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## The Historic 1968 Struggle Against Columbia University

*How a Black United Front in Harlem, the Students' Afro American Society, and Students for a Democratic Society took on the Columbia University Ruling Class, Mayor John Lindsay, the New York Times, the NYPD—and won!*



Still from Columbia Revolt, 1968 by the Newsreel Collective.

“There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks when decades happen.”

– V.I. Lenin

*This article was written in 2018, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic Columbia struggle. It is dedicated to the “We Are Columbia” movement, the Divest from Death student Encampment at University of Southern California, and the people of Palestine in support of their resistance.*

*I am the director of the Labor/Community Strategy Center in Los Angeles, working in South Central with our Bus Riders Union and Strategy and Soul Social Justice Clubs focusing on*

*the struggle against U.S. and L.A. Genocide against the Black community. Besides my ongoing direct organizing work, I do work to fight for the historical interpretation of history, especially movement history that is now caricatured, slandered, and erased. I am almost finished, after 7 years, with my book, We Made the Revolution with Our Bodies on the Line—the Journey of a CORE, SDS, and UAW Organizer. The lengthy analysis and historical interpretation discussion of the Great Campaigns that were part of the larger war to end U.S. genocide against Black people, the people of Vietnam, and the people of Palestine is an increasingly central part of my work. In talking with the U.S.C. students, who invited me to speak, I was not trying to give them advice on the great work they were doing as much as ideological and historical support to let them know that they were not alone, or inventing history. In fact, they were part of the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist resistance from 1492 to the present. They did as me about some ideas and conclusions out of my own work of more than 50 years that might be helpful to theirs and ours. I presented them with modesty and the constant reassurance that they were the people who best understood how to proceed.*

*It is in this spirit that I hope you read this article.*

*—Eric Mann*

The Columbia University Struggle of 1968, 50 years ago, was in fact a Struggle *against* Columbia University—as a ruling class slumlord, a racist gentrifier against the people of Harlem and Morningside Heights, and a genocidal war criminal carrying out weapons research against the People of Vietnam. It was one of the great miracles of the times that students who had been recruited to support The System turned against it and sided with the Black community and the people of Vietnam.

The Struggle against Columbia was carried out by The Movement—a Black United Front in Harlem including Harlem Tenants Association, Morningsiders United and Harlem CORE, the Students' Afro-American Society and Black Students of Hamilton Hall, Students for a Democratic Society at Columbia, and national groups like Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, SDS, with support from the national civil rights and anti-war movements.

The Movement demanded that the University stop the construction of a gentrifying gymnasium in Morningside Park opposed by the residents of Harlem and Morningside Heights, who called it Gym Crow, and withdraw all institutional ties to the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA)—a Department of Defense think-tank that developed weapons to use against national liberation and communist insurgencies including the people of Vietnam. The Columbia University administration, after a two-month struggle, acceded to the core demands of the struggle—an unequivocal victory for The Movement at the time.

The Columbia Struggle took place in New York, a world city, and Harlem, the national capital of the Black Nation. The Movement gained prestige by taking on such high-profile adversaries on a world stage—the Columbia ruling class, Mayor John Lindsay, the New York Times, and the New York Police Department. Its historic victory was shaped by the protracted nature of the conflict over years culminating in two intense months and the consistent ability of its Black and white leadership to solve the many challenges in the organizing process. The Movement built and sustained a broad united front of Black and white anti-racist, anti-war forces to stay on message against Gym Crow and the Institute for Defense Analyses, keep the heat on the university administrators and trustees, and isolate careerist white students and faculty who tried to capitulate on the core demands in favor of “student power” and a “restructured university”

Through the struggle Black Harlem residents, Black students at Columbia and Barnard College, and white anti-racist anti-war students came to see even more clearly that institutional racism and imperialism were not just things that Columbia did but rather, were the very essence of the university’s role in capitalist society—including training its students to become the future administrators and leaders of the U.S. Empire.

The struggle took place in the revolutionary year of 1968 in which the United States was losing all moral credibility in the world, and that students, teachers, workers, women of all races were in revolt shaped by a world and Third World revolutionary energy and optimism. Like a revolutionary feedback loop, Columbia in turn contributed to the revolutionary energy and power of the world movement against the military and political hegemony of the U.S. Empire. Many students at Columbia and Barnard, armed with the moral imperatives of the time, fighting for the key demands of that campaign, and experiencing mass police repression of their movement came to understand that the struggle against Columbia was also a fight against The System and that in turn raised their determination and morale.

Fifty years ago, I came to Columbia as a national organizer for SDS and worked closely with the SDS chapter leadership for more than a month to build greater support for the struggle and the Six Demands. I was so moved that in August 1968 I wrote a long article going into great and at times minute detail of what I believed were the lessons of Columbia that was published in *Our Generation*, a Canadian radical magazine, and later *The Movement*, a publication of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. I focused on Columbia because it had deeply impacted my views, radicalized me further as all events at the time in history did, and because I believed in analyzing social movements to lay the historical record. Today, I have spent the last 3 months re-studying the Columbia struggle, reading Stefan

Bradley's excellent *Harlem versus Columbia: Black Student Politics in the late 1960s* and every essay in *A Time To Stir*, edited by Paul Cronin, a valuable compendium of Columbia participants, to reground my own historical perspective and re-examine my own role in that struggle. I think *The Struggle Against Columbia* is worth that level of engagement as it provides such a positive model of a Black/white anti-racist, anti-imperialist mass campaigns again on such a large historical stage. And as I have seen clearly by reading so many conflicting interpretations of history—where not surprisingly of course I side with the Black view of that struggle including its many united front voices and dedicated white comrades—there is no such thing as “history” but only the battle over historical interpretation and this article is my contribution to that battle.

### **Key Events in the Struggle Against Columbia**

The Struggle Against Columbia was a confrontation with Columbia University's reactionary role in U.S. society. If the decisive event in the Columbia struggle was the SAS/SDS occupation of Hamilton Hall on April 23, 1968 that its participants will describe in these pages that struggle had deep and long roots in protests against the University.

- 1) Tenants in Harlem and Morningside Heights had a long history of struggle against Columbia the Slumlord throughout the 1960s.
- 2) Black groups and Morningside Heights neighborhood community and tenant activists had been opposing Columbia's building of a gym in Morningside Park in Harlem since it was proposed in 1961.
- 3) Anti-war faculty and students had been protesting Columbia role in weapons research and Columbia's complicity with CIA and military recruiters and U.S. genocide in Vietnam since the mid-1960s.

