



The Strawberry Statement: Notes of a College Revolutionary

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The student rebellions of the 1960s caught through the eyes of a Columbia College undergraduate during the spring of 1968. A classic that sold 35,000 copies in hardcover, The Strawberry Statement retains its appeal to college students sensitive to the world's injustices while confronting their own adult future.

The Strawberry Statement: Notes of a College Revolutionary Details

Date : Published August 3rd 1995 by Wiley-Blackwell (first published 1969)

ISBN : 9781881089520

Author : James S. Kunen

Format : Paperback 150 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Politics, Biography, Historical

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Kenalia says

This book was assigned to me for a university US History class. Originally, I was not expecting to enjoy the book since I have never enjoyed much reading that has been assigned to me, but I ended up really enjoying it.

Kunen's writing is very disjointed (and he points this out early), but after the initial event chapters the information is a lot easier to follow. This is a downside to most people, but after multiple readings of those chapters, it is fairly simple to piece the information together and get a unique insider-look of the event.

Being nonfiction, I tried to follow many of the interviews and radio shows that Kunen describes appearing on, but either he wasn't important enough for those to be saved, or I simply didn't look hard enough. Who knows.

Kunen is definitely a teenager, and if you aren't the type that enjoys shallow-yet-introspective nightwalks, you might not enjoy the second half of this book.

If you are interested in the Columbia University protests, and especially the atmosphere of New York / the Counter Culture surrounding the event, then this is definitely a great book for you!

Chris S. says

This book is a great primer for would-be college revolutionaries. A normal student got rolled up into radical politics simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As a college kid, I got radicalized a bit by 9/11 and the Bush Administration's response. I've mellowed a bit since, but this book served as a great instruction manual on how to see & respond to ham-handed tactics by people or groups who have no regard for the other side of the argument.

That, and I love the title, and the story behind it.

Georgina Koutrouditsou says

Περ?μενα πολλ? περισ?τερα, λ?γω της εκπληκτικ?ς ταιν?ας!

Με κο?ρασε το ημερολογιακ? ?φος των γεγον?των.

Ο αφηγητ?ς πολλ?ς φορ?ς γ?νεται κουραστικ?ς με την ?τοπη κριτικ? του.

Brian Page says

I first read James Simon Kunen's THE STRAWBERRY STATEMENT: NOTES OF A COLLEGE

REVOLUTIONARY as an impressionable high school student around about 1971; and this book did more to shape my political philosophy than anything, save perhaps for Bernard Bailyn's THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. So it was an interesting experience to track down a copy (thanks, Amazon) and re-read it as an adult. I am profoundly struck by two aspects. First, the naïveté of the "revolutionary" students and, secondly, I would like to be able to say, "how little things have changed," but in truth and in nearly every respect for the causes the students fought for, that things have gotten worse. They were naïve in believing that change was possible but spot on for anticipating the creep of economic subjugation. Kunen's tale is still worthy to be read today by those who have not given up fighting for social justice if for no other reason than to see that today's challenges are of a continuum with such efforts stretching at least since the industrial revolution.

Rahadyan says

My favorite non-fiction book of my junior high and high school years. Sometimes I look back at that idealistic self. Worth revisiting in my middle years.

Jim says

Not much has changed from those days. So many of Kunen's thoughts and observations are applicable today. Having grown up in a sheltered suburban enclave in the 60's I enjoy reading about what took place in the rest of the world at that time.

And...

I can honestly proclaim I was not at Woodstock...

Ηλίας Α. says

"Μιλώντας για την επιρροή που ασκεί στη διοίκηση του πανεπιστημίου η γνώμη των φοιτητών, ο κοσμητώρ Ντην διακρύβει: «?ταν οι φοιτητές ψηφίζουν "ναι" ? "?χι" επ?νω σ' ?να δεδομένο θέμα, ε?ναι σα να μου λ?νε πως τους αρ?σουν ? δεν τους αρ?σουν οι φρ?ουλες». Εμ?να μ' αρ?σουν οι φρ?ουλες."

CD says

Not sure how this one is just now being added to my lists as this is one of the iconic books that anyone interested in how we got to where we are today needs to read. A book that adds a few vital footnotes to the wide stage of the Student Movement in the United States.

Kunen light heartedly chronicles his days at the edge of the turmoil of the Revolutionary period at Columbia University. Scampering between the most WASPian of manly athletic activities, crew, and occupying the admin buildings, there is ironic acknowledgment of self realized cynicism that ultimately caused the

Movement to collapse. Or maybe Graduation was the ultimate cause.

Snapshots of various members of SDS that were to become more radical/violent actors in the 60's/70's political anti-war drama are unique and well written.

