

Special Report

Kate Coleman, 60s radical, now writes her battles

Freelance writer recalls her mix of political activism

It was a decade of dreams and nightmares, of causes that divided the country and united it at the same time. Many of the wounds of the 1960s are still healing today. Twenty years ago this year the Free Speech movement was born on the UC Berkeley campus. The Bay Area became a catalyst and symbol of the turbulence, boldness and progress of the times. Some of the people who made the 1960s a unique part of American history will be profiled by DEADLINE over the next few weeks.

By Carl Moody
DEADLINE STAFF REPORTER

Former UC Berkeley student radical Kate Coleman has thrown away most of her protest placards, but few of her ideals.

Recently, she passed up a day of the first reunion of SLATE, the campus political group that was a model for many organizations in the 1960s, to participate in a women's triathlon.

It was a good day: she swam 1 1/4 miles, ran a 6 mile race and biked 25 miles. And she won in her division — women 40 to 50 years old.

"I ain't a jock. I am training for these triathalons," she said, during a recent interview at the Caffe Mediterraneo. Nowadays, Coleman supports herself as a freelance writer and has become active in competitive sports.

During the 1960s, Coleman followed many other radicals and bounced from one activist group to another. She participated in SLATE, the Free Speech Movement at UC Berkeley, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Weather Underground, Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and others.

Even though she maintains that she played a minor role in the late 1950s and 1960s movements, she was featured in a 1965 CBS Television documentary, "The Berkeley Radical."

At 41, Coleman, who is single and still lives in Berkeley, has settled into writing about social injustices for regional and national publications.

Her first major investigative article was on Huey Newton, co-founder of the Black Panthers. It appeared in a 1978 issue of New Times, a progressive political magazine. She has also written about Ginny Foat, former president of the California National Organization for Women (NOW), who was acquitted in a murder trial, and the controversial 1982 Miss America, who was Miss California and was accused of restructuring her looks.

Despite leading a quieter life these days, Coleman participated in a protest against former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in Oakland last April. She said she was enraged over Kissinger's views on Nicaragua.

Talking recently over a cup of mocha, Coleman was dressed casually in a cream and blue striped blouse and white cotton trousers. Her chestnut curly brown hair was cut into a shag, which she referred to as looking "punk." The cafe was only a few blocks down Telegraph Avenue from the site of some of the campus confrontations in the 1960s.

Coleman's current passion of competitive sports, she explained, was a result of giving up cigarettes, drugs and alcohol, and going through several years of psychoanalysis. The analysis, she said, followed a bout of severe depression she recently suffered.

She was concerned her life was standing still.

"I felt I couldn't change . . . I felt everything was sort of okay, but it wasn't. I was depressed, I felt old and not moving. I don't think I understood how depressed I was," she said.

After her psychoanalysis, she said that her life was like a rocket. "I sort of took off," she said.

Coleman came to California after spending much of her childhood on the East Coast, from New Jersey to upstate New York and Florida.

An event in one of her Los Angeles high school classes sparked her activism, she said, recalling a discussion of Marian Anderson, the black concert singer denied the right to perform in the concert hall of the Daughters of American Revolution in 1939. The performance was

eventually moved to the Lincoln Memorial.

Coleman said she was naive at that time and like several of her classmates had argued that the organization had been just in its refusal to let Anderson sing in their hall.

But the instructor was so enraged that he "blasted" the class, she said. "And that was the beginning of my enlightenment," added Coleman.

After that event, she did not attend any more religious or pep assemblies at her high school, a sign of her early political rebellion.

She entered UC Berkeley in 1960 and joined "SLATE right away," because two of her high school classmates were active.

That spring SLATE demonstrated against the House Committee on Un-American Activities, a congressional panel that investigated whether citizens had communist connections. She didn't participate but remembers vividly how the members gathered at the San Francisco City Hall and were washed off the steps by fire hoses. Many were arrested and she collected bail money.

The "event radicalized me," Coleman recalled. "That, and the tremendous domination of the older lefty graduate students, who I was in love with."

There were, for instance, several "shop-ins" in Oakland that were organized by CORE. Stores which refused to hire blacks were picketed. After checking their groceries at the cash register, the pickets would not have the money to pay for the items. This activity, which Coleman participated in, would tie up the store's business for hours.

Her activism during her days at Berkeley, where Coleman was an English major, she recalled, got in the way of her academics.

"I went on [academic] probation my first semester. I was deeply embedded in the boys, politics," she said.

As for SLATE and the Free Speech Movement, she readily admits that she really did not have any power.

"I never ran the mimeos," she said, describing a task delegated to the women in many organizations. "This was a very macho, dominant group. I thought I was escaping that by being uncategorizable . . . In fact I had no power. I came on like



DEADLINE PHOTO BY CARL MOODY

Kate Coleman, now a freelance writer, reflects on her student activist days.

the court jester."