### *The concepts of moral responsibility and confronting complicity drove the Columbia Struggle*

As the movement against the war in Vietnam gained strength after 1965, organizers researched and challenged the structural connections between U.S. racism and atrocities society and the institutions in which they lived, worked, and studied. People started to say, “my church or university is “complicit” in war crimes and “I don't want be complicit through benefitting from the system or by being passive or silent in the face of injustice.”

Bob Moses, SNCC leader, at the SDS March on Washington Against the Vietnam War in April 1965, said that Vietnam and Mississippi were two fronts in a world movement against racism and colonialism and challenged us to “make the connection between segregation in the South and U.S. defoliation in the Third World.”

In March 1967, Bob Feldman, an SDS researcher, discovered that Columbia was institutionally affiliated with the Institute for Defense Analyses, whose Jason Division of U.S. university faculty members was doing Vietnam War-related research on weapons for the Department of Defense to be used against native peoples in the Third World. Professor Seymour Melman, a prominent anti-nuclear and anti-war figure, exposed the university as an appendage of the military state in which some faculty were involved in the production of nerve gas and 50 percent of the University's budget was paid by the DOD, Atomic Energy Commission and NASA. SDS and anti-war students challenged CIA recruitment on the campus and raised the charge that Columbia was directly involved in crimes against humanity against the people of Vietnam.

On April 1967, at Riverside Church blocks away from Columbia, Dr. Martin Luther King gave his most forceful statement against the U.S. war against the people of Vietnam, *Breaking the Silence*, saying, "There are times when silence is betrayal" and calling the United States, "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world."

By February 1968, Columbia finally began construction of its gymnasium, put a fence around the site and began digging. Black community groups called on Columbia to stop the construction of the gym altogether. H. Rap Brown and other national Black liberation and civil rights leaders joined Harlem groups. Black students at Columbia made the fight against Gym Crow a high-visibility Harlem, city-wide and national campaign.

Still, in the spring of 1968, the demands against Columbia—stopping construction of the Gym and cutting all ties to IDA—were not yet part of a coherent campaign nor was there an agreed-upon tactical plan to even imagine winning those demands.

In an irony of history, only a few days before the April 23, 1968 demonstrations and occupation both SAS and SDS worried that the campus was not ready to move aggressively to confront Columbia on Gym Crow and the IDA before the end of the school year.

As Ray Brown of SAS describes in his essay, "Race and the Specter of Strategic Blindness" in *A Time to Stir*,

"Mark Rudd or Juan Gonzales asked William Sales and myself to attend a meeting to discuss whether there would be any further demonstrations about the Gym before the graduation of 1968...We unanimously agreed that the student body was tired, apathetic, and unlikely to engage further on the issue. There was agreement however that we should give it one final joint rally at the Sundial."

As Brown explains, first the students tried to occupy Low Library but it was locked down. Then someone yelled, "To the Gym" and the Black and white students marched there only to

discover, “a whole in the ground provides a poor prop for a demonstration” and then the group moved to have a “teach-in” that soon became an occupation of Hamilton Hall.

There, the Black and white students understood they were moving from a protest to a serious and possibly protracted occupation of Columbia buildings. Later that day, The Black Students of Hamilton Hall decided they wanted an exclusively Black site to strengthen their own perspective, presence, and independent role in the overall protest and asked the whites to “find other buildings to occupy.” SDS leaders agreed and moved on to occupy Low Memorial Library, Mathematics, Avery, and Fayerweather. The Black and white, SAS and SDS, agreed on what would be called The Six Demands.

1. That the administration grant amnesty for the original ‘IDA 6’ and for all those participating in these demonstrations.
2. That construction off the gymnasium in Morningside Park be terminated immediately.
3. That the university sever all ties with the Institute for Defense Analyses and that President Kirk and Trustee Burden resign their positions on the Executive Committee of that institution immediately.
4. That President Kirk’s ban on indoor demonstrations be dropped.
5. That all future judicial decisions be made by a student-faculty committee.
6. That the university use its good offices to drop charges against all people arrested in demonstrations at the gym site and on campus.

Inside the occupied buildings more than 100 Black and 700 white students practiced self-government, engaged in deep personal conversations and for many, lifetime transformations, and formed the nucleus of a larger and sustained resistance to Columbia administration and support for the Six Demands.

On April 30, at 2:30 in the morning, after a week of mass occupations, the University and New York Mayor Lindsay called in a massive, armed-to-the-teeth, New York Police Department force to forcibly evacuate the students. The Black students, painfully aware of police brutality and with the power of Harlem and the recent urban rebellion surrounding them, negotiated an orderly withdrawal from Hamilton. The white students were met by a police riot in which many people were arrested and beaten. The campus, already supportive of the two major demands to Stop Gym Crow and Stop IDA became even more supportive of the occupiers.

After “the police bust” SAS and SDS called a student/university strike, the university canceled classes for the rest of the year. Now, SAS and SDS built a broad united front to support the Six Demands, went from occupying the buildings to occupying the university,

initiated city-wide demonstrations in support of other social justice causes including support for Harlem and Morningside Heights tenants fighting Columbia as a slumlord, and organized a Liberation School as an alternative to corporate, imperialist education involving as many as 1,000 students participating.

Through a complex process of protest, mobilization, community organizing, counter-institution building, independent media such as Liberation News Service and Harlem and Black publications, and great city-wide and national support The Movement—led by the Harlem Community, SAS, and SDS was able to take on the Columbia ruling class, New York Times, Mayor Lindsay, and the NYPD—and win. Miraculously, Columbia accepted the demands of the Movement. The University agreed to stop all construction of the Gym in Harlem. The University agreed to break all institutional connections with the Institute for Defense Analyses.

### **The Columbia Struggle as a Civil Rights, Black Liberation, and Anti-war Campaign led by the Black community**

The Struggle Against Columbia University in April and May 1968 was a civil rights and anti-war struggle as part of a national and international movement. It was led by a powerful alliance of the Black community nationally and in Harlem, the Students' Afro-American Society (SAS), Black Students of Hamilton Hall, and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)—a national, white, radical, civil rights anti-war student organization and its Columbia-Barnard chapter. It was not a Columbia University and Barnard College-student-centered struggle as much as broad united front inside and outside Columbia against the University as a slumlord, racist gentrifier, and human rights violator.

The year 1968 was a momentous year marked by epochal world events. Three events among many shaped the Columbia struggle.

