

# College protests pick up speed as students realize new power

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.30.15

Word Count **867**



Several hundred students begin their occupation of the Arthur G. Coons Administrative Center at Occidental College in Los Angeles' Eagle Rock neighborhood on Nov. 16, 2015. Occidental College students joined with the Black Student Alliance to protest a lack of diversity and said they would occupy the building until Nov. 20. Photo: Mark Boster/Los Angeles Times/TNS

If recent events at the University of Missouri were the spark, then the fire has quickly spread.

On Nov. 10, the president and chancellor of the university resigned. Since then, protesters have organized at more than 100 colleges and universities nationwide. Social media sites have been buzzing. What began as a complaint about racism on the campus in Missouri has grown into a movement affecting higher education in America.

Students across the nation are taking to social media. They are questioning the educational institutions they once trusted. Their protests are inspired by the marches in Ferguson, Missouri, and Black Lives Matter, a campaign against violence toward black people.

The students are calling for racial and social reforms on their campuses. They are borrowing methods from the protests of the 1960s — hunger strikes, sit-ins and lists of demands. Together they are addressing shared frustrations, hurt and rage.

Their actions are not going unnoticed.

### **Protesters Seek Support For Minorities**

Last week, the dean of students at Claremont McKenna College in California stepped down after protesters said she was not supportive of minority students.

Occidental College in California is reacting to unrest as well. On Tuesday, college President Jonathan Vetch said he and other administrators are considering ways to make the campus more open and accepting of black students. They are thinking about creating a black studies major and offering more diversity training.

Students at the University of Southern California are also engaging in the movement. They have proposed similar plans to improve their school. They are asking the school to add a top administrator to promote diversity, to include minority voices and to give them more say in the school.

Nationwide, complaints of racism toward different groups of people are spreading online. Universities are wondering how to react.

For decades, students have helped drive social change around the country. According to University of California President Janet Napolitano, colleges have been an important part of reforms. Campuses, she said, have historically been places where social problems are raised and where many voices are heard.

### **Social Media Adds Sense Of Urgency**

The protests of today are similar in some ways to those of the past, though the speed and the urgency of today's unrest are different.

Tyrone Howard of the University of California, Los Angeles, said that social media has played a big role. "A protest goes viral in no time flat. With Instagram and Twitter, you're in an immediate news cycle. This was not how it was 20 or 30 years ago."

Howard also believes that the president's resignation at the University of Missouri has sped up the movement.

"A president stepping down is a huge step," he said. "Students elsewhere have to wonder, 'Wow, if that can happen there, why can't we bring out our issues to the forefront as well?'"

Shaun Harper, executive director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, agrees. The resignation of two university top administrators showed students around the country that they have power they may not have realized before.

The protests show "we're all together and we have the power to make the change we deserve," said a senior at Occidental.

## **Nonviolent Protests Reflect The 1960s**

In some ways, protests of today reflect those that took place in the 1960s, said Robert Cohen. He is a professor at New York University and author of a book about Mario Savio, who led the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley in the 1960s.

"The tactical dynamism of these nonviolent protests and the public criticism of them are in important ways reminiscent of the 1960s," Cohen said. He said that today's protests, like those in the '60s, are pushing for change and sparking dialogue.

Recent protests are targeting the obvious forms of racism that affect students' lives. They are also talking about the kinds of racism that are not so easily noticed.

Campuses are like society, according to Howard. They are often similar in terms of diversity and opportunity for students. Students tend to push for more representation, acceptance and inclusion.

"As a black person, I think black people are just fed up. It's time out for ignoring these issues," said Harper, of the University of Pennsylvania.

## **Rules Might Limit Free Speech**

The protests in the 1960s helped create specific protections for universities today, such as Title IX. That law guarantees equal access for all students to any educational program or activity receiving money from the government. Still, a gap has widened over the years between students and administrators over how they view bias.

Educational institutions that strongly support free speech find themselves wrestling with the prospect of setting rules for what their students can say about race. But to focus on what is or isn't politically correct avoids the more important issues, Cohen said. Campuses should be focusing on whether they are diverse enough or how to reduce racism, he says.

Occidental student Raihana Haynes-Venerable has heard criticism that students today are too sensitive. But she argues that subtle forms of discrimination still have a powerful effect, such as women making less than men and fewer minorities getting jobs.

"This is the new form of racism," she said.

## Quiz

- 1 University of California President Janet Napolitano would be most likely to AGREE with which of the following statements?
- (A) Students' protests today are likely to impact their educational futures and social opportunities.
  - (B) The use of social media to promote protest and call for social change is unlikely to aid students in their efforts.
  - (C) Protesting by college students can create social change, though it is often minimally felt by other members of society.
  - (D) Social change on college campuses is rarely affected by student protesting, but the current efforts are likely to shift ongoing practices.
- 2 Which of the following MOST influenced several university administrations to look for ways to change the practices in their schools?
- (A) marches in Ferguson, Missouri
  - (B) the Black Lives Matter campaign
  - (C) student protests and calls for change
  - (D) the resignation of one university president

- 3 Read the paragraph below.

*On Nov. 10, the president and chancellor of the university resigned. Since then, protesters have organized at more than 100 colleges and universities nationwide. Social media sites have been buzzing. What began as a complaint about racism on the campus in Missouri has grown into a movement affecting higher education in America.*

How does using the word "buzzing" affect the tone of the sentence above?

- (A) It creates a lighthearted tone by comparing social media to bees.
- (B) It creates a solemn tone by comparing protesters to bees.
- (C) It creates an energetic tone by hinting that people are busy like bees.
- (D) It creates an angry tone by implying that protesters are swarming like bees.

4 Read the sentences from the article.

*"A president stepping down is a huge step," he said.  
"Students elsewhere have to wonder, 'Wow, if that can happen there, why can't we bring out our issues to the forefront as well?'"*

Which answer choice is the BEST definition of the word "forefront" as used in the sentence?

- (A) stage
- (B) back
- (C) center
- (D) attention