After a year on the sidelines, Coleman decided to become active again when the Free Speech Movement was born in 1964.

Coleman left Berkeley after graduation in 1965 and worked for Newsweek magazine in New York as a researcher for three years. During this time, she said, she was active with the Yippies and was arrested during a demonstration on the Lower East Side.

Coleman has close ties to Berkeley, she said. "I have a lot of family and friends in this town . . . this place has community and continuity for me in the way it might have been possible for an extended family in a small town."

A self-described leftist, Coleman voted for the Rev. Jesse Jackson in the California presidential primary, despite the fact that she is Jewish.

"And in honesty, the man's positions are what I support," she said,

referring to Jackson's positions on blacks, women, Nicaragua and labor.

But Coleman is highly critical of his personal style and his derogatory remarks calling Jewish people "Hymie."

She was also indifferent about a woman running for vice president on the Democratic ticket.

"I support anybody other than Reagan," she said. "I don't care about them pleasing Judy Goldsmith of NOW," a reference to the organization's call for a woman vice president.

"I want people who will do things for women in terms of legislation and legislation for blacks. I want them to enforce the Civil Rights Act. I want them to enforce equity in hiring," she said.

As for college students today, she said, "I think they are stupid and don't read. They know how to do computers and I don't."

S.F. senior citizens get free anti-crime escorts

By Linda M. Watkins
DEADLINE STAFF REPORTER

Senior citizens who live in two high-crime areas of San Francisco will be provided with stepped-up escort service beginning next week, coinciding with the Democratic National Convention.

More than 6,000 seniors in the Tenderloin and North of Market areas of the city for the first time will have access to street patrols that will seek to prevent crimes against them, officials of the non-profit Escort Outreach Program announced Wednesday.

Purse snatchings and assaults on elderly people in the two areas are higher than in other neighborhoods in the city, said Willie Kennedy, a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

"Many of you could not venture outside your homes if it wasn't for the escort service," said Kennedy, who addressed about 70 elderly people at a news conference at the program's office on Ellis Street.

Escort service offices are in eight

neighborhoods of the city and employ 4,452 escorts, who are screened by the program and police.

Escorts take older people to hospitals, stores and meetings, using the program's vans, buses and private taxi cabs, said Sgt. Dennis Gustafson, senior crime prevention coordinator at the San Francisco Police Department.

"We're the only type of program for older adults in the city that does a one-to-one escort service," said Gustafson.

Program officials said roaming escorts are more effective than stationary ones in the high-crime areas because they spot more crimes while they are occurring. Escorts report to their base stations so that police can be notified, Gustafson said.

"If there's a problem, police can be there in two minutes," he said.

"In the first year, we hope to reduce crime [in the areas] by 60 percent and in years to come by 100 percent," said Capt. Paul E. Kotta, of the Police department's community services department.

Citizens' group launches fight to combat 'Band-Aid' solutions

By Robbie Morganfield
DEADLINE STAFF REPORTER

A newly formed citizens' coalition, calling upon the nation's political leaders to stop hunger in America, launched a campaign against "Band-Aid solutions" Wednesday in San Francisco.

"The Democrats started applying Band-Aids to the needs of the poor back in 1932, and in 1980 the Republicans started removing them," said Mario Obledo, national president of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). "They cut budgets and social programs that were beneficial to the needy," he said.

Obledo, one of several speakers for the "No More Band-Aid Solutions" campaign, addressed a sparse gathering of supporters and downtown workers on lunch

break in the U.N. Plaza on Market Street.

The speeches were a prelude to more aggressive efforts planned during the Democratic National Convention next week, said Obledo.

The group advocates cuts in defense spending and the creation of new jobs for the unemployed, as well as higher pay for many already-employed workers.

"We have made these concerns known to both the Democrats and Republicans," Obledo said. "They say they understand, yet their actions indicate otherwise."

"We spend \$100 billion on defense for Japan and they're better off economically than we are. They should be defending themselves," he said.

Frances Moore, director of the

Institute for Food and Development Policy in San Francisco, told the crowd that welfare should not be a substitute for creating new jobs.

"We're not saying welfare is a Band-Aid," said Moore. "It need not be, but it is a Band-Aid when it's used to replace a citizen's right to earn a living."

Those sentiments were echoed by Angela Blackwell of Black Women Organized for Political Action.

"This country is becoming too comfortable with a permanent underclass of people," she said.

During the Democratic convention members of the coalition plan to distribute their own version of a Band-Aid that reads, "Hunger Hurts Us All," said Harry Snyder, spokesman for the campaign.