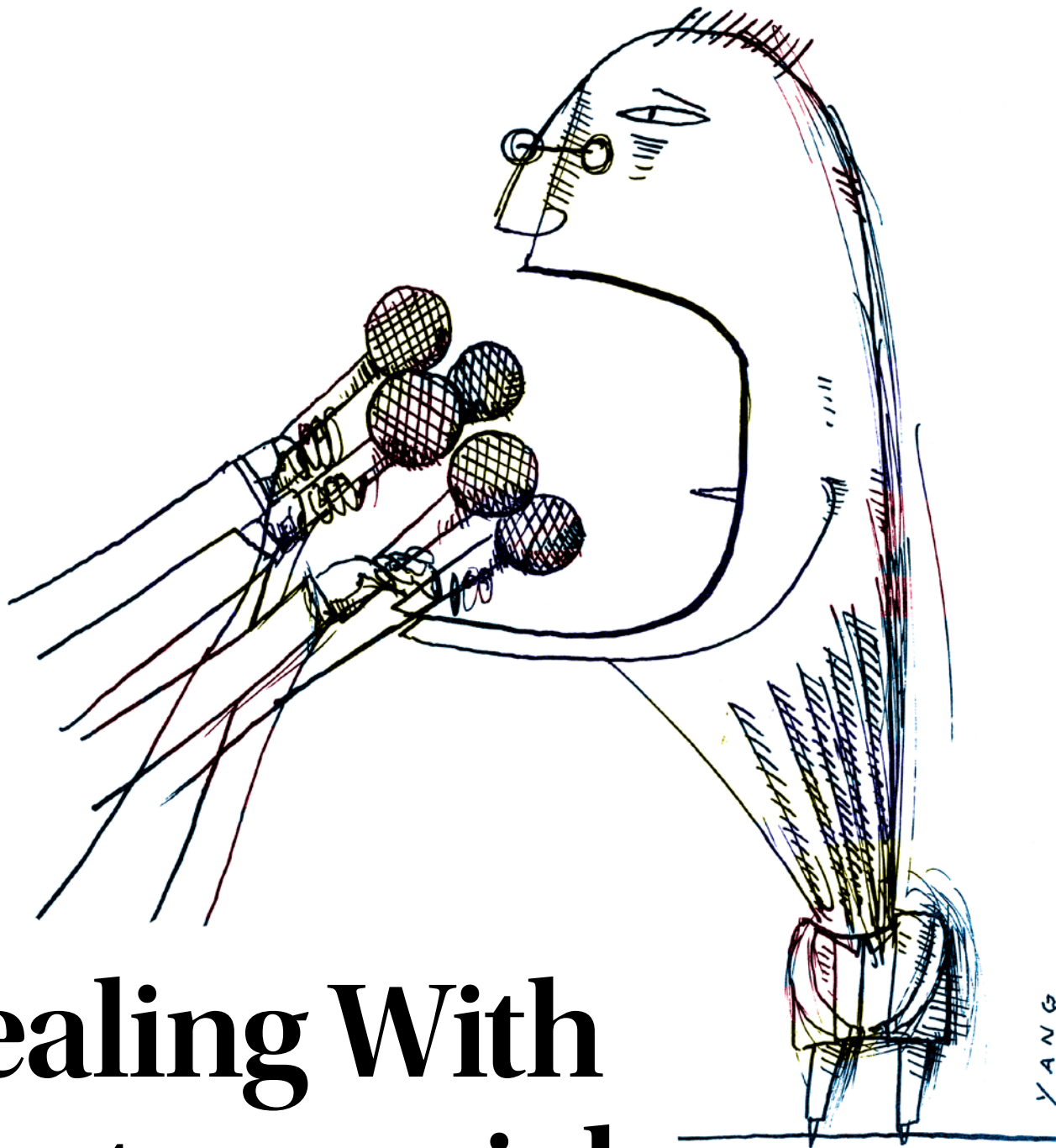


# Focus

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION



## Dealing With Controversial Speakers on Campus

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**C**OLLEGE OFFICIALS generally do not want their campuses to become venues for hate speech. Nor do they want to suppress the free expression of ideas. Those principles are tested when controversial speakers come to campus. Their appearances have, on occasion, been accompanied by outbreaks of violence between opposing sides in the political debate. This collection gives an overview of how college leaders, and their campus communities, have responded to speakers with unpopular messages.

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Cover Illustration by James Yang



BROOKE ANDERSON

Black-clad protesters at the U. of California at Berkeley shut down a far-right speaker's campus appearance and placed the California flagship once again at the center of a debate over free expression.

# Mayhem at Berkeley Hardens New Battle Lines on Free Speech

By BETH MCMURTRIE

**M**ORE THAN 50 years ago, the University of California at Berkeley became the birthplace of the free-speech movement. Thousands of students protested restrictions on political activity on campus, the university relented, and the state's future governor, Ronald Reagan, railed against disruptive students and a weak

administration.