\* In January 1968 the Vietnamese National Liberation Front carried out the Tet Offensive—a brilliant coordinated attack against South Vietnamese targets and U.S. troops including seizing the U.S. embassy in Saigon—the NLF had a great sense of symbolism. This shocked the world into finally understanding that the struggle led by the National Liberation Front and the Communist Party of Vietnam would win the war—and members of U.S. ruling circles began to discuss how to end it.

\* On March 31, 1968, President Lyndon Johnson announced he would not run for re-election as a reflection of the powerful anti-war sentiments against him and growing anti-war Democratic Party insurgencies against him by Senator Eugene McCarthy with Senator Robert Kennedy also waiting in the wings.

\* On April 4, 1968, in what many believe was an FBI, right-wing plan, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis Tennessee, a year to the day after his passionate anti-Vietnam war speech “Beyond Vietnam—A Time to Break Silence.” His murder led to the largest national outbreak of urban rebellions in Black communities all over the U.S. including in neighboring Harlem. While a few made facile statement like, “Well, that’s the end of non-violence,” in fact King’s assassination was a devastating blow to the Black movement, the U.S. and the world left. We had lost our finest leader who had the unique ability to effectively confront the federal government and the Democratic Party and was killed precisely because of that gift.

On April 23, 1968, the day of the dramatic escalation of the Struggle Against Columbia, the civil rights, Black Liberation, anti-Vietnam war, and Third World movements inside and outside the United States were filled with a sense of outrage, influence, and hope and dreams of major structural victories against “The System” —aka U.S. Imperialism.

*The form and content of Black Leadership of the Struggle Against Columbia University.*

In 1968, Columbia University was a private educational institution with a campus of 8,000 white students at which 100 Black students provided leadership to the surrounding Black community and the white student movement as well.

SDS—the white radical student organization dedicated to opposing the U.S. war against the people of Vietnam was also very supportive of the civil rights and Black Power movements at the time. Many of its members had also been members of CORE and Friends of SNCC even before joining SDS and the Columbia SDS committee on university expansion that Mike Golash headed made the struggle against Gym Crow a high priority. In fact, SDS’s grasp and practice of support for the Black struggle and the people of Harlem dramatically improved through the course of the struggle.

In his important essay “Race and the Specter of Strategic Blindness” in *A Time To Stir*, Ray Brown, then a leader of the SAS and Students of Hamilton Hall argues that “The Black struggle at Columbia was the pivotal act of the Columbia protest not an ancillary code to a New Left uprising.”

As an active participant in that struggle, I understood that at the time and believe that the vast majority of SDS students did as well. Today, sadly, 50 years later, a few white, bitter, ethically impaired, and marginal participants have attacked the Black students for choosing to make Hamilton Hall an all-Black site of occupation. I think that is a re-writing of history in which many white people have moved to the right over their lifetime but they do not speak



for SDS at the time and in some cases are even rejecting their better selves in their present downward spiral.

*The Fight Against Gym Crow: The Black United Front in Harlem with critical white allies defeated Columbia University*

Today in Harlem and Black communities throughout the U.S., including South Central Los Angeles where I presently work and organize, the Black community is under profound attack—dispersed, disoriented, defensive, at times demoralized. Black communities are under constant police occupation and a ruthless market system in which an oppressed, colonized people driven out of the economy can no longer afford to live in their apartments and homes. Harlem, the most prominent Black Community in the United States, once the site of white flight, is now suffering from the invasion of the white gentrifiers.

When I went to work with the Congress of Racial Equality in 1964 in the northeast, including Harlem, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black militants had already coined the slogan, “Urban renewal is Negro removal.” As such, the struggle in 1968 for Black residents of Harlem in alliance with Black students to stand up to a powerful white university to defeat Gym Crow was a significant and symbolic victory on its own terms. It was part of the historic struggle of the times for “Black community control” of schools, police, and public land—reflected in the historic struggles at IS 201 in Harlem and the Black communities of Ocean Hill/Brownsville in Brooklyn.

This movement for Black self-determination was in direct conflict with the University’s view of itself as the white civilizer of native peoples. As Stefan Bradley describes in *Columbia versus Harlem*, University Provost Jacques Barzun saw the Black community as “un-inviting, sinister, abnormal, and dangerous.” Barzun felt that Columbia’s Negro removal programs were necessary to protect the safety of white Columbia faculty “and their wives” and offered a better alternative to the system’s only other solution, “paratroopers in an enemy country”

As Roger Kahn, in *The Battle of Morningside Heights*, explained, “In the 1960s, Columbia, ‘one of the most aggressive landlords on earth,’ bought 115 residential buildings in West Harlem and Morningside Heights, and displaced around 6,800 Single-Room-Occupancy [S.R.O.] tenants and 2,800 apartment tenants, approximately 85 percent of whom were Black and Puerto Rican.”

In 1968, the Ford Foundation gave \$10 million to Columbia for community development which only reinforced their power against the community while liberal Mayor Lindsay made high-sounding statements against removal and gentrification with no commitment to take on the university. On the people’s side, the Architects Renewal Committee in Harlem put forth

radical visions for an alternate future and grassroots groups continued the protests but there was not sufficient muscle to stop the voracious university. Since the capitalists controlled all the financial institutions, the political “power structure,” and the police, and given this ominous balance of forces, what were Black, Puerto Rican, and low-income people of color to do?

In 1961 the Columbia University administration, with the support of the white corporate power structure, went to the New York State legislature and got them to pass a sweetheart bill to cede, that is “rent” two acres of public land in Morningside Park bordering on Harlem to the university to build a gym for its white student body and faculty. At the time, Black elected officials State Senator James L. Watson and Assemblyman Percy Sutton from Harlem supported it hoping the project might bring resources to their constituency.

But, by 1967, as the gym moved towards groundbreaking and construction, the reality of the project hit home—Columbia was going to carve out 2 acres of valuable public park land to build a monument of segregation. Columbia planned to “allow” the community access to 15 percent of the gym facilities and hours of operation and to punctuate its contempt, offered the residents of Harlem a segregated “back door” at a lower level at the bottom of the gym. A growing community resistance called for the cancellation of the project with the brilliant agitational slogan, “Stop Gym Crow,” in reference to the racist Jim Crow segregation laws.

By October 1967 Robert McKay of the West Harlem Tenants Association announced that their members would “throw themselves in front of the bulldozers” if Columbia did not stop its plans to build the gym.

In December 1967 H. Rap Brown, the chair of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, in the ascendant language of Black Power, told a meeting in Harlem, “If they build the first story, blow it up. If they sneak back at night and build three stories, burn it down. If they get 9 stories built, it’s yours. Take it over and maybe we’ll let them in on the weekends.”

