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Fear of an educated working class

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Black and Puerto Rican students and community members march to demand open admissions at New York's City College 1969.

Former U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer didn't have to worry about student loans when she graduated from Brooklyn College in 1962. Whites then comprised over 90% of the students in the City University of New York system. Nobody had to spend a dime on tuition.

By 2019, [Asian, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students](#) accounted for 73% of the students in CUNY's four-year colleges and 85% in CUNY's community colleges. But

CUNY isn't free anymore.

[Current tuition](#) is \$6,930 per year for the four-year colleges and \$4,800 per year in the community colleges. This doesn't include over \$200 in student fees or the cost of books and supplies.

The imposition of expensive tuition on the much more diverse student body is racism.

Black and Latinx students accounted for 40% of New York City's high school graduates in 1969. Yet CUNY's student body was still 91% white.

The same year, a student strike demanded open admissions to CUNY for all New York City high school graduates. It was won in 1970.

One of the fighters for open admissions was the late Tom Soto. He was later invited to come to Attica by the prisoners who would be massacred by Gov. Nelson Rockefeller.

Open admissions benefited everybody. The number of first-time students almost doubled from 19,939 in 1969 to 38,256 in 1972.

Black students increased 2.7 times from 16,529 to 44,031. Latinx students almost tripled, going from 4,723 to 13,563.

The number of white students also rose by 18%, going from 106,523 in 1968 to 125,804 in 1972. Thousands of more white students were able to attend college [because of open admissions](#).

When Asian, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people move forward, so do all poor and working people.

Illiteracy is preferable to the rich

The wealthy and powerful hated open admissions. Just the idea that poor people could attend college offended them.

“We are in danger of producing an educated proletariat ... that’s dynamite,” moaned Roger Freeman in 1970. Freeman was an advisor to then-Gov. Ronald Reagan of California. The term “proletariat” refers to the working class.

“We have to be selective on who we allow [to go to college],” [said Freeman](#). Reagan and Freeman were outraged by the struggles of college students against racism and war in the 1960s.

On May Day, 1970, President Richard Nixon called these students “bums.” Three days later, four Kent State University students were killed by the Ohio National Guard. On May 15, 1970, two Black students at Jackson State College (now Jackson State University) in Mississippi were killed by police.

The longest fight was the 1968-69 student strike at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University).

It won Asian, Black, Indigenous and Latinx study programs. Among the strike leaders were the future actor Danny Glover and future International Longshore and Warehouse Union officer Clarence Thomas.

Freeman’s sentiments were in tune with the Anglican Bishop Leonard Beecher’s 1949 report about education in the British colony of Kenya. Beecher wrote that “illiterates with the right attitude to manual labor are preferable to products of the schools.”

There were only three high schools for Africans in Kenya at the time, which admitted just 100 students annually.

Wall Street got its chance to gut open admissions and impose tuition for CUNY

students during the 1975 “fiscal crisis” in New York City.

This was a hold-up of over 7 million people by the banksters who demanded 50,000 city workers be fired. Among them were thousands of teachers.

The passing of California’s Proposition 13 in a 1978 referendum [gutted funding for education and public services](#) in the Golden State. While California residents paid a \$300 yearly fee to attend the University of California at Berkeley in 1968, the tuition is now \$15,000.

In contrast, all education in socialist Cuba is free.

Also helping to drive poorer students out of college have been the attacks on affirmative action programs. California’s Proposition 209, which passed in 1996, banned these attempts to promote equality.

Black student enrollment reached 8% of the freshman classes in the California State University system in 1997. By 2018, [it dropped to just 4%](#).

Private schools are worse. [Just 1% of the students](#) at Caltech are Black.

Thirty-nine lashes for teaching

Slave masters considered teaching enslaved Africans to read and write to be dangerous. If an enslaved person was convicted of teaching another enslaved African to read in North Carolina, they would be [whipped 39 times](#).

Black people in the United States fought to build schools. Peter Humphries Clark, a co-worker of Frederick Douglass, was principal of Cincinnati’s Colored High School.

Clark was a socialist who [spoke to striking railroad workers](#) in 1877. “The miserable condition into which society has fallen has but one remedy, and that is to be found in socialism,” said Clark.

The struggle for free public education was connected to the abolitionist movement. Thaddeus Stevens fought for public schools at the 1837-38 Pennsylvania constitutional convention.

Stevens later led the anti-slavery forces in Congress. He demanded land and freedom for Black people.

Following the U.S. Civil War, it was South Carolina's Reconstruction government—known as the “Black Parliament”—that established the state's first public school system.

Capitalists need workers to have skills, yet they fear an educated working class. They want college to be reserved for “their kind.”

The wealthy also don't want anyone else helping to educate poor and working people. The FBI hounded the labor schools operated by the Communist Party.

We agree that an educated proletariat is dynamite. All education should be free.

We look forward to helping to organize the coming social explosion that will get rid of capitalism forever.