Echoes of those early conflicts appeared this week following violent protests against a controversial speaker known for his anti-immigration and anti-feminist rhetoric. Berkeley once again became the center of a free-speech debate, this one framed as a conflict between the right to free expression and an imperative to fight hate speech.

As dozens of protesters smashed windows and started fires Wednesday night to stop Milo Yiannopoulos, a Breitbart editor who has been touring college campuses, from taking the stage inside Berkeley's student union, the chaos was broadcast on national news and lit up social media. President Trump weighed in on Twitter early the next morning:



The Berkeley administration, which had repeatedly resisted requests from students and professors to ban Mr. Yiannopoulos, was quick to respond with a news release condemning the violence and pointing out that the campus “was invaded by more than 100 armed individuals clad in masks and dark uniforms who utilized paramilitary tactics” to shut down the event.

In other words, they were separate from the 1,500 students who the university said had gathered peacefully to protest Mr. Yiannopoulos's message.

“This is part of what's called the black bloc group,” said Dan Mogulof, a university spokesman, naming an anarchist group that has disrupted peaceful protests in the Bay Area and elsewhere with violence. “They came armed. They came with a clear plan to disrupt. We have no evidence to suggest that any of them were our students.”

A number of eyewitnesses supported that conclusion, he said, noting that many of the violent protesters seemed not to know their way around campus or how to get out. The police have made at least one arrest and are reviewing video to identify other suspects.

On social media and elsewhere, however, the narrative of the radical Berkeley student dominated. The Heritage Foundation, the conservative think tank, tweeted out adjacent photos: “1964: Berkeley students march to demand free speech. 2017: Berkeley students riot to demand free speech be denied.” Young Americans for Liberty, a conservative student organization, issued a news release claiming that 1,500 protesters threw smoke bombs, damaged property, and started fires, proving, the group said, that “even the most liberal, open-minded campuses in our country harbor intolerance for those that disagree with them.”

Breitbart News, which has backed Mr. Yiannopoulos's “Dangerous Faggot” campus tour, pub-

lished an article titled “The Night Berkeley Betrayed the Free Speech Movement,” finding parallels between the plight of conservatives today and Berkeley activists in the 1960s.

Angus Johnston, a historian of student activism who teaches at the City University of New York's Hostos Community College, sees parallels, too, but in a different way. The anger that protesters expressed, he says, “is a reflection of the fact that the political system is broken.”

Mr. Yiannopoulos, he notes, has been touring college campuses and inciting protests for months. But now that Donald J. Trump is president and Steve Bannon, the former head of Breitbart News, is his chief strategist, Mr. Yiannopoulos “is essentially one handshake away from the presidency,” Mr. Johnston says. “So his schtick resonates very differently.”

Mr. Johnston also thinks free-speech advocates on the right have whitewashed the 1960s' protests. When the police attempted to arrest a Berkeley student for handing out civil-rights literature on campus in 1964, thousands of fellow students staged a massive sit-in, preventing the police car from moving.

“Mario Savio, the hero of the free-speech movement, said in his most famous speech that there comes a time when the operation of the system makes you so sick at heart you have to put your body on the gears of the machine,” said Mr. Johnston. “I don't think that principle is such a huge distance away from what we saw last night.”

**“A lot of protesters perceive, not unfairly, that that cry of free speech is far more often raised against them than in support of them.”**

The right has essentially flipped the free-speech argument, Mr. Johnston says. “A lot of protesters perceive, not unfairly, that that cry of free speech is far more often raised against them than in support of them.”

Donald P. Moynihan, a professor of public af-

fairs at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, is one of many who think the violent protesters played into the hands of conservatives looking to make the case that colleges are bastions of liberal intolerance. “Their next argument is that they need to do something to fix this problem,” he said.

### RED MEAT FOR REAGAN

When he entered the governor’s race in 1966, Mr. Reagan made the Berkeley protests a centerpiece of his campaign. “Will we allow a great university to be brought to its knees by a noisy dissident minority?” he asked. “Will we meet their neurotic vulgarities with vacillation and weakness?” Within weeks of his election, he helped ensure that Clark Kerr, president of the University of California system, was fired.

Mr. Trump suggested denying federal funds to universities that do not support free speech (see article on next page), but possible legislative action in the states is what concerns Mr. Moynihan more. Some state legislators have introduced bills that attempt to regulate expression on campus. “We’ve always had student protests since the 1960s, and colleges survived,” he says, “but I don’t think we’ll survive if we have legislatures micromanaging what constitutes free speech on campus.”

The Goldwater Institute, a conservative think tank, released model legislation this week for state governments that would punish students at public colleges who shut down speakers on campus. Jim Manley, a senior attorney for the organization, said that if students clearly understand the risks of such protests — including suspension and expulsion — they will be less likely to act. “I’m not going to say this law is a panacea, but I do think it’s important to set free speech and free expression as the primary value of the university.”