The Black students at Columbia, led by the Student Afro-American Society, made the stopping of the gym their priority. As Raymond Brown, observed, “As a group we found ourselves more committed to the Harlem community than Columbia.”

*Black artists, revolutionary intellectuals, civil rights, and Black Liberation organizers helped shape the political and cultural consciousness of Black Students at Columbia*

SAS leaders Ray Brown, who later became a prominent attorney challenging genocide in Africa, and William Sales, who became a prominent Black scholar at Seton Hall University, explained that the Black students had frequent interactions with militant civil rights leaders

Courtland Cox, James Bevel, Pan Africanists Queen Mother Moore and John Henrik Clark, and Black nationalists such as Charles 37X Kenyatta. The group had also met with James Baldwin, the revolutionary writer. As Brown wrote, “Baldwin explained that our presence at an Ivy League University was more important than we ourselves realized and that our complaints about our treatment were minor issues compared to the fact of our presence and the search for connections to the larger issues.”

It is hard for people today to grasp that those influential Black leaders who were the celebrities of our time prioritized work with rank and file and future leaders of grassroots movements and treated us with great respect. In my own experience with CORE and later as an organizer with the Newark Community Union Project, we spent hours listening to Robert Moses, Dave Dennis, Fannie Lou Hamer, Lawrence Guyot, William Kunstler, and other leaders of CORE, SNCC, and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party who spoke with us about organizing and movement strategy. As such, Black students came to understand the significance of their strategic role as a wedge and even weapon against the University’s attacks on their community and were beneficiaries of the great Black thinkers and revolutionary worldview of the times—including its internationalist and Pan-Africanist influences. The fact that Chairman Mao Tse-tung sent a telegram of support for the Black Students of Hamilton Hall is beyond comprehension today.

*Black independence, Black separatism, Black self-determination and the decision to ask the whites to leave Hamilton Hall.*

The Black Students of Hamilton Hall found their own voice, their own independence, their own self-determination, inside Hamilton Hall and created a Black enclave of self-government that was a model for the broader movement.

As Ray Brown, explains, once the Black and white students began the occupation of Hamilton Hall, the Black students began to meet separately upstairs. Ray Brown, Andrew Newton, William Sales, and Cicero Wilson formed the steering committee of Black Students of Hamilton Hall.

With surprising clarity and speed, we decided to embrace the demands to ‘cease the construction of the Gym and end the university’s ties to IDA.’ We also decided to barricade the building and ask the still disorganized white students to leave and seize other buildings on your own. Our victories on IDA and the Gym have long been manifest.

As William Sales explains,

Inside Hamilton Hall we experienced true self-determination. Everything that went on inside the building was a result of decisions we made and had to live with. It was our larger Black

community that literally fed us and stayed the hand of the police for a week. We ironed out disagreements and established workable protocols for maintaining the livability of the building and for democratic decision-making. Our success in remaining together under those circumstances greatly enhanced our mutual self-respect. It created for us a visceral experience of what Black Power and self-determination could be within the larger society.

Contrary to the rewriting of history by a few bitter white liberals, the SDS leadership and supporters, by then 700 strong, and the vast majority of white students fully supported the decision of the Black Students of Hamilton Hall, saw them as “our vanguard” and saw their role in occupying Low Library, Fayerweather, Avery, and Mathematics as their own great achievements. They saw “take over your own buildings” as a constructive challenge to expand the support for the Black community, the Black students, and the people of Vietnam—and had the good sense and good politics to not get caught up in the false and racist consciousness of, of all things, “white rejection by Blacks.”

In my hundreds of conversations with SDS members and allies, I did not sense any resentment of Black self-determination. If anything, I was already hearing war stories among white students about their great experiences in Mathematics, Fayerweather and other buildings, the “commune experience” and how proud they were of SAS and SDS. And this was just after the NYPD free-for-all attack on the white students with more than 700 being beaten and arrested where if they had any anger it was against the police and the university. Then, the questions facing the movement were, “What do we do now? How do we seize the initiative? If we are no longer in the buildings how do we win our demands? How do we get Columbia to stop building the gym and carrying out war crimes against the Vietnamese?”

Ray Brown spoke for the Black students and the best of the white students when he concluded, “Our victories on IDA and the Gym have long been manifest.”

*Building a Black United Front and multi-racial alliance against the gym.*

As one example of the growing power of the Black Power and Black militant forces inside the Black united front, many of the Black Democrats who had initially voted to authorize Columbia’s building of the gym, including Percy Sutton who by then had become Manhattan Borough President, claimed they had been misled by Columbia and went from token to militant opposition—first proposing compromises to make the gym more community friendly and then realizing as did Columbia that the entire project was toxic—and coming out against the gym altogether. Victor Solomon of Harlem CORE said “the racist gym” cannot be built. “Harlem is a colony and the community should impede the progress of “the imperialist.” What is again hard to grasp today is that those radical and revolutionary ideas had great

resonance in the Black community and its advocates—in this case CORE and SNCC knew how to organize not just put out rhetoric.

As William Sales explained, “I knew that Black activists could accept many Communist principles if presented in the context of Third World Liberation. If one used the words of Fanon, Cabral, Mao, or Nkrumah many blacks would endorse your position especially when combined with major references to Black Nationalism.”

Again, the interrelationship with advanced thinkers shaped the clarity and force of the Black students. As William Sale explained, in his essay, “Self-determination and self-respect: Hamilton Hall 50 Years Later,”

Preston Wilcox of the School of Social Work faculty helped Ray Brown and myself avoid the pitfalls of opportunism around the issue of the gymnasium. We initially conceded that community folks and their student allies were too weak to oppose the construction of the gym. Our position was that Columbia could be pressured to increase the size and amenities of the gym structure but it was too late to force them to abandon the notion of two separate gyms within one shell. Preston was adamant, and won us over to the position, that the struggle was against any form of Jim Crow building, not about getting a better deal within an essentially Jim Crow arrangement.

*SDS and white students were critical elements of the Gym victory.*

While SAS and the Black students at Hamilton Hall drove the Gym campaign the aggressive support of SDS was critical. This was a white university in a white society and white students were 90 percent of the student body. Initially, SDS, from my reading of that history and my participation in the struggle, focused more on opposition to the war in Vietnam and ending the University’s role with the CIA, DOD, and the Institute for Defense Analyses. But the power of the Black movement and Harlem made the gym a compelling issue and central to the strike and the campaign.