What is the strawberry statement? Well read the book to find out if your desires are any more important than my love for fresh strawberries and chocolate liquor.

columbionalion says

When I came to Columbia in 1972, the last of the 68' freshman were graduating. Aside from the odd reminiscent conversations I had eavesdropped on, (because direct conversations rarely existed between freshman and seniors) the events of the CU student revolts had largely slipped into a realm of apathy and indifference. All of the major players were gone, as was the administration of Grayson Kirk, replaced by William McGill along with most of the Columbia Board of Trustees. So strangely, new students were of course made aware of what had happened on campus in 68' (mainly b/c most to all matriculating freshman classes are in Hamilton Hall, a central site of the protests) the exploits of Mark Rudd, the SDS etc were rapidly becoming somewhat characteristic of urban legend.

Author Jim Kuen's "Strawberry Statement" is truly an eyewitness, boots on the ground chronicling of the events of that turbulent era of 1968 at Columbia, from the perspective of the activists AND the issues of war, injustice and racism, they were trying to remedy. The only other book offering a direct reporting from inside College Walk at Morningside in 68', is the rather sterile compilation of the Columbia Spectator (school newspaper) articles entitled "Up Against the Ivy Wall"

Reading Strawberry now, is particularly timely with the advent of the current Occupy Wall Street protests in NYC and elsewhere. The parallels to the Columbia revolt are considerable, both were organized by way of clear perception and disillusionment of college aged youth that the existing political status quo was an unacceptable manipulated ruse, perpetrated on an unaware, repressed American society, and a belief that only through civil disobedience and disruption to societal norms could force change. Kuen's book delivers the visuals of the violence exhibited by NYPD to clear the Columbia campus; similar to the controversial tactics now on display in Zuccotti Park. Kuen also incorporates his philosophical processing of what it was like to be a youth in America in 68', observing an unending war in Vietnam (which threatened all draft aged kids), the blatant racism on exhibition in the American south through the likes of George Wallace and other enemies to civil rights. But most of all, the author communicates the core feelings of political hopelessness that permeated through the nations youth, a feeling that unseen forces (the establishment, war, government and ultimately any legitimate authority figure) had stacked the deck against them and needed to be defeated.

Melanie says

Don't let the first three pages put you off, because this is an awesome book.

"This ego blast book I'm writing fits well into the anti-hierarchy scheme, it seems to me, because I am not an author, nor will I be an author once having written a book. This seems altogether fitting and also proper. Why should only book writers write books? Who cares about them? They're not where it's at. Let everybody write so that no one is a writer" (p. 94).

"She points out that neither Gandhi nor Thoreau would have asked for amnesty. I admit I haven't read them. But Gandhi had no Gandhi to read and Thoreau hadn't read Thoreau. They had to reach their own conclusions and so will I" (p. 37).

"We check to see what the other rooms have decided. One room is embroiled in a political discussion, and in the other everyone is busy playing with the office machines" (p. 31)

Noel says

(Review written Jan 2003 and thus kind of dated): This book, written by a kid my age (19), resonates very strongly with me, as a member of a new generation of college revolutionaries. [Ed: awww, so idealistic!] The parallels between his experiences protesting Columbia University's worker policies and involvement in the Vietnam War with the impending war in Iraq today are striking. Overall a good read that has valuable things to say and chilling relevance to today's situation.

Beth says

Definitely one of my all time favorite books. Read it if you can get your hands on a copy.

Emily says

*Isn't it singular that no one ever goes to jail for waging wars, let alone advocating them? But the jails are filled with those who want peace. Not to kill is to be a criminal. They put you right into jail if all you do is ask them to leave you alone. **Exercising the right to live is a violation of law.*** (61)

*[My mother] points out that neither Gandhi nor Thoreau would have asked for amnesty. I admit I haven't read them. **But Gandhi had no Gandhi to read and Thoreau hadn't read Thoreau. They had to reach their own conclusions and so will I.*** (29)

This diary-format eye-witness look at the rebellion of Columbia University students in 1968 was a lot more interesting than I expected it to be. It helped that the author's writing voice was actually a *delight*-- Kunen was hilarious and cynical and I laughed out loud quite often, especially in the first half.

*I can assure you that the Columbia action cannot be dismissed as an overgrown panty raid, a manifestation of the vernal urge. It lasted too long; participants endured hardship, **and worse, boredom, conditions through which collegiate fetishistic folly could never sustain itself.*** (150)

I didn't know anything specifically about the protests at Columbia, though of course I knew that 1968 was a year of great social upheaval in the US in general. I chose to read *The Strawberry Statement* for a more general look at student protesting fifty years ago and compare it to the current social situation.