He praised Berkeley’s administration for defending Mr. Yiannopoulos’s right to speak, and said he was troubled by the fact that some students and professors had asked for the speech to be canceled. One such group argued in a letter to Nicholas B. Dirks, the chancellor, that Mr. Yiannopoulos’s tactics are so provocative — including naming and shaming individuals in videos that would then go viral — that they constitute harassment and potential defamation.

Judith Butler, a Berkeley professor and one of the cosigners of that letter, wrote in an email on Thursday that, while she continues to believe that

Mr. Yiannopoulos’s actions should not be considered protected speech, “I deplore the violent tactics of yesterday and so do the overwhelming majority of students and faculty at UC Berkeley.”

### HIJACKED BY ANARCHISTS

Avinash Kunnath, a 2010 Berkeley graduate who writes about sports on California Golden Blogs, wrote a post on Thursday that also countered the narrative that students had incited the violence. Anarchists, a familiar presence in the area, were to blame, he said, yet that was not the message aired publicly. “People have taken advantage of the Berkeley spirit of free speech to use it to advance their own agenda for a national audience,” he wrote.

In an interview, Mr. Kunnath said that members of the black bloc frequently show up to otherwise-peaceful local protests to cause mayhem. “Really this was just meant to be a protest to express disdain for a certain speaker, and the actions of those people made the message more difficult to go through. They don’t deserve to be lumped in together.”

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a free-speech organization, pushed back against Mr. Trump’s argument that Berkeley was preventing free speech and that withholding federal funds could be an appropriate punishment. In a statement, issued Thursday, the group said it had seen no evidence that Berkeley had tried to silence Mr. Yiannopoulos.

“It’s concerning to suggest that a school of tens of thousands of students could effectively be cut off because of the violent acts of a few,” Will Creeley, FIRE’s vice president for legal and public advocacy, said in an interview. He praised Berkeley’s administration for its thoughtful handling of campus tensions leading up to the event and said he was disturbed by what President Trump’s remarks could portend.

“If the attention of the president of the United States can be gained by violence, and the president can be prompted to take punitive action against an institution,” he said, “it seems to me it sets up a perverse incentive for those who don’t like an administration or a speaker to respond violently. That seems counterproductive and illiberal.”

Mr. Johnston, the historian, says colleges should brace for more anger from both the left and the right. “We’re in for a rough ride,” he said.

*Originally published on February 3, 2017*

# Trump Can't Cut Off Berkeley's Funds by Himself. His Threat Still Raised Alarm.

By SARAH BROWN and KATHERINE MANGAN

**B**ACK IN OCTOBER, when President Trump vowed to “end” political correctness on college campuses, it was unclear how the then-presidential candidate planned to go about doing that.

On Thursday, he dropped a hint: He threatened to cut off federal funding to the University of California at Berkeley after violent protests there prompted campus leaders to call off a talk by a far-right provocateur.

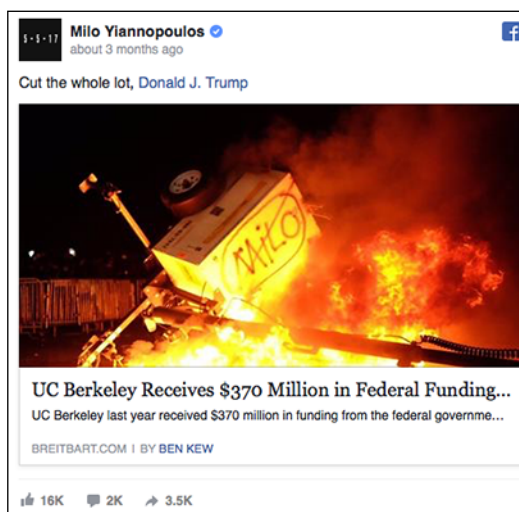
Milo Yiannopoulos is a Breitbart News editor and Trump supporter who has for months traveled to campuses to give talks that often draw protests and have sometimes resulted in violence. He was once permanently banned from Twitter for his role in a harassment campaign against the actress Leslie Jones, and he has drawn heavy fire for his insulting comments about feminists, Black Lives Matters protesters, Islam, and topics he considers part of leftist ideology.

Mr. Yiannopoulos was scheduled to speak on Berkeley's campus late Wednesday, as part of his “Dangerous Faggot” tour, and more than 1,500 students gathered outside the venue to peacefully protest. Then about 100 additional protesters — mostly nonstudents, Berkeley officials said — joined the fray and hurled smoke bombs, broke windows, and started fires. The violence forced the campus police to put Berkeley on lockdown and led university leaders to cancel the event.

The following morning, a political commentator suggested on *Fox & Friends* First that President Trump should take away Berkeley's federal funding. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Trump decided to weigh in.



