” Such efforts highlighted the unknown commitments of the campus police

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force and a serious contradiction: What kind of protection can universities provide students in precarious situations when campus police officers are armed agents of racialized violence?

These examples remind us that campus police exist in antithesis to the sanctuary of vulnerable student populations of color, even and especially in public university systems like CSU. To seek a safe haven from a campus police force in this context would be to misunderstand its historical and contemporary function in institutionalizing racial inequality and student suppression when the university's profit or administration is threatened. We must understand these demands as fundamentally a call for true protection for students of color on campuses, from and not by agents of today's racist police state. This article tracks the shifting rhetoric around demands for protection on CSU campuses, in which Black and nonwhite students' demands for protection from city police have sparked expressly racist and aggressive responses from CSU administrators. We focus on two formative moments in that history: First, CSU administrators deployed city police in the mid-1960s to arrest powerful student protests at what is now San Francisco State University. Second, we examine the contested decision in the mid-1970s to arm campus police forces across the CSU system. In each of these contexts, the CSU administration invoked the power of campus police forces precisely to suffocate civil protection for students of color.

Envisioning the People's University and the San Francisco State Strike

The 1960 California Master Plan for Higher Education systematized the governance of higher education and created three distinct tiers of public collegiate education. The architects of the Master Plan aspired for their work to allow democratic access to higher education across California. However, the tiers of institutions were divided through existing and pervasive racial and class disparities, which plagued higher education administration in California for decades to come and were contested in popular student movements at the time throughout the state. In Los Angeles in the 1960s, Mexican American students walked out of high schools across the region demanding a more equal and culturally relevant education. Meanwhile at Cal State LA, the United Mexican American Student Association and the Black Student Association joined forces and protested the misuse of admissions acceptances, which led to revised admissions policies and opened the door for more racial minorities and low-income students. Furthermore, the establishment of the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) across

California universities in 1969 and the establishment of affirmative action across the CSU system in 1973 supported the efforts of students fighting to diversify higher education.

The conflict between the aspirations of a newly diversified student body against administrative consolidation of power set the context for the student and faculty strikes at San Francisco State College (hereafter SF State). Often regarded as the struggle that institutionalized Black and ethnic studies departments in academia, the 1968–1969 student and faculty strikes at SF State had another unacknowledged impact on the vast system of comprehensive universities in California: specifically, the institutionalization of campus police departments in direct response to the demands of Black and nonwhite students for civil protection while on campus. The conflict drew nationwide media attention and the uncharacteristic involvement of rising stars in the California Republican Party. On one side, the Black Students Union, Third World Liberation Front, and (eventually) the American Federation of Teachers joined forces to articulate a multiracial, inclusive vision of US higher education structured to serve marginalized and disenfranchised communities in the post-civil rights urban metropolis (Karagueuzian 1971). On the other side, Governor Ronald Reagan, CSU Chancellor Glenn Dumke, Interim President of SF State and future California Senator S.I. Hayakawa, and the board of trustees of the then-named California State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) seized administrative power to begin the process of institutionalizing armed police officers on campuses.

Discussed in greater detail in a number of other accounts (Karagueuzian 1971, Orrick 1969, Smith et al. 1970), SF State gained historical fame in the 115-day strike and standoff between students and police during the 1968–1969 academic year, during which hundreds of students were arrested and dozens brutalized by the San Francisco Police Department and Tactical Squad. In this heated moment, the board of trustees made no efforts to hide their contempt for student protesters, referring to them in racially charged language as “thugs” with “utter disregard and disrespect for others” (Hart 1967). Acknowledging that the board had thus far taken what he termed a “tolerant” stance, Chairman Donald Hart penned a response to SF State protestors threatening both student and faculty suspension of dissenters. Critically, in this memo, Hart (*ibid.*) emphasizes the imminent need for “law and order” to be preserved on campuses, with “whatever force ... necessary to accomplish this ... used without hesitation.” Hart then encouraged the use of campus police forces as an underutilized tool to be fortified moving forward.