By April 23, the famous Last Chance Demonstration, as Black and white students marched together, the chants were “let’s take Low Library” followed by “Let’s go the gym site” followed by “Let’s take Hamilton Hall.” In a few hours, the Gym and the IDA were joined together for posterity.

We can be assured that if the Columbia ruling class felt any tension or conflict between the Black and white movements on the core demands of the strike they would have exploited them to its own benefit. In my own work at Columbia, I and other SDS leaders challenged white students who said, after the police raid on campus, “I support the strike, but... I want

student power and a restructured university and do not want to be bound by the two main demands of the campaign—the Gym and IDA.”

We at SDS vehemently replied that The Strike was about racism and war and Columbia’s role in it. For some liberal and careerist whites to say they supported a “strike” but not the demands of the Struggle was in fact supporting Columbia’s racism and imperialism and selling out the people of Harlem and Vietnam. We did not want a “restructured university”—we wanted a specific end to specific racist and imperialist policies and institutional arrangements by the university.

To their credit, the vast majority of white students agreed and rallied behind the powerful moral arguments of the Campaign. By the end of the struggle, when Columbia finally announced it would end the gym project—Gym Crow—once and for all and withdraw from IDA it was a testament to the broad, multi-racial, progressive, radical, and revolutionary united front led by the Black community and students. It was the dialectical relationship between Black ideas, Black community forces, Black students, and a broad and militant support from the white and vast majority of Columbia/Barnard University students and again the revolutionary conditions of 1968 and that period in history that turned the tide for such an unequivocal victory.

William Sales summarizes the spirit and achievements of unity/struggle/unity in Black/white relationships that successfully defeated the Columbia ruling class.

Black students at Hamilton Hall did not split with the agenda of the white students. We endorsed the demands of the strike and never wavered from that position. There were, however, important tactical considerations that could not be ignored. We felt that white students underestimated the violence that the system was capable of directing at its own citizens when challenged. Black students knew this from the beginning. As a small minority of the student body Blacks did not want mere numbers to swallow up their presence in the demonstration. In addition, our smaller numbers and stronger mutual familiarity allowed us to arrive at firm consensus significantly quicker than our white counterparts. Stylistically, the ultra-democracy of SDS with the amorphous, fluctuating white membership in the strike was a protest style we wanted no part of. It appeared to us to be anarchic.

I personally respected the SDS leadership. The need to keep cohesion among their constituency was a monumental task that they should be praised for executing. Their self-sacrifice and adherence to a principled position in support of oppressed people of color, in Harlem as well as Vietnam, commanded our respect. No decision to assume separate tactical headquarters should imply we were not allies in the same fight.

### **From Protest to Strike to Campaign to Victory**

On April 30 after a week of student occupation of the university, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) arrested more than 700 students—500 men and 200 women. The SAS and SDS leaders enjoyed significant popular support but Columbia administration had not agreed to meet their demands. In response to the “police bust” there was even more support for the movement and SAS and SDS proposed and thousands agreed it was time to go on Strike. But what was the tactical plan? What did a strike look like? How could the movement win its demands and sustain the momentum of the occupations? Again, the focus was the Six Demands.

Again, the Six Demands were debated, discussed, and dissected.

#### **The Six Demands as a Definition of Politics**

- 1) That the administration grant amnesty for the original ‘IDA 6’ and for all those participating in these demonstrations.
- 2) That construction of the gymnasium in Morningside Park be terminated immediately.
- 3) That the university sever all ties with the Institute for Defense Analyses and that President Kirk and Trustee Burden resign their positions on the Executive Committee of that institution immediately.
- 4) That President Kirk’s ban on indoor demonstrations be dropped.
- 5) That all future judicial decisions be made by a student-faculty committee.
- 6) That the university use its good offices to drop charges against all people arrested in demonstrations at the gym site and on campus.

When I arrived at Columbia, Mark Rudd, Juan Gonzales, and other SDS leaders explained the challenge. They said that while the Black students of SAS and SDS had won the respect of the majority of the campus they worried that the more militant forces could be isolated as more moderate forces, closely aligned with the University administration, had joined “the strike” but were not committed to stopping the Gym or ending the university’s ties to IDA. We all knew this was history in the making but how could we turn a great protest into a structural victory?

As one example, a new group, “Students for a Restructured University” (which received \$40,000 in funding from the Ford Foundation, whose then-president, McGeorge Bundy, was a former Johnson White House National Security Affairs Advisor) said that SDS was turning people off with talk about “racism and imperialism” and argued that Columbia was in fact a “community of scholars.” They put themselves forward as a competing political force and tried to negotiate a separate and unprincipled peace with the Columbia administration telling

the public that SAS/SDS did not speak for the (white) students. But what about the interests of the people of Harlem and the people of Vietnam—would these privileged white students from an imperialist Ivy League University, some of them with their own imperialist aspirations, sell out the movement? At the time, the answer was “very possibly if not probably if we don’t continue to provide political leadership.”

*The struggle for the political leadership of the Columbia Strike*

SDS and SAS proposed that the strike committee be expanded from 100 Black occupiers and 700 white occupiers. They agreed that the Black students would get 3 delegates, a ratio more than a literal counting of the 100 Black students who occupied Hamilton. Today it seems shocking that SDS did not propose the Black students get at least 7 delegates to the 7 white SDS delegates. The Black students and their Harlem allies were the main force and had provided such great leadership for the campaign—and it was not their fault that because of Columbia’s racism, there were so few Black students. It did not make sense that the white SDS students could out-vote the Blacks let alone the new mass of more moderate white students just joining the movement after the Police Bust. Fortunately, SDS and many other white students did respect and grasp Black leadership and were united on the Six Demands of the movement. It is a credit to the white students and the leadership of SAS and SDS that they did not provoke a split by trying to overrule the Black students who clearly would have left the strike committee under those circumstances.

But now, the SAS/SDS bloc had to worry that their votes and power would be vitiated by the thousands of new people, almost all white, who wanted to join the strike. SDS and SAS made what was in fact a very generous offer. Any additional 70 people who organized themselves into a working group could get one vote on the strike committee providing, of course, that they supported the Six Demands of the Protests since that was of course why people were now going on strike.