Not surprisingly, Mr. Yiannopoulos liked that idea. On Facebook Thursday, he linked to a Breitbart article about the federal money Berkeley receives, adding, “Cut the whole lot, Donald J. Trump.”



Others were quick to condemn the president's threat. U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee, a California Democrat whose district includes the Berkeley campus, tweeted back: “President Trump doesn't have a license to blackmail universities. He's the president, not a dictator, and his empty threats are an abuse of power.”

Later, in a statement, Ms. Lee said Mr. Yiannopoulos “has made a career of inflaming racist, sexist and nativist sentiments.” Meanwhile, she wrote, “Berkeley has a proud history of dissent and students were fully within their rights to protest peacefully.”

Could Mr. Trump take away a university's federal funding for what he sees as a violation of the First Amendment? Not on his own, and not en-

tirely, some scholars say, though there are ways he could advocate for cutting some of it.

Regardless, Mr. Trump's singling out of Berkeley is worth paying attention to, they say, because it serves as a message to other campus officials that they may soon be put in the position of responding to the president's social-media whims.

### HOW BERKELEY PREPARED

Berkeley's chancellor, Nicholas B. Dirks, went to great lengths last week to explain why the university would not give in to demands to cancel Mr. Yiannopoulos's appearance. The First Amendment, the chancellor wrote, does not allow the university to censor or prohibit such events.

"In our view, Mr. Yiannopoulos is a troll and provocateur who uses odious behavior in part to 'entertain,' but also to deflect any serious engagement with ideas," Mr. Dirks wrote.

But, he added, "we are defending the right to free expression at an historic moment for our nation, when this right is once again of paramount importance." Mr. Dirks went on to warn that the university "will not stand idly by" if anyone tries to violate university policies by disrupting the talk.

Still, the furor over the protests delighted many activists who have been arguing for years that pressure to be politically correct on campuses has stifled those with conservative views.

Among them were members of the "alt-right" movement, a loosely affiliated group characterized by its white nationalist, sexist, and anti-Semitic views.

The group clearly felt vindicated by the president's assertion that Berkeley doesn't allow free speech, which came on the heels of the online discussion group Reddit banning an alt-right community for publishing personally identifiable information about people it is criticizing.

The Left is trying to shut us down because they are losing. We're the real opposition on the Right. We're... <https://t.co/Q9HayRhSD>

— AltRight.com (@AltRight\_com) February 2, 2017

On Thursday, Mr. Dirks released a statement doubling down on his earlier comments about the campus's commitment to free speech. The violence, he said, was perpetrated by "more than 100 armed individuals clad all in black who utilized paramilitary tactics to engage in violent, destructive behavior" designed to shut the event down.

"We deeply regret that the violence unleashed by this group undermined the First Amendment rights of the speaker as well as those who came to lawfully assemble and protest his presence."

The university had anticipated a large crowd of

protesters at Mr. Yiannopoulos's talk on Wednesday night and had brought in dozens of police officers from across the university system to help maintain order. But "we could not plan for the unprecedented," Mr. Dirks wrote. The event was called off only after the campus police concluded that the speaker had to be evacuated for his own safety, he added.

Mr. Trump's threat was also criticized by a group that is known for condemning campuses that it

## "We could not plan for the unprecedented."

sees as violating free speech rights. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, known as FIRE, released a statement Thursday objecting to "both violence and attempts to silence protected expression."

The group said, however, that it had seen no evidence that Berkeley, as an institution, had made any effort to silence Mr. Yiannopoulos, and that the university had, in fact, resisted calls to cancel his visit until the situation got out of hand.

FIRE added a caution that seemed to be directed at President Trump's threat to strip funding from Berkeley. "To punish an educational institution for the criminal behavior of those not under its control and in contravention of its policies, whether through the loss of federal funds or through any other means, would be deeply inappropriate and most likely unlawful," its statement said.

### WITHHOLDING FEDERAL FUNDS

The idea of punishing colleges for free-speech controversies was originally Ben Carson's idea, said Jonathan Zimmerman, a professor of the history of education at the University of Pennsylvania. Mr. Carson, a neurosurgeon and former Republican presidential candidate, said in October 2015 that he would have the U.S. Department of Education "monitor our institutions of higher education for extreme political bias and deny federal funding if it exists."

Terry W. Hartle, a senior vice president at the American Council on Education, took the question mark on the end of Mr. Trump's tweet literally. The president might have been asking, Could I withhold federal funds from Berkeley? Mr. Hartle said.

Yes, the federal government has the authority to

withhold federal funds like financial aid from colleges that engage in certain activities, Mr. Hartle said. And it has the authority to attach conditions to the money it gives out. The Solomon Amendment, for instance, requires colleges to admit ROTC or military recruiters to their campus or risk losing money.

But Congress would have to act to give the government the ability to take away federal funds for controversies involving the First Amendment, Mr. Hartle said.