Echoed by language in the chancellor's special report threatening the use of "police and civil authority to protect the personal safety of our constituents and the property of the State,"¹ this and other memos from the board conflated policing with students' freedom: "Vigorous enforcement of campus rules on student conduct is essential to preserve the campus as a place of freedom."² Indeed, administrative actions taken in the year leading up to the full strike—including the use of criminalizing language in reference to protesters—enabled full police involvement and laid the foundation for the broader institutionalization of campus police forces. Once dissenters were framed as thugs engaging in mob rule, the board of trustees gained full rhetorical power to interfere in campus administration at SF State and compel the more regular use of police force.

As Chancellor Dumke's and the board of trustees' stance on the SF State actions were becoming national news, radicalized student groups at SF State led by the mission of the Black Student Union (BSU) intensified their tactics. In November 1968, the BSU declared a strike with the explicit intention of shutting down SF State "by any means necessary," employing powerful language from the Black Panther Party's expanding work at the time (Karagueuzian 1971, 1). In response to the suspension at the insistence of Governor Reagan of an instructor who had been instrumental in organizing for a Black studies department, student strikers effectively shut down the campus with the secret guidance of Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael. During this time, the board of trustees also held a secret meeting in which Governor Reagan expressed his disappointment at the lack of retaliatory action taken by the two presidents who had led SF State in the previous six months. Two days after this meeting, on November 28, 1968, the board of trustees circumvented campus policies and gave the presidency to Dr. S.I. Hayakawa, a politically conservative English professor at SF State who had advocated for "lightening counterattacks" and the immediate suspension of at least 150 students and faculty involved in the strike (Smith et al. 1970, 196, 213). Hayakawa (1968) proclaimed, "I intend to be a son-of-a-bitch," and within two days of his appointment mandated the reopening of campus and declared a state of emergency at SF State in order to expedite punishment procedures (Smith et al. 1970, 217).

Then, citing the need to protect women staff on campus in fear for their personal safety, Hayakawa announced a new regime entirely intolerant to campus dissidence; students and faculty would be swiftly suspended if found engaging in the strike in any form. His public statement demanded more campus security in the immediate future and better-trained campus police

in the long term. Crucially, he employed dramatic rhetoric of fearful women employees juxtaposed against student activists portrayed in racialized tropes of dangerous criminals.

Thus began the bloody standoff between striking students and police officers on campus in possession of batons, firearms, and the uncompromised support of President Hayakawa, the CSU board of trustees, and Governor Reagan. In the first two weeks of December 1968, reports circulated that between 450 and 700 police officers were stationed on the city university campus, arresting a total of 148 students one by one to avoid retaliation against mass arrests (Smith et al. 1970, 226). After the arrests, student protests advanced forward, and in response, police and the San Francisco Tactical Squad chose to aggressively fight back; Smith et al. (ibid., 223) write of the scene filled with “hysterical screaming, scared running, thumping clubs, blood, student and police wrestling on the grass.” The culminating moment of this day was when police officers chased three students up a nearby hill, beating one bloody, fracturing the skull of another, and lacerating the back of the third person’s head (Karagueuzian 1971, 25). By the end of the week, leaders of the Black Panther Party advocated for protesters to arm themselves, the SF State Foundation offered bail loans to arrested students, and the *Los Angeles Times* had printed the SF State demands on the front page (Dreyfuss 1968).

However, in no accounts of the strike does it seem like the BSU and Third World Liberation Front students won against the SF State and CSU administration broadly. The end of the 115-day strike in March of 1969 represented little more than a settlement, encouraged by the incarcerated former Black studies instructor and through a mediation process overseen by a Catholic bishop (Smith et al. 1970, 310). In terms of the needs of students of color on CSU campuses, the strike was a powerful reminder of what student-led resistance looked like, to be understood alongside the East LA high school student walkouts earlier in 1968 and ongoing protests against the Vietnam War. Despite some concessions, administrators primarily used the strike to establish a more tightly enforced public safety regime across the 18 colleges in the now uniformly named CSU system. In a statement to the California State Assembly Committee on Educational Environment, Dumke (1969b) conceded that simply throwing out the “trouble-makers” or “hard core revolutionaries” would not suffice without the legal procedures to do it in a sound manner. Though he included language recognizing the importance of adapting the CSU campus to evolving student needs, Dumke (ibid.) explicitly recommended that campus police forces control through

law and order what constitutes permissible dissent, noting poignantly: “The laws of the land shall be observed on the campus in the same manner that they are observed in the community. The campus is not a sanctuary against the law.”

