



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TOPIC:

UC BERKELEY THIRD WORLD LIBERATION FRONT STRIKE OF 1969

In January 1969, UC Berkeley became the site of a mass student strike organized by the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). The TWLF was a coalition of Black, Chicana, Asian American, and Native American students brought together by their origins in the “Third World”—loosely defined as an idea of formerly colonized peoples united for liberation. After its original founding at San Francisco State College during its own student strike, the UC Berkeley chapter was composed of the African American Student Union, Mexican American Student Confederation, Asian American Political Alliance, and Native American Student Alliance. Together, these students organized a mass strike on campus in pursuit of an autonomous Third World College that would allow for the study and representation of Third World peoples. More broadly, however, the TWLF sought to redefine the university’s role in society by interrogating academia’s disconnection from the community and envisioning university education as a vehicle for revolution rather than just for individual social mobility. For over 10 weeks—the longest student strike in UC Berkeley’s history—the TWLF mobilized and politicized the broader Berkeley student body, wrangled with uncooperative university administrators and violent police, and shut down business-as-usual on campus.

After 10 weeks, the Academic Senate voted to establish a Department of Ethnic Studies. Faced with a partial victory but a dilution of their original demand for an autonomous Third World College, as well as the challenges of nurturing the new department, the TWLF struggled to maintain their momentum and unity, and eventually did not continue on. Over 50 years later, we are left to contend with the strike’s legacy and the unfinished business it left behind.

This committee will begin in January 1969, as the TWLF convenes to determine its strike demands and strategy on the cusp of the strike. As committee progresses, each

delegate will put themselves in the shoes of a TWLF student striker and work with others to respond to strike developments as they emerge, including negotiating with university administration, navigating police presence and brutality, and managing the TWLF's relationship to other students and organizations (as well as relationships with the TWLF itself). The goal of this committee is to strategically plan and execute a successful strike, although the definition of success will undoubtedly be up for debate.

As chairs, our hope for this topic is for delegates to gain a stronger understanding of social movements and what decisions influence their outcomes, as well as for them to critically examine the dynamics of oppression in socio-political institutions, including— but not limited to—the university itself. We also hope that this committee introduces a lesser-known part of UC Berkeley and Bay Area history and helps delegates draw connections between the past, present, and future. Delegates are only a few years younger than the strikers they will be simulating as, and so we hope that they feel inspired to take action against injustice in their own lives, as their predecessors in the movement did. As an extension of this, one of the most valuable lessons of the TWLF strike is the importance of building community in a politically meaningful way. While many crisis-type committees are characterized by how delegates can utilize the portfolio powers of their specific character, the TWLF is distinct in that delegates' characters are simply college students—without many resources at their disposal on their own, but a force to be reckoned with as a collective.

During the research process, some questions to consider include: What historical and ideological developments led to the formation of the TWLF and the strike? How did the student groups in the TWLF build solidarity and navigate collective decision-making? What was the role of the police and law enforcement in the strike? What were the difficulties and successes in negotiating with the university? To what extent was the settlement of the strike a success or not, and how can we balance accepting the gains that were made versus the demands that remained unfulfilled? What has been the legacy of the TWLF since 1969, and what relevance does it still have today? What should an education by and for Third World peoples look like today, and what role does the university play in revolutionary change and society as a whole? In the process, it may also be useful to compare the TWLF strike at Berkeley with other college campus activism or social movements throughout history. Finally, we encourage you to seek out a variety of sources to inform your research beyond traditional “academic” sources, including archival sources, oral histories, and community-sourced materials. The TWLF is a testament to the fact that knowledge resides not just in the classroom, but in the ordinary and extraordinary all around us, and by making that a practice in our own lives, we can help that legacy live on.