The government also couldn't pull funding from Berkeley by retroactively saying the institution's federal money is contingent on protecting free speech, said Alexander (Sasha) Volokh, an associate professor of law at Emory University.

"If the funding comes explicitly with strings attached, which is that you must adequately protect free speech on your campus if you want these funds, and if the university takes these funds knowing the condition, that's one thing," he said.

The U.S. Supreme Court has weighed in several times on strings attached to federal funding, Mr. Volokh said, and has determined that such conditions must be clearly stated in advance and related to the matter being funded.

For instance, he said, the court said it was OK for the government to tie federal highway funds to a requirement for states to adopt a drinking age of 21, because highway safety could be affected by the drinking age. But the National Institutes of Health probably couldn't attach a requirement for free-speech protection to a grant for researching Ebola, he said.

Moving forward, Mr. Trump could tell federal research agencies that some of their contracts with colleges and researchers should now include stipulations about free speech, Mr. Volokh said. "I have the feeling that Trump had something much blunter in mind," he said.

#### 'UNCHARTED TERRITORY'

Mr. Trump's social-media attack on Berkeley raises another question for colleges: how to respond to such tweets. "This is uncharted territory for all organizations," not just colleges, Mr. Hartle said, citing Mr. Trump's criticism of Boeing for what he considered to be an overpriced contract for constructing two Air Force One planes that future presidents will use. (Boeing subsequently promised to keep the cost below \$4 billion.)

It might not be wise to pick a fight with someone who has millions of Twitter followers, Mr. Hartle said, but "you can't just ignore it if the president of the United States tweets about you."

Berkeley is in a particularly difficult situation, Mr. Hartle said, because in his view the university

did everything right when Mr. Yiannopoulos came to the campus. "Berkeley tried to allow him to speak and to allow protesters to protest," he said. "Everything was fine until the protests turned violent."

One challenge for colleges, he said, will probably involve dealing with people, particularly nonstudents, who want to disrupt speakers and who "now see resorting to violence as simply another tactic in an effort to accomplish their purpose."

If Mr. Trump were to push Congress to pass a law giving him the authority to take away federal funds from colleges for free-speech controversies, Mr. Hartle said, "they should carve out some sort of exception when it involved violence or a police request."

While the president might not make such legislation a priority, college officials shouldn't dismiss his criticism of Berkeley, said Mr. Zimmerman, of Penn. "It's ridiculous and frightening for the president to be threatening to withhold money based on his perception of what's happening with free speech on campus," he said. On the other hand, he said, "Trump is not wrong when he says a lot of people on these campuses want to squelch free speech."

When institutions disinvite speakers or try to quash a right-wing group's event or demonstration, Mr. Zimmerman said, "they're playing right into Trump's hands."

**"Trump is not wrong when he says a lot of people on these campuses want to squelch free speech."**

Given the violence, Mr. Zimmerman doesn't begrudge Berkeley's administration for canceling the speech. But he described as problematic a letter signed by dozens of professors saying that Mr. Yiannopoulos shouldn't be allowed to speak on campus.

Ultimately, Mr. Volokh is more concerned about the way in which Mr. Trump made his point, versus the content of the tweet. "It wasn't enough for him to say that free speech is important," Mr. Volokh said. "He had to do it in a way that was threatening."

*Originally published on February 3, 2017*

# At Berkeley, a Speaker's Cancellation Spurs New Battles Over Free Speech

By CHRIS QUINTANA

**O**NE week ago, the conservative commentator and firebrand Ann Coulter insisted that she would be speaking at the University of California at Berkeley, over administrators' objections that the event wouldn't be safe. But following heavy posturing, a legal challenge, and plenty of Berkeley bashing, Ms. Coulter dropped her plans.

On Wednesday, she said on Twitter and to news outlets, including *The New York Times*, that she was concerned about the safety of the event, and laid the blame for the lack of security at the feet of the university. The student groups who had helped book Ms. Coulter's speech, the Young America's Foundation and the Berkeley College Republicans, pulled their support from the event on Tuesday afternoon because of safety concerns.



(Ms. Coulter told the Associated Press that she might “swing by to say hello” to her supporters on Thursday.)

Berkeley has been sharp in its response, saying it tried to work with Ms. Coulter and that it supported her right to speak in a safe venue, but that they needed more time to find the appropriate space. And the mostly conservative students who organized the event, though they disagree among themselves, split the blame between both Ms. Coulter and the university.

The kerfuffle and subsequent recriminations show just how charged the political atmosphere is for Berkeley, heralded as the cradle of the free-

speech movement on college campuses. And the events highlight lessons other colleges might have to learn in order to both honor their dedication to free speech and protect the safety of students and speakers.

Among those lessons: The free-speech fights may never end. Despite Ms. Coulter's decision to stand down, the university was still bracing for potential violence on Thursday.