Campus Police and the Impossibility of Sanctuary

The firm belief that the campus should not provide sanctuary against the law guided discursive efforts to articulate the role of the university and who belongs. In the aftermath of student protests, Dumke (1968) identified the need to prevent “willful minorities” from manipulating academic institutions and establishing a systemwide governance that could adequately respond to a “dynamic, high pressure, volatile environment.” For Dumke (*ibid.*), the public expected “constituted authority to take appropriate disciplinary action” in the face of disruption, even as some student activists seemingly fought to create disorder and not to secure civil rights. Essentially, Dumke and others believed academic institutions could solve social problems but should not become sites of political protest or a haven for student activists, and this neoliberal discourse then justified the systemwide arming of campus police in 1975.

Since the 1965 Watts Rebellion 10 years prior, police had been trained to suppress the mass mobilization of students by arresting youth, community members, and journalists. Some activists were physically beaten without mercy. Local police also employed undercover surveillance tactics under the direction of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Meanwhile, Chancellor Dumke’s perception of police brutality squarely placed the blame on student protestors. More than a dismissal of police brutality, Dumke (1969a) demonstrated concern about students “demanding for themselves the unlimited right to judge which laws they will obey and which they will disobey.” Dumke’s words closely aligned with discourses of law and order that justified police repression of racial minorities. In short, the brutality endured by Black and nonwhite activists was the very purpose of police presence on the campus.

Administrators used their disdain for student activism to not only justify increased policing, but also to question their belonging in spaces of higher education. For example, Hayakawa (1970) heavily criticized Black student activists who sought Black studies courses, Black teachers, and spaces for Black students on campus. He argued that those rallying against discrimination were merely avoiding hard work and fearful of their own “sense of

inadequacy.” He questioned whether they were rejecting white middle-class values, going so far as to ask, “do they find mathematics and chemistry and English grammar too difficult for them?” (ibid.). Hayakawa’s statements demonstrated the extent to which the concerns of students of color were seldom taken seriously and established the university as a space that policed the type of student of color that was acceptable.

By the 1969–1970 school year, the presence of police on campus had become normalized. Amid growing national concerns about a lack of law and order and increase in campus crimes, Dumke (1972) created the position of director of security for the CSU system in January of 1972. The same year, the campus security guards became campus peace officers. More than a name change, peace officers were expected to perform the same basic functions as city and county police officers. Shortly after, Cal State Northridge initiated a pilot project during the 1974–1975 school year aimed at exploring increased policing of CSU campuses.

Armed while on Campus

On September 26, 1975, Chancellor Dumke announced Executive Order 228, which required campus peace officers across the CSU system to be armed while on duty. He required all campus presidents to sufficiently arm police officers so that they are able to “protect themselves and the community from violent actions.”³ Dumke justified this order and cited an 18 percent increase in felonies occurring on campus from 1972 to 1974, whereas local communities experienced a much lower increase of two percent. He added that most of these cases involved “persons from off-campus who had nothing whatever to do with the university or college concerned.”⁴ Championing a defensive mentality, Dumke argued that arming campus police officers was “an absolutely necessary and protective measure to take” so that they could handle any situation that might arise.⁵

