

"Free Speech" at UC Berkeley

by Gary Fouse



It seems like a century ago that a young man named Mario Savio launched something called the “Free Speech Movement” at the University of California at Berkeley. Ever since, the university has prided itself as the birthplace of free speech, which might draw a hoot from our founding fathers.

To be sure, controversial speakers from Louis Farrakhan to Vicente Fox to radical Oakland-based imam Amir Abdel Malik Ali have found a friendly environment at Berkeley, but for conservative speakers, the idea that they too might enjoy the right to speak without a riot ensuing has proved far more elusive.

In fact just this year, three speakers from the right have learned the hard way that they have no free speech rights at UCB.

Take Milo Yiannopoulos, for example. His February speech was cancelled at the last minute when students and other anarchists rioted at the site of the venue. People were beaten

and \$100,000 of property damage resulted while campus police posed as potted plants. Only one arrest took place. The unlucky chap seems to have gotten in the way of a local campus gendarme who was probably writing a parking ticket.

Then there was David Horowitz, scheduled to speak April 12. The university administration put so many barriers in his way (like moving the venue to some undisclosed broom closet a mile off campus) that he figured there was no use speaking to two or three homeless people who might stumble in by mistake.

Now comes Ann Coulter (who, like Horowitz, has spoken at UC Irvine without incident). She was scheduled to speak this week at "The Home of the Free Speech Movement." When the little rascals threatened to give her the Yiannopoulos treatment, the university panicked. The campus police were afraid there would be violence. The school tried to reschedule the event to September (probably during school break). They said they had no room available. Just like Horowitz, they put up condition after condition-which she agreed to- before her sponsors threw in the towel.

Understandably, the College Republicans and Young Americas Foundation at UCB, who attempted to sponsor these events, are frustrated and convinced they cannot get fair treatment from a feckless administration that hides under its collective desk at the first sign of trouble. (Believe it or not, UCB's outgoing chancellor, Nicholas Dirks, was found to have had an escape hatch built into his office in case protesters got too close.)

If student and community thugs try to shut down an event, that's what the cops are there for-at least in the good old days when I was in law enforcement. Campus cops, of course, are under the direct control of the university administrators. The result is that riots go unpunished and the heckler's veto is king.

As illustrated above, universities all over the country are learning that putting administrative roadblocks in the way of conservative speakers is a good way to shut down an event and avoid disruptions altogether. Forcing conservative groups like the College Republicans to post inordinately high security insurance fees, or hold their events in the daylight hours during classes at off-site locations or in halls too small to accommodate large crowds are methods increasingly being used as tools to keep conservative speakers off campus. It belies the very purpose of universities, which is to expose students to a wide variety of viewpoints on controversial issues. The result is one huge echo chamber.

Contrary to what some think, the quick fix is not to demand that the universities hire more conservative professors. This is a culture that has been building since the 1960s. It will not change overnight. In addition, few conservatives are interested in making a career in a university setting. Who wants to put up with that aggravation?

What is needed is a drying up of funds from donors and tax payers-to say nothing about students deciding to go elsewhere. Just ask the University of Missouri after the Black Lives Matters protests drove prospective students to other schools. Mizzou is hurting big time in the pocket book due to a lack of students.

Another thing that needs to change now is having campus cops stand down when events are being disrupted or shut down by violence. Instead, arrests should be made and prosecution and expulsion must ensue. Would be disruptors must know that campus police and administrators will take whatever measures to ensure that freedom of speech applies to all. The purpose of campus police is to keep order on campus and protect people and property. They seem to have forgotten that at UC Berkeley.

In one respect, however, justice has been served. Milo Yiannopoulos, David Horowitz and Ann Coulter have brought

national attention to UC Berkeley and universities in general. Public awareness is the first step to bringing change where change is badly needed.