## ‘A UNIVERSITY, NOT A BATTLEFIELD’

The fracas over Ms. Coulter has unfolded in an already fractious atmosphere. Earlier this year, Milo Yiannopoulos's aborted appearance on the campus sparked a riot and a threat from President Trump to cut off the campus's federal funding. And just this month, protests in the City of Berkeley turned violent.

Days after that violent weekend, citing potential threats from off-campus groups, university officials initially said they couldn't host Ms. Coulter on April 27, the date originally scheduled by the Berkeley College Republicans. Instead the university offered her a May 2 speaking date. Ms. Coulter rejected the changes, and said she would speak on April 27, as originally planned.

In a campuswide message on Wednesday morning, Berkeley's chancellor, Nicholas B. Dirks, wrote that the reason Ms. Coulter's speech had been canceled for the 27th stemmed from the lack of a safe venue for the speaker.

“This is a university, not a battlefield,” Mr. Dirks wrote. “We must make every effort to hold events at a time and location that maximizes the chances that First Amendment rights can be successfully exercised and that community members can be protected.”

In a cramped room full of reporters and cameras on Wednesday, a spokesman for the university and a campus-police captain reiterated that the institution's insistence on May 2 was a matter of logistics. Namely, it was the challenge of finding a safe venue that wasn't already booked, one that doesn't have floor-to-ceiling glass windows and does have a suf-

ficient number of exits, among other things. “The number of venues on this campus that meet those criteria are few and far between. We’re 50,000 people here and they’re often booked out months in advance,” said Dan Mogulof, the spokesman.

“We must make every effort to hold events at a time and location that maximizes the chances that First Amendment rights can be successfully exercised and that community members can be protected.”

He added that poor planning on the part of the sponsoring student groups, the Berkeley College Republicans and BridgeUSA, were responsible for the current challenges. “We wouldn’t be sitting here and this wouldn’t be a story if the student group in question had followed procedure,” Mr. Mogulof said. “In nobody’s memory here has so much time been spent with a single student group trying to make a single event work because we support their right and ability to bring speakers of their choosing to this campus.”

The police official, Capt. Alex Yao, said the campus police would be “highly visible” and would have a “very low tolerance” for any type of violence on the campus on Thursday, based on intelligence they had previously gathered. Even though Ms. Coulter has canceled her speech, “we’re still planning for the potentiality of a riot-like situation occurring in our community,” he said.

And Mr. Dirks, in a late-afternoon email to the campus, wrote that people looking to avoid protests should steer clear of Sproul Plaza, the area where the free-speech movement started in 1964. “Our campus will not tolerate acts of violence or the destruction of property in our community,” Mr. Dirks wrote, and the police will “investigate, arrest and prosecute anyone who commits crimes on our campus.”

#### **‘A TERRIBLE SITUATION’**

Naweed Tahmas, a member of the Berkeley College Republicans, said during an impromptu news conference on Sproul Plaza on Wednesday afternoon that the blame for the cancellation lay with the university for failing to provide an appropriate venue. The group and its lawyer, Harmeet Dhillon, charged again, as they had done in a lawsuit filed earlier in the week, that the university was unfairly limiting their right to free speech.

“Unfortunately, despite giving the university

four weeks to prepare, they have not provided a venue for us and the UCPD has refused to ensure the safety of all students,” said Mr. Tahmas. “They have not provided any assurance to us that they will provide safety for Ann Coulter as well. They may have won the battle, but certainly not the war.”

It was difficult to hear the soft-spoken Mr. Tahmas and later the group’s president, Troy Worden,

**“Unfortunately, despite giving the university four weeks to prepare, they have not provided a venue for us and the UCPD has refused to ensure the safety of all students.”**

over the shouts of protesters who materialized on the scene with a bullhorn. That group included a man holding a large sign that declared, “No” and featured a web address, “refusefascism.org.”

Pranav Jandhyala, who is co-president of BridgeUSA, the other sponsoring organization, said his group wanted to have an open discussion rather than wage a battle over the First Amendment. And he acknowledged that campus administrators were in a tough spot and said they had done what they could to make the event happen, given the crossed wires in planning the event.

“This event wasn’t supposed to be the testing of free speech, it was supposed to be an example of what dialogue and discourse can look like when we bring someone as controversial as Ann Coulter,” Mr. Jandhyala said.

But what’s most frustrating, Mr. Jandhyala said, is the way Berkeley’s name is being co-opted.

“People are using our campus community and UC Berkeley as a battleground. People are using it for their own self-elevation, for publicity,” he said. “It’s resulting in a terrible situation for our perception in the nation. It’s resulting in a terrible situation for the safety of our student body.”

*Originally published on April 27, 2017*



LISA RATHKE, AP IMAGES

Protesters turned their backs and shouted as Charles Murray, the controversial political scientist best known for “The Bell Curve,” tried to speak at Middlebury College on Thursday. The confrontation became violent later as protesters swarmed Mr. Murray and the professor who moderated the event as they tried to leave.