Arming campus police was one facet of the creation of a larger policing infrastructure across the CSU system. Simultaneously, campus police officers were also introduced to a communication interface with law enforcement, crime data reporting system, training, and improved recruiting. Although Dumke relied on discourses of law and order to justify his decision through correspondence and media, a central question was the legal responsibility of the university. Campus peace officers of all CSU campuses were placed in the same category of police in the University of California system, California Highway Patrol, and State Police. The Peace Officers Research Association

of California contacted Dumke in support of San Jose State campus security requesting to carry firearms during daylight hours (Bean, n.d.). In their letter, they informed Dumke of an appellate court decision involving the city of Oakland in which firearms were ruled “necessary safety equipment” (ibid.) In addition, the Workers’ Compensation Appeals Board stated an employer—namely the CSU system—could possibly be held liable for not providing a safe place for employees to work. When questioned about his decision, rather than focus on the legal justifications for arming campus police, Dumke focused on an exclusionary stance on who the university is for.

The response to the executive order varied across campuses and proved to be a divisive debate. Some faculty and even campus presidents, such as those at San Diego and Chico State, opposed the fact that this order was handed down without consideration of local campus environments. For them, the executive order was a serious blow to campus autonomy. At Chico State, in a poll conducted with faculty, students, and staff, 58 percent of faculty voted against the arming of campus police compared to 89 percent of students. When asked about whether the local campus community or the chancellor’s office should make this decision, 86 percent of faculty and 96 percent of students felt that decision-making power should lie with the local campus community. Although more staff supported arming campus security, they too felt that the decision should be made locally.⁶ Nonetheless, the chancellor focused on aggregate statistics across the CSU system to justify increased policing and implement centralized policies.

Debates about arming police discursively became arguments about who should be able to access spaces of higher education. Cal State Fresno Chief Bambridge (quoted in Pestorich 1975) argued that “the people off the street, not the students, faculty and staff” were the major cause for concern. He lamented that movements for social justice on college campuses sparked an influx of nonuniversity people on campus stating,

It’s the people off the street, not the students, faculty and staff that cause the biggest problem. Before we were off by ourselves but when all the action was taking place on campus, police saw what potential it had. The campus is a good target. (ibid.)

His reference to civil rights actions made it clear he was most concerned about specific members of the public, mainly activists of color and their supporters. Dumke (1976) also emphasized the need to protect the university from “off-campus elements” in response to concerned letter writers. That

they invoked the public as the justification for policing the public university demonstrates the administrative efforts to produce exclusionary spaces.

Opinion pieces and letters to the chancellor shared a disdain for student activists and a sense that they sought a sanctuary from responsibility. For example, one opinion piece supporting Dumke's executive order argued that the real issue was whether those occupying spaces of higher education were entitled to immunity from the laws that govern the rest of the public. The writer went on to argue that student activists sought to create a "special-privilege island community, a place where they can enjoy the benefits of their splendid immunity while still slipping out of their sanctuary often enough to try to run the surrounding community as well."⁷ Ultimately, correspondence and media discourse highlighted the extent to which CSU administrators aligned themselves with already circulating discourses of law and order.

Students represented the bulk of the opposition and argued against both the lack of individual campus autonomy and ongoing racial tensions between police and communities of color. At San Diego State, the Associated Students Security Committee was responsible for organizing activities protesting the arming of campus police. They began by submitting anti-arming petitions to the board of trustees at their November 24–25 meeting in Los Angeles. They followed that with an informational picket on campus (Choney 1975). Statewide, students had made the connection between the decision to arm campus police and contemporary oppressive policing structures that affected students of color on and off campus. Members of the Young Socialist Alliance argued, "Do cops protect us? Ask those in the Black, Chicano, Asian and Indian communities of San Diego what their 'protectors' have done for them lately. The feeling between cops and the minority communities is mutual. Hatred" (San 1975). This statement linked the fight against police oppression off campus to the experience of students of color on campus. Their protest against armed campus police was as much about the fight for the university as it was about the fight for social equality.