The moderator [...] said that what [adults] are doing today is paying the penalty for years of permissiveness, which is true, if permissiveness means raising kids to think and not obey any authority that happens to come stomping along.

All concurred that we students “should be busy studying to be leaders instead of carping about things.” (57-58)

What I found is that... things haven't really changed much. Or maybe they've even gotten worse? It was a trip to see the same sentiments that feminists and anti-racists write think-pieces about today being written by a 19-year-old in 1968. Much of this book could easily be applied to contemporary events.

*In America you shouldn't have to worry about police busting into your apartment and beating you up. I specifically remember seeing a TV show around thirteen years ago about an immigrant couple who still had their old country fears and thought the mailman was a cop coming to take them away. **They weren't confused; they were just ahead of their time.** (79)*

The format of this book isn't the best. As it is a published diary, there is some context missing from much of the events described; possibly if I knew more about the specific events I wouldn't have felt so lost. Instead, I was confused about what exactly was happening, especially in the second half of the book, when Kunen lost some of his clear-headed-ness and became noticeably confused, apathetic, and depressed in turns. Still, since it was more interest in the general sentiment of the time, rather than research into the specifics, I didn't mind feeling confused. I was still interested in Kunen's ponderings. I also read the book in short bursts over almost a month, as the author himself suggests it is best consumed in small doses due to the general disorganization of his thoughts.

*Most people agree that there are good cops and bad. But everybody assumes that there have to be cops, that there always have been. I have no plan for abolishing police forces, but I do think **people should consider that police are not the most natural thing in the world [...]** It seems strange to me that a few men should be taken from the community and given the job of watching out for it. [...] He's got his club and his gun and everybody seems to think that's the way it's supposed to be. (140)*

*Commenting on the importance of student opinion to the administration, Professor Deane declared, “**Whether the students vote ‘yes’ or ‘no’ on an issue is like telling me they like strawberries.**” (121)*

Kunen paints quite the picture of the reactions of school administration, fellow students, police, media, and general citizens to the rebelling Columbia students. It was incredible to read about police brutality at peaceful protests and marches-- including an incident when NYPD purposefully barricaded the Columbia campus to pen in the student protesters, covered their badges with tape, then proceeded to use their bully clubs, rubber bullets, and tear gas to round up and arrest the students. Kunen himself was arrested in this instance.

*Think twice before you pour your stinking bloody money into more weapons because people are hungry and we won't let you. We need good schools and houses for people to live in and **it could be done and we're going to make this country do it.** (94)*

I can't say how Kunen's writings on race relations of the time were received when this was first published, but there was certainly some problematic terminology by today's standards. Kunen often refers to "the blacks", and often in differentiation from "the students" indicating that none of the students were black. Later in the book there is mention of black students, leaving the reader to wonder whether black students were part of the protests and what they thought of the whole situation. In other words, Kunen's account is not very intersectional in scope; but, then, it is a personal diary, not a thoroughly researched exposé. There was also a metaphor comparing the Viet Cong to cockroaches which, while not specifically pejorative, certainly was in bad taste.

*Social progress is slow. It's practically nonexistent. We're about where we were 10,000 years ago. **But you have to try to make it go fast so that it will go slow at all.** (102)*

I've noticed that a few different reviewers have concluded that *The Strawberry Statement* demonstrates that student protesters don't know what they're doing. I'd say, duh, of course they don't, who ever knows what they're doing? But protesters don't have to know everything to know that what they're witnessing is wrong, and to know that they can do something about it. Even when Kunen becomes apathetic, it is out of frustration with the different factions and the infighting that hinders any real progress, not because he has decided that there's nothing worth fighting for.

***But sadness is not despair so long as you can get angry. And we have become angry at Columbia. Not having despaired, we are able to see things that need to be fought, and we fight. We have fought, we are fighting, we will fight.** (6)*

I think one of the biggest take-aways from this book is that there's nothing new about criticizing the American government. "Make America Great Again"? And when exactly was it great before? There are problems running deep in this country, and pointing them out doesn't make you an "SJW", "snowflake", or "commie" today any more than it did in 1968, or 1908, or 1861, and on and on. As the saying goes, if you're not angry, you're not paying attention. Though it's somewhat disheartening to see how little has changed since 1968, I think it's clear that the movements have grown and have encompassed more and more people over the generations. (It seems to me that) there are more different kinds of people talking about and caring about social change today than in the past, which provides some hope for an eventual tipping point, hopefully not too long in the future.