# A Scuffle and a Professor’s Injury Make Middlebury a Free-Speech Flashpoint

By BROCK READ

**I**N THE WAKE of protests that disrupted a controversial speaker’s appearance and left a professor injured, Middlebury College has become the latest flashpoint in a national battle over campus speech and safety.

In a statement to the campus on Friday, Laurie L. Patton, the college’s president, described “a violent incident with a lot of pushing and shoving” as protesters swarmed Charles Murray, the speaker, and Allison Stanger, a professor who served as moderator, after the event. Ms. Patton apologized to Mr. Murray, Ms. Stanger, who was injured during the encounter, and “everyone

who came in good faith to participate in a serious discussion.”

“Last night,” the president wrote, “we failed to live up to our core values.”

Even before it happened, Mr. Murray’s appearance had put those values on trial. Now the incident has stoked new debate — about whether the protesters were suppressing or exercising free speech, and about who was responsible for escalating the disruption into a fracas that sent Ms. Stanger to the hospital for treatment of an injury to her neck.

At the center of the incident was a familiar figure: Mr. Murray, the polarizing political scientist best known for his 1994 book *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. The book, co-written with the psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein, argues that the gap in academic achievement between black and white students can be at least partially explained by genetics. The book has been widely criticized for both its sociological methods and its racial implications.

A conservative student organization invited Mr. Murray to Middlebury; the college’s political-science department then sponsored the invitation.

On Wednesday, a day before the event, the student newspaper published a letter from a group of nearly 500 alumni and students who condemned Mr. Murray’s visit, calling it “a decision that directly endangers members of the community and stains Middlebury’s reputation by jeopardizing the institution’s claims to intellectual rigor and compassionate inclusivity.”

The following day, *The New York Times* reported, most of the over 400 students at Mr. Murray’s speech turned their backs to the speaker and shouted him down. Middlebury officials moved Mr. Murray to a new room, where Ms. Stanger, a professor of international politics and economics, completed an interview — streamed on video — despite further disruptions.

In an essay published Sunday, Mr. Murray — no stranger to campus protests — argued that, due to its length and intensity, the Middlebury disruption “could become an inflection point.”

“Until last Thursday, all of the ones involving me have been as carefully scripted as kabuki: The college administration meets with the organizers of the protest and ground rules are agreed upon,” he wrote. “If this becomes the new normal, the number of colleges willing to let themselves in for an experience like Middlebury’s will plunge to near zero.”

### ‘THE MOB AT MIDDLEBURY’

After the event, as protests continued outside, a group including Mr. Murray and Ms. Stanger left the venue. There, according to Ms. Patton, a “violent incident” occurred, culminating in “an attack

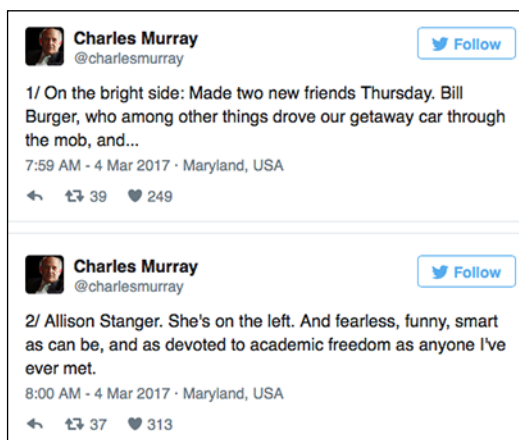
on the car in which they were leaving campus.”

Bill Burger, a college spokesman who was part of the group escorting Mr. Murray, told the *Times* that masked protesters accosted Ms. Stanger. “Someone grabbed Allison’s hair and twisted her neck,” he told the newspaper.

Ms. Stanger was treated and fitted with a neck brace at a nearby hospital, according to the *Addison Independent*.

A group of student protesters published a conflicting account of the incident, arguing that Middlebury officials had exacerbated the incident and that Ms. Stanger’s hair “was not intentionally pulled but was inadvertently caught in the chaos that Public Safety incited.”

On Twitter, Mr. Murray applauded both Mr. Burger and Ms. Stanger:



“We believe that many of these protesters were outside agitators,” wrote Ms. Patton in her note to the campus, “but there are indications that Middlebury College students were involved as well.”

Whatever the mix of students and outsiders, many commentators from across the political spectrum were quick to portray the incident as an example of students’ intolerance of uncomfortable speech.



In an editorial assailing “The Mob at Middlebury,” *The Wall Street Journal* urged Ms. Patton

## **“We believe that many of these protesters were outside agitators, but there are indications that Middlebury College students were involved as well.”**

to “follow through with discipline to scare these students straight.” And Suzanne Nossel, executive director of PEN America, an association of writers and editors, condemned a “lawless and criminal attack” that “marks a new low in this challenged era for campus speech.”