The Grad-Facs (Graduate Faculty) put forth the most manipulative demagogic proposal. They thanked SAS and SDS and the Strike committee for agreeing that every additional 70 people who supported “the strike” could get one vote but they argued that the new delegates did not have to agree to support the Six Demands or demand the end to the Gym or IDA. They even accused the Black students and SDS of not being “democratic” by “imposing” these demands on the new white students who had done nothing to support those demands in the first place. So here was another dilemma for the organizers. If we told the new members of the Strike Committee they had no right to mess with the demands but could participate in the discussions of the strike, the right-wing liberals would have split the forces and yes, there was



danger of isolation. If on the other hand, we said that Columbia's role as a slumlord, Gym Crow gentrifier, and human rights violator was "negotiable" then we could be accused of selling out the demands of the Black community and the people of Vietnam in an unprincipled pursuit of popular support of white students at an imperialist university.

Right or wrong, the SDS leadership agreed that the new 70-member groups had some power to debate the demands and we took the responsibility to win those debates. As one example, I was asked by the SDS Columbia chapter leadership to argue for the strike demands to a mass meeting of more than 300 new strike supporters in a large auditorium I think in the Architecture school. I began by challenging the white students to ask themselves whether they believed they had the "right" to vote, as privileged beneficiaries of a racist, imperialist university, as to whether Columbia, in turn, had the "right" to be a slumlord in Harlem, had a right to build Gym Crow, had the "right" to conduct research on mass weapons to kill civilian populations in violation of the Nuremberg Statutes. Many of the white students were Jews, as was I, and I argued they had to grasp the present Holocaust being imposed on Black people in the U.S. and the people of Vietnam—and many of them did. I argued then as I do now that "Human rights and civil rights are not subject to "majority vote" by those who are inflicting or benefitting from those abuses by our government.

That was the moral argument. But, in that they *did* have a "vote" in the strike committee and since we urgently wanted to win those demands against Columbia I had to convince them to support The Six Demands. I argued that they had a moral obligation to vote for human rights and against racism and genocide. I said they had a moral obligation to stop Columbia as a slumlord and war criminal and yes, in the arguments of the times, challenged them to not be "complicit" in those crimes by even passive support. I challenged them to support those in SAS and SDS who had occupied the buildings, stood up to the police, put their bodies on the line, yes, risked their continued student status at the university, and had fought for the people of Harlem and Vietnam "You can't make your support conditional on re-debating the demands of the campaign. You must support the Six Demands of the Campaign fully and enthusiastically with gratitude to those who had the courage to lead." And then I ended with the punch-line, "And think of what a great victory it would be if we were able to force Columbia University to stop construction of the gym and end all ties to the IDA—think of how people in Harlem and Vietnam would appreciate what you did."

Then we had to confront those on the strike committee who argued against our demands for amnesty and the dropping of charges. Again, the pro-Columbia liberals were very clever.

They argued, “Well, if you chose to violate the rules and seize property and fight the police, in the spirit of civil disobedience why aren’t you willing to suffer the consequences?”

We replied that if the University was evicting people from their apartments, building a racist gym, and participating in the murder of civilians part of our political victory was to force them to accept the righteousness of our actions and to stop repression against the movement. If Columbia could bring in the police, get people sent to prison on political charges, suspend and expel students then it would have a chilling effect on future protests which is exactly what the university wanted. We argued, “Do not hide behind civil disobedience which none of us thought we were doing—if a racist court sends Black people to prison for registering to vote who are you to call that justified. And what of the Black students at Columbia who had to fight to just get into this racist institution. Now that they fight for their community you white liberals want to have them face charges, suspension and even expulsion. Why don’t you just go to work for the University and stop pretending to support the strike.”

And while we had to win this debate day by day through this process we won many hundreds of students to not just support the Six Demands but angrily reject the manipulation of the Grad-Facs and later, Students for a Restructured University.

#### *Keeping up the protest movement and building the Liberation University*

So now thousands of students were on strike—but now what did we do with people? Many students agreed to boycott classes but how did we prevent them from just “dropping out” and going back to their dorms or apartments and disappearing? We at the Strike Committee came up with two interrelated ideas—keeping up demonstrations and actions throughout New York, especially in Harlem and building a Liberation School on the Columbia campus to show an alternative university as the revolution right inside the very institution we were shutting down.

As I wrote in 1968 in *The Movement* magazine,

The liberation classes served several functions:

- 1) to give students an example of the type of university Columbia could be under different political conditions.
- 2) To keep students occupied and on campus.
- 3) To provide a unique opportunity to put forth radical critiques and solutions to political questions in courses taught by radicals from around the city, many of who were not “professionals.”
- 4) To provide an opportunity for radicals to show that they could run institutions competently and democratically.

Many students were rapidly changing their opinion of the left, and although still suspicious, were becoming increasingly open to ideas that only a few weeks before they would not have considered. It became clear that while some peoples' ideas change through discussion, *action can provide a political context in which those discussions can be most fruitful*. For many, resistance to radical arguments stems, not from disagreeing with the particular issue being discussed, but from a belief that radicals can't win. *At Columbia, thousands of students came to believe that the left was, or perhaps could be, a real force in this country*. And because of that feeling, they became more open to our politics.

I then went into a detailed discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Liberation School experiment. But in retrospect a lot of that was metaphysical—"wishing" we could have gone from a protest group to a disciplined mass organization with infinite organizational skills and capacity. In reality, the Liberation School was a smashing success—we built an alternative out of whole cloth, figuring it out on the fly. The Liberation School involved more than 1,000 students in classes on the lawn, in classrooms, some academic, some strategic, some interesting, some boring, but all of them real and carried out by radical students and their community supporters. I taught a course on radical movements on the Columbia lawn—the organizer as a radical educator. *We had succeeded beyond any historical expectations.*

*The Unfolding Dialectic of Direct Action—Maintaining the Momentum of the Strike—expanding the scope of protest while the strike continued*

As I wrote in 1968,

After the first bust the momentum of the strike could be described as steadily declining, with frequent exciting incidents temporarily halting that decline. The problem of maintaining cohesiveness and commitment, always a difficult one, was greatly influenced by the nature of how the strike began. The fact that the original defining character of the strike was its tactics continued to influence its development throughout its duration. As a result, the leadership of the strike spent a great deal of energy planning a series of confrontations that would keep the pressure on the administration and maintain a sharp focus on the strike. Considering the great difficulty of such a strategy, they were quite successful.

*Expanding the Action*

“There were many actions: a demonstration against a university ban on outsiders coming into campus, rallies with people from Harlem, a demonstration by the moderates on the strike committee to retest the ban on indoor demonstrations, and most successfully, a joint sit-in with community residents in Morningside Heights who seized a building Columbia owned because of high rents, poor services, and efforts to evict them. Over 140 people were arrested,

about half students and half tenants, and hundreds more were in the street.” Fifty years later this is hard to grasp in its significance—the Black and white students increased their commitment to Harlem and expanded their struggle against the Gym to Columbia as a slumlord and The Movement as an ally of Black and Puerto Rican tenants.

