A TALE OF TWO IMAGES

The depth of the collections held at The Bancroft Library sometimes even surprises those of us that work here. My father, Richard Cushing, died during the summer of 2004, and I began the tedious and delightful task of processing his personal documents. In one of his scrapbooks was a picture he had taken of a student antiwar demonstration on the Berkeley campus, with a fiery orator, a crowd, and signs calling for “Schools not battleships” and “Abolish ROTC.” This would normally be an unremarkable sight at Berkeley, except that the date was 1935—the photo taken while he was an undergraduate here. Prominently visible in the photograph is an official sign declaring “University of California Campus Limits,” a vivid reminder of the constraints on campus activism before the flowering of the Free Speech Movement. Less prominent was a poster affixed to the front of the rickety wooden podium, with the words “Strike Against War” and an image of a strident activist. Of all the placards evident, this was the only one with a graphic image, and as a poster historian it captured my attention immediately. I had never seen it mentioned before, and assumed I’d probably never know what the whole image looked like.

Several months later I was refiling posters from a presentation using Mexico’s Taller de Gráfica Popular collection, and I glanced at a nearby portfolio labeled “Broadsides and pamphlets distributed at Sather Gate, 1935-1950.” That certainly caught my eye, so I opened it up. Nested among the handful of flyers from the Communist Party and the Bay Area Transportation Union was a magnificent copy of the “Strike Against War” poster. To compound this unusual coincidence, it turned out that this particular portfolio had escaped retrospective conversion when library records went digital and did not exist in the on-line catalog. Serendipity, and the rich collection of The Bancroft Library, conspired that day to reveal a unique artifact of the visual history of the U.S. peace movement.

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