Conclusion: Present-Day Xenophobia and Hostility

The institutionalization of campus police in the CSU system tells a story of the impossibility of sanctuary in publicly funded institutions. Indeed, as CSU Chancellor Glenn Dumke (1969a) proclaimed: "The campus is not a sanctuary against the law." Even with respect to immigration enforcement specifically, Dumke's rhetorical assertion set the standard for future policy. In November 1979, amid the year and a half of political crisis referred to

curtly as the Iran hostage crisis, Dumke issued a report requesting presidents of all CSU campuses to “comply with requests for space, facilities and other assistances consistent with the law which they may receive from the Immigration and Naturalization Service and to work cooperatively with the Service if unique problems arise.”⁸ Students with Iranian citizenship in the CSU system instantly became targets of administrative and state intervention. Today, the legal implications of a sanctuary campus continue to be fraught. Although immigration warrants can only be issued or executed by authorized federal agents, campus police forces are authorized to enforce criminal statutes, some of which in California relate to entry, reentry, registration requirements, and ID theft (Chacón 2009). Additionally, campus police departments have access to the FBI National Crime Information Center database, which includes immigration information (Immigration Response Initiative 2017).

This is a story that can be read as a close examination of the post-civil rights moment in Republican California at the same time that it instructs us on the intended purpose of campus police forces to limit civil protections for students of color. By the time the broader sanctuary movement was established in the United States, the CSUs were armed—literally—to stand in opposition to student protection on campus, if the demands or desires of university administration called for it. In this work, we affirm that campus police exist in antithesis to the sanctuary or civil protection of vulnerable student populations, even and especially in public state university systems like CSU. The perceived tension between who deserved to be on the college campus versus the perceived liabilities of the university over the safety of students writ large became the neoliberal justification for institutionalizing armed campus police forces that could act only against the interests of students of color.

Postscriptum

We first wrote this piece in response to the calls for sanctuary across US cities and college campuses after the rescission of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Today, we are in the midst of a revolutionary moment sparked by the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and countless others at the hands of police just for being Black. Despite an ongoing global pandemic, people across the world have flooded the streets to protest anti-Black racism and police brutality, and cities and school districts are beginning to reimagine public safety by defunding police forces.

Students have been critical to pressuring institutions toward this outcome. For example, University of Minnesota decided to discontinue contracting the Minneapolis Police Department for large events after Student Body President Jael Kerandi wrote administrators an impassioned letter demanding a response within 24 hours. Although many consider this a victory, activists know this is only a first step toward creating and sustaining a supportive society for Black (and thus all) life.

In line with this, university students across the country have continued the fight that CSU students undertook in the 1960s that we detail in this article. At Yale University, Black Students for Disarmament have been organizing against on-campus police brutality and are now pushing for the complete dismantling of campus police. At Cal State LA, calls for defunding the police have amplified as students become aware that the campus police represents a larger line item than the Dreamers Center, Educational Opportunity Program, and the Office for Students with Disabilities combined.

What the history of campus policing that we outline herein lays bare is that campus and city police are not separate institutions. Rather, they have historically functioned to increase the vulnerabilities of the most minoritized communities, including Black and undocumented students in this political moment. Police cannot replace police, and until the structure of power in university governance is overturned, campuses extend the racist mechanisms of surveillance and security that define US politics and culture.

NOTES

1. Chancellor's Special Report, November 30, 1967, Chancellor's Office Collection, California State University, Dominguez Hills Archives and Special Collections.

2. Chancellor's Special Report, 1967.

3. *Executive Order No. 228: Campus Peace Officer Firearms Policy for The California State University and Colleges*, September 26, 1975.

4. "Chancellor Issues Explanation of Arming Order," *Daily Aztec*, October 3, 1975, Chancellor's Office Collection, California State University, Dominguez Hills Archives and Special Collections.

5. "Chancellor Issues Explanation," 1975.

6. Referendum Balloting on Firearms, December 8, 1975, Chancellor's Office Collection, California State University, Dominguez Hills Archives and Special Collections.

7. "Campus Agitators Inflate Non-Issue," *Chico Enterprise-Record*, December 9, 1975, Chancellor's Office Collection, California State University, Dominguez Hills Archives and Special Collections.

8. Report of Chancellor Glenn S. Dumke, Meeting of Trustees, November 28, 1979, Chancellor's Office Collection, California State University, Dominguez Hills Archives and Special Collections.

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