

INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK is a cross between a case study and a memoir. It does not purport to be either a history of Stanford in the relevant years or a study of “the Sixties,” a period that has been written about in countless venues and forms. Instead, this work concentrates on the campus unrest that Stanford, like many other institutions, suffered from in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In some ways Stanford’s experience in those years resembled that of other universities, especially the so-called elite ones. Our troubles were not as widely noticed as those at Columbia, Berkeley, Harvard, and Cornell. People are surprised to hear that we had a half-dozen major cases of arson, suffered significant damage to campus buildings, principally in the form of broken windows, and during the notorious “Cambodia Spring” of 1970 had to summon police to the campus repeatedly to end sit-ins or deal with other disruptions; dozens of police and students were hurt. One Stanford president had his office burned, with the loss of a lifetime’s mementos; his successor was forced to resign after just nineteen months in office for his inability to cope with the uproar.

At the same time, although some faculty sided wholeheartedly with the protesters, they never became as bitterly divided as their colleagues at Harvard did after a police bust there in the spring of 1969. And unlike what happened at Cornell, the local Palo Alto community was never terrorized by black students; we offered no photo opportunities like the picture of blacks leaving Willard Straight Hall with automatic weapons at the ready.

In fact, one of the remarkable facts about Stanford’s experience was that the rise in prestige and all the indices of academic strength that had begun

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in the 1950s under President J.E. Wallace Sterling and Provost Frederick E. Terman continued unabated throughout the period of crisis and threats to institutional integrity.

Whether that came about through particular things that we did or refrained from doing is hard to say. There was some well-executed structural change, the leading example being the creation of the University Senate to give the entire faculty a representative assembly of manageable size, and one which, by the device of giving the president, provost, and deans *ex-officio* seats without vote ensured that the chasm that so often separates faculty from administration could be bridged. At each Senate meeting the president and provost had a place on the agenda to make statements and to respond to questions raised by Senate members.

But it cannot be said that the Senate's existence enabled us to escape troubles. In fact the stress level at Stanford in this period was intensified by the university's startling progress. The university began shedding its parochialism; a system of providing a European experience through overseas campuses contributed to this, as did the civil rights movement in the South. The faculty, docile in the early Sterling years, began to assert itself. Alumni from earlier times found it hard to recognize their alma mater in this burgeoning institution.

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Stanford was one of the wave of late-nineteenth-century institutions, such as Johns Hopkins, Cornell, and the University of Chicago, born as full-scale universities that included postgraduate work and professional schools as well as undergraduate colleges. Bit by bit, Ivy League institutions evolved from undergraduate colleges, with the exception of Dartmouth, which never quite completed the development, though it did create both business and medical schools.

The newer universities, except for Johns Hopkins, were coeducational from the beginning. Some of the older ones had coordinate colleges for women. Coeducation only became the norm for the Ivies after World War Two.

Stanford was an interesting crossbreed between the old East Coast private institutions and the great state universities that flourished in the West and Midwest. The Stanfords' emphasis on practical education resulted in a strong engineering program, while the creation of the Graduate School of Business and the School of Earth Sciences after World War One continued this tradi-

tion. Perhaps Stanford should have been called the Cornell of the West rather than the Harvard of the West; Cornell, of course, was and is a crossbreed itself between a private college and a land-grant institution run by the state.

Stanford began with a mixture of advantages and disadvantages. A clean slate was in many ways an advantage: Stanford had no traditions to stand in the way of constructive change; no alumni body as yet looking over the president's shoulder and lamenting any departure from the old ways; a huge endowment, at first held up by a lawsuit but soon successfully claimed; ample space, conveniently near but not in a major city; and no rival private university west of Chicago. Despite all this, as an early observer noted, a visitor found "teachers and pupils going through the same old lessons in the same way as everywhere else. . . . It shows the power of educational heredity, that a university unique in its origin should grow up to be so much like its older sisters."¹

Partly this derived from the tug-of-war between the surviving founder, Jane Stanford, Senator Stanford having died in 1893, and the first president, David Starr Jordan. Mrs. Stanford always had in mind the university as the memorial to her son, and she was much more interested in constructing buildings than in what went on inside them. This meant that even when the lawsuit was decided in the university's favor and an income began to flow from the endowment, she wanted to see it spent on more buildings rather than on faculty salaries or support for research and teaching. And no sooner had she died than the great earthquake of 1906 left many of her buildings destroyed and in need of replacement, a further drain on the endowment.

Perhaps equally damaging was the Ross case. Edward A. Ross, sometimes described as a sociologist and sometimes an economist, incurred Mrs. Stanford's wrath, first for his public support of the free silver movement and the presidential candidacy of William Jennings Bryan and later for his advocacy of municipal ownership of the street railways in Oakland (clearly socialism!), and second for his opposition to Asian immigration, which Jane Stanford saw as an insult to the Chinese laborers who had built her husband's railway. She urged President Jordan to dismiss Ross from the faculty, which for several years he resisted. Finally, fearful that Mrs. Stanford would withdraw the endowment and destroy the university, Jordan gave in. Ross, however, protested his dismissal, infuriating Jordan.

The Ross case quickly became a cause célèbre, and seven other Stanford faculty members either resigned in protest or were dismissed for vocal criticisms of Jordan's action. The American Economics Association investigated

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the firing and censured the university. It was one of several similar cases around the turn of the century that eventually led to the creation of the American Association of University Professors to fight for faculty rights. And it cast a pall over Stanford's development that only lifted gradually with the passage of time and the end of the Jordan presidency.

The interwar years were those of the long presidency of Ray Lyman Wilbur, who held office from 1916 to 1943. Stanford, during that period, was more notable for its football prowess than its academic standing. Although the university was among the charter members of the Association of American Universities, founded in 1900 to bring together all those institutions that offered graduate work, it was certainly not among the more prestigious members before World War Two. At that time it might have been described as a respectable regional university, not in the same league with the Ivies or the University of Chicago.