Finally, on May 21, there was the second bust. The police were called in to clear demonstrators protesting the disciplining of six students who participated in an earlier demonstration against I.D.A. Police stormed through campus, clubbing demonstrators and non-demonstrators, students who supported the strike and students who couldn’t care less. Even though they were ordered to clear the campus some police went inside dormitories to beat up students. Students retaliated by throwing cobbled stones ripped up from the walk, and dropping heavy objects off the tops of buildings on to police cars. More than 70 Columbia students arrested inside Hamilton Hall were immediately suspended by the Columbia administration

*The victories of May.*

If the SAS and SDS “only” occupied 6 buildings and put Columbia on the political defensive and won great support in New York the U.S. and the world that would of course been a profound victory. But those forces continued the tactical offensive to win their demands throughout all of May under very difficult conditions. During this period, when the administration played a consciously passive role, momentum was difficult to keep up because, without a visible common enemy, the direction of the strike had to come from within. While the SDS chapter at its core was a small, perhaps 25 to 50-person group, and SAS had also been transformed to Black Students of Hamilton Hall, it was miraculous that those forces who had as late as mid-April worried that their campaign would have little support were now leading a movement of thousands of students and many thousands of Black and Puerto Rican and white liberal/radical supporters.

SAS/SDS who did not have a long history of collaboration were forced by history to work far more closely together and work out contradictions in the process of organizing.

Miraculously, they were able to transform the character of the strike from a mass confrontation to a sustained mass action to a coherent campaign with clear demands, and broad mass support, and were able to isolate the Columbia University administration despite its powerful ruling class allies—or perhaps because of them and the growing mass, moral revulsion against The Establishment.

The leadership of the strike, and the hundreds of others who worked hard on keeping the strike going, were painfully aware of the problems being encountered, and, yet, kept solving

the problems put before them. This was a historic experiment in Mass Politics. SAS, SDS, and The Strike Committee were not a bureaucracy making decisions and implementing them in a vacuum. Both SAS and SDS were a group of people—most of them from 18 to 22 years old, often very new to this level of spotlight and leadership, functioning and functioning effectively in the midst of powerful political currents. *When things were moving, they moved with enormous force and rapidity. When periods of inertia set in, the malaise was overpowering.*

All great revolutionary victories must have some element of good fortune and the benefit of our adversaries far more powerful than us making major mistakes of arrogance, miscalculation, brutality, and carrying out indefensible, immoral policies. Harlem, SAS, SDS, and their allies defeated the Columbia University ruling class, Mayor John Lindsay, the New York Times, and the NYPD. In the end, Columbia University agreed to stop the construction of Gym Crow, agreed to end all institutional relationships with the Institute for Defense Analyses, and even beyond the immediate demands of the campaign but clearly as a result of it, in the fall of 1968 called on the U.S. government to immediately withdraw all U.S. troops from Vietnam.

As I wrote in 1968, with such great hope and optimism,

The Columbia strike more than any other event in our history, has given the radical student movement the belief that we can really change this country. If we are successful, we can use the university as a training ground for the development of organizers who will begin to build that adult movement we talked about so much about.

### **In Praise of radical and revolutionary organizations who challenge the U.S. Empire**

On the 50th anniversary of The Struggle Against Columbia it seems like, “A long time ago in a galaxy far far away.” I am so lucky to have lived through the Great Revolution of The Two Decades of the Sixties because I truly saw a revolution with my own eyes—a revolution that shapes my organizing work today.

During the Sixties, I was given the gift of working with the great organizations and leaders of our times. Millions of our lives were shaped by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Congress of Racial Equality, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Students for a Democratic Society, Young Lords Party, American Indian Movement, and the Black Panther Party.

Our lives and life choices were a product of Third World Revolutions that created the historical events, international conditions, and mass consciousness of the times. Whether people understand it or not, the events of 1968 were on a direct continuum with the Haitian

Revolution of 1794, the Great Slave Revolts that swung the civil war to the North in the 1860s, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Chinese Revolution of 1949, the Cuban revolution of 1959, and the great African revolutions of the Congo and Ghana in 1960 and beyond. The Sixties were profoundly determined by the Great Vietnamese Revolution against French and U.S. Genocide— beginning with opposition to the French invasion of Vietnam in the 1850s, through World War I and World War II, culminating in the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1955 and the U.S. in 1975.

It was also a period shaped by such great revolutionary intellectuals, organizers, and mass leaders who carried out the most revolutionary rejection of White Settler State U.S. colonialism and imperialism and built an entire worldview of counter-hegemonic thought and ideology to delegitimize the system and legitimize The Movement—Black and Third World revolutionary thought.

The image of Black students at Columbia being schooled by the great Black thinkers of the time—James Bevel of SCLC, H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael of SNCC, John Henrik Clark, and James Baldwin is inspiring to me to this day. And their generation was the product of the work of W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, Claudia Jones, William L. Patterson and the great Black communists who wrote *We Charge Genocide—the Crime of the U.S. Government Against the Negro People* and presented it to the United Nations in 1951.

By the 1960s our generation's radicalism took the form of courageous action, making moral choices, confronting individual and group sacrifice, and speaking out with force and conviction against the profound moral depravity of our own government.

At the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Justice, Dr. King called out the United States for duplicity against the Negro people.

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'"

At Berkeley in 1964, Mario Savio gave voice to many students at U.S. universities

There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part! You can't even passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels...upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you've got to make it stop! And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!

By 1966, Muhammad Ali, a great political thinker, gave voice to Black people's opposition to the war in Vietnam,

Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go ten thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights?

No, I am not going ten thousand miles from home to help murder and burn another poor nation simply to continue the domination of white slave masters of the darker people the world over. This is the day when such evils must come to an end. I have been warned that to take such a stand would put my prestige in jeopardy and could cause me to lose millions of dollars which should accrue to me as the champion.

But I have said it once and I will say it again. The real enemy of my people is right here. I will not disgrace my religion, my people or myself by becoming a tool to enslave those who are fighting for their own justice, freedom and equality...

If I thought the war was going to bring freedom and equality to 22 million of my people they wouldn't have to draft me, I'd join tomorrow. But I either have to obey the laws of the land or the laws of Allah. I have nothing to lose by standing up for my beliefs. So, I'll go to jail. We've been in jail for four hundred years.