*There used to be a dream for America. You know, the American dream? America was going to be different. Free. Good. Free and good. Of course they blew it right away. As soon as the Puritans came over they set up religious laws. But at least they clung to the dream. Until now. Now no one hopes for America to be different. I guess it was the dream that ruined the dream. **People became convinced it was true, so they never made it true.** People think the U.S.A. (a great-sounding, nice, informal name) is special, so we can do anything and it's okay (an American expression). **People should wake up and dream again.** (64)*

[All bolding is mine]

Katerina Charisi says

Δε νομίζω να έχω δώσει ποτέ μισό (!) αστεράκι σε βιβλίο εδ? μ?σα, όμως απ? τη μια τα τρ?α του είναι πολλ?, απ? την άλλη τα δ?ο λ?γα. Ας π?με λοιπ?ν κ?που στη μ?ση, με βιτρ?να το (μ?λλον υποτιμητικ? δυαρ?κι).

Το βιβλίο είναι ?να (ασυν?ρτητο εδ? κι εκε?) ημερολ?γιο 19χρονου, γενικ? συμπαθ? αλλ? π?ντα 19χρονου, π?σω στο (σχετικ?) μακριν? '68. Ο τ?τλος λ?νε ?τι προ?ρχεται απ? μια απαξιωτικ? δ?λωση πρ?τανη του Κολο?μπια για την συμμετοχ? των φοιτητ?ν στις αποφ?σεις του πανεπιστημ?ου, οι οπο?οι, ?πως υποστ?ριξε, μπορο?ν να εκφ?ρουν μ?νο ασ?μαντες προσωπικ?ς γν?μες ?πως αν τους αρ?σει ? ?χι η γε?ση της φρ?ουλας.

Και θα μπορο?σε ?σως αυτ? να είναι και το μ?νο ενδιαφ?ρον κομμ?τι του βιβλ?ου.

Δεν το λες ιστορικ? ντοκουμ?ντο, παρ?λα αυτ? τα κομμ?τια του βιβλ?ου στα οπο?α αναφ?ρονται τα (με ημερολογιακ? ?φος π?ντα) γεγον?τα ?χουν τη βαρ?τητ? τους.

Δεν το λες ο?τε γαργαλιστικ? ημερολ?γιο 19χρονου μιας γεμ?της εποχ?ς απ? χ?λια δυο ερεθ?σματα - η μουσικ? πχ που αναφ?ρεται είναι ελ?χιστη, ο?τε πολιτικ? αν?γνωσμα, ο Κο?νεν αν και συμπαθητικ?ς ?ταν μ?λλον συντηρητικοαδι?φορος, κ?ποιες δηλ?σεις πιο ηχηρ?ς ?δειχναν σημει? ζω?ς κι ?τι ναι, υπ?ρχε εγκ?φαλος μ?σα σε εκε?νο το κεφ?λι,

λ?ει και ωρ?α πραγματ?κια εδ? κι εκε?.

Γενικ? πολ?ς ντ?ρος για το (σχεδ?ν) τ?ποτα.

Η ταιν?α σαφ?ς αν?τερη, αφο? ελ?χιστα είναι τα κοιν? σημει?α με το βιβλ?ο, αν και εμπορικ?ς δραματοποιημ?νη για το σχετικ? ντ?ρο.

Cecilia says

I lived a pretty sheltered suburban life in the Midwest when James S. Kunen was going to college at Columbia (NY) in the late '60s. I was some years younger than the author but sure remember the times...and yeah, "they were a changin".

I re-read "The Strawberry Statement" over this past weekend for some reason...guess I just am nostalgic about the late '60s. Kunen sure nailed that time period of revolutions, sit-ins, love-ins, hassles with the police (I hate to use the term "pigs"...but that was what they were mostly called), working with the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) wanting to change the government for the better, protesting against the war in Vietnam, etc. all during 1968-69. The author was living all of this when he wrote his book in diary style...and he wrote it with great intelligence and humor for a young man of 19 yrs. Even then, Kunen had an open mind and still professed love for his country even as he wanted to change what he saw wrong with it. So...I ask you...what is wrong with that?

A wonderful, remarkable read for anyone wanting to find out what life was like in the late '60s for a young

college student of 19 yrs. old trying to discover who he was, what he wanted to do with his life & what he could do to make life better for everyone. The book is still applicable in today's world...although today we are sadly missing Hendrix, Joplin, the Kennedy's, King...

More nostalgia on my part...not connected with this book since Woodstock was never mentioned and happened after the events written in "Strawberry Statement". I'd have been pretty young to head to Yasgur's Farm to attend Woodstock at that time...but I sure wanted to go...:> My mom would have never let me out of the house again if I'd attempted that "trip" ...grounded for life! Scares me to think on it now...but she was right.

My paperback copy of "Strawberry Statement" is pretty old and brittle but it's still one of my favorite books and one I can go back to again & again and never tire of reading it. I recommend that you read it, too...you won't be sorry.