In the Struggle against Columbia, we felt a profound moral obligation to defend Black people in the U.S., the people of Vietnam and the people of the world from the assaults of our government. We agreed with Dr. King that the United States was "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world." We saw our role, as it is today, to challenge every institution of which we were a part, to develop the most radical and structural demands against the system, and to develop forms of organization and forms of struggle, that is, tactics, to carry out those objectives. We all wanted to be part of organizations and looked to national organizations with local, city-wide, and regional chapters as the best form of challenging the system.

In the Struggle Against Columbia SAS and SDS built the broadest possible united front in support of the Six Demands. We were generous and inclusive but not stupid—we understood our moral responsibilities and would not sell out the cause to which we had dedicated ourselves. We confronted and isolated the cynical corporate liberals among Columbia students and faculty who were little more than proxies for the Columbia administration. The vast majority of students Black and white saw Columbia the slumlord, Columbia the gentrifier, and Columbia the war criminal as a clear morality play in Black and white and saw the Six Demands as a clear Black and white answer. We fought with both innocence and sophistication to defeat powerful ruling class forces.

Today, we are living in a Great Counterrevolution Against the Great Revolution of the Two Decades of the Sixties. The greatest weapon of the counter-revolution is to caricature and

slander the great radical and revolutionary organizations that made history. Many of us, as veterans of those movements, can tell you better than our enemies the many mistakes, errors, even abuses we carried out in the process of fighting for a better world. Inside SDS within months of the great Columbia victory, the Progressive Labor party inside SDS came up with a new line, “All nationalism is reactionary” and began attacking Black studies, Black liberation, Black Panthers and even the Vietnamese Communist Party for exercising self-determination in its negotiations with the U.S. to end the war. Another faction, calling itself the “Revolutionary Youth Movement” in believing it was leading the struggle against P.L. in fact turned on virtually everyone but themselves and played a profoundly destructive role in making SDS into a playground for factions and little else.

Throughout that I stood close to my principles and the politics of the broad united front I had learned in my work in the Civil Rights and Black Liberation movement and what I thought were the “lessons from Columbia” that still guide my work today. I went back to Boston University where along with Craig Kaplan, Don Alper, Nora Tuohey, Sherrie Rabinowitz and other SDS members, and in close alliance with great faculty Howard Zinn and Murray Levin, we built BU SDS into a powerful mass radical organization. We initiated our Anti-military campaign that called in Boston University to prohibit Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) from being on the campus and to end its B.U. Overseas Program in which BU faculty taught at U.S. military bases all over the world. We fought on the side of Chuck Turner and other Boston/Roxbury Black organizers to challenge white trade unions and white construction workers to demand Tufts University hire Blacks in its construction projects, fought for Black Studies, and worked closely with the Boston Black Panthers. We did not attack other SDS members or each other and somehow managed to survive both PL and the RYM people. But SDS did not and by the SDS Convention of July 1969, only a year after the great Columbia victory, SDS had destroyed itself and could not blame the U.S. government for its descent into sectarianism and white chauvinist self-importance. Even at the Convention I and others tried to find a “3rd road” but the idea of SDS as a radical, non-sectarian, mass anti-racist, anti-imperialist organization with deep devotion to real Black people and the real people of Vietnam was an idea whose time has gone.

But most organizations eventually fall of their own weight and their inability to solve their own internal contradictions. For those who really care, the idea is to learn the lessons, look in the mirror, and move on to another form of organization that you believe is more relevant and righteous and get on with the work. That is what I have done my whole life and will continue as long as I live. For me, my fight continues with the racism, imperialism, male supremacy,



and ecological catastrophe of my own government aka U.S. imperialism so I always need an organization in which to do my work.

And those of us today who continue the search for national and international organizations to challenge the U.S. Empire can give no assurances that similar problems will not occur again— for they are in the human condition. Certainly, any effort to bring together 5, 10, 100, let alone 1,000 or 10,000 or more people in one organization will confront old and new challenges.

But what cannot be denied is that we of The Sixties carried out the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and Occupation of the Pentagon. We passed the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, elected Black mayors, fought at Wounded Knee, led anti-war protests among G.I.'s and for a moment, slowed down racist violence and ended the war in Vietnam.

It is not our fault that The System fought back with a vengeance, killed the Black Panthers, used COINTELPRO to infiltrate our organizations, and carried out the greatest re-enslavement of Black people as now 1 million Black people are in prison and millions more face police brutality and occupation every day of their lives. It is The System's Fault that the Democrats under Clinton ended welfare and passed the "anti-terrorist and effective death penalty act." It is the Systems Fault that Barack Obama with 8 years in office stood by as the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act were destroyed as he made weak noises of protest and did nothing to fight for those rights.

It was unimaginable in 1968 that U.S. and world imperialism would pollute the planet with such a vengeance and emit so many greenhouse gases that the future of the world beginning with the very survival of Africa hangs in the balance.

Amid this U.S. Holocaust against the world, it is beyond disgraceful to hear people today, repeating the "lies the system taught me," say with so little investigation, or empathy let alone admiration— "SNCC did this wrong, SDS did that wrong, Black Students at Hamilton Hall did that, Dr. King and Malcolm did not understand this and that, and the Panthers did that." Without radical and revolutionary organizations there is no hope for radical and revolutionary change and Columbia was one of the high points of successful, creative, organization and organizing.

The central problem facing the movement today is an epidemic of anti-communist, anti-left, anti-Black nationalist, anti-Third World, and anti-organizational individualism. The central challenge, that so many of have tried to solve with little success for decades, remains— How can we rebuild a national and international movement against the U.S. government and

imperialism and how can be build a movement, led by Third World people inside and outside the U.S., that anti-racist, anti-imperialist, environmental justice independent and to the left of the Democratic Party.

At Columbia under enormous odds, the Black Liberation Groups of Harlem, SAS, SDS, and all of us thought we were part of a world movement in which we told the system “The whole world is watching.” I am so proud to have been part of that movement where I showed up, did my job, and, as an ally of SAS and an organizer for SDS, helped to stop Gym Crow and force Columbia out of the IDA.

Today, I work with Black and Latino organizers who in turn are working with hundreds of Black and Latina high school students along with veterans of the civil and human rights movement in South L.A., city-wide and nationally. We are calling for an end to U.S. Genocide against the Black Nation, Free Public Transportation, No Police on MTA Buses and Trains, No Police in the Schools, Stop MTA Attacks on Black Passengers, and an end to U.S. drone attacks all over the world.

I am spending even more time reading and writing revolutionary history so that I can help today’s movement grasp the great achievements of our past to once again fight for a hopeful and revolutionary future.

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