Amid the fiery off-campus response, Middlebury students and faculty took stock. Some expressed dismay at the disruption of Mr. Murray’s speech and the chaos that ensued.

“It is understandable why some students may find Murray’s research findings offensive,” wrote Matthew Dickinson, a professor of political science at Middlebury. “It is less clear, however, why so many believe that the appropriate response was not to simply skip his talk, but instead to prevent others from hearing him and, in so doing, inadvertently give him the platform and national exposure they purportedly opposed.”

But the view that student protesters erred in shouting down Mr. Murray is far from unanimous.

“I am angry that free speech is conflated with civil discourse,” wrote Linus Owens, an associate professor of sociology. Mr. Owens argued that Middlebury legitimized Mr. Murray by giving him a stage and deciding that “only then we can ask smart and devastating questions in return.”

“That’s one model, sure,” he wrote, “but it’s not the only one.”

In a Facebook post, Ms. Stanger described Thursday as “the saddest day of my life.” By turning away from the stage during Mr. Murray’s speech, the professor wrote, the protesting students had “effectively dehumanized me.” Still, she argued against a common criticism of the disruption as an example of ivory-tower excess.

“To people who wish to spin this story as one about what’s wrong with elite colleges and universities, you are wrong,” she wrote. “Please instead consider this as a metaphor for what’s wrong with our country, and on that, Charles Murray and I would agree.”

*Originally published on March 5, 2017*

# What Could Middlebury Have Done to Avoid a Free-Speech Fracas?

By FERNANDA ZAMUDIO-SUAREZ

**O**FFICIALS at Middlebury College knew a speech by Charles A. Murray would be controversial. That's why the political-science department, which co-sponsored the event with Mr. Murray, held an open meeting to discuss why it was participating.

Mr. Murray, a political scientist, is best-known for *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, in which he and his co-author, the psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein, argue that genetics can at least partially explain the achievement gap between black and white students. The book has been criticized for its methods and conclusions.

Despite prior planning, the event last Thursday ended with unexpected chaos: Mr. Murray and Allison Stanger, the professor who moderated his talk, were harassed after the event, and Ms. Stanger was injured. (In a written statement on Monday, Laurie L. Patton, the institution's president, said that the campus police department would investigate the confrontation in which Ms. Stanger was injured.)

At its open meeting last Wednesday, a day before Mr. Murray's talk, the political-science department and other students, faculty, and staff members debated what type of speakers would be invited to the campus moving forward, said Bertram Johnson, an associate professor of political science and the department's chair. Even Ms. Patton stopped by the meeting, he said. After Thursday night's turmoil, Mr. Johnson said, there will probably be more debates and meetings like Wednesday's.

But with the small Vermont college now in an unwanted national spotlight, Mr. Johnson said he's frustrated, and he wonders what more the college could have done. The department held meetings beforehand, students and faculty members spoke about their concerns, and the department explained how it makes sponsorship or co-sponsor-

ship decisions, he said. Administrators also fine-tuned a backup plan, he said, but the protests still went awry.

In short, if this much diligence went into hosting Mr. Murray at Middlebury, and the event still didn't pass without incident, where can such events go right?

"I think we've been talking about it in lots of different forums both before and after this event on Thursday, and some people are kind of exhausted

**"I think we have a more 'woke' student body, a student body that's more aware of racial issues than they were in the past."**

by it, to be frank," Mr. Johnson said. "I'm not sure what we're going to do differently. I think it could have a real chilling effect, and I don't want it to have such an effect."

## **MORE ACTIVISM ON CAMPUSES**

Long before Mr. Murray visited Middlebury, students and faculty members debated the optics of having a conservative student organization host him, with the political-science department

co-sponsoring the event and Ms. Patton introducing the controversial guest, said Kevin Moss, a professor of modern languages and literature.

It's one thing to study and read controversial authors, but hosting them on campus could be seen as an endorsement of their views, Mr. Moss said. These questions, combined with an uptick in student activism on campuses, may be one of the reasons why the protesters' response to Mr. Murray grew so raucous.

"I think we have a more 'woke' student body, a student body that's more aware of racial issues than they were in the past," Mr. Moss said. "I think really it's about things like Black Lives Matter, about protests that people have seen, that they don't necessarily have to sit down and shut up in all situations."

The problem was that the protests eventually turned violent, Mr. Moss said. And long after the campus steps out of the national spotlight, Middlebury will still have to grapple with these hard questions of free speech and improve, he said.

"This is the worst I've ever experienced," Mr. Johnson said. "It's fair to say this is probably the worst week in my career."

Though there were a lot of discussions before the talk, administrators didn't fully understand how upset students were, said Gloria Estela González Zenteno, an associate professor of Spanish. And students' disconnect didn't simply come from the event, she said, but from the 2016 presidential election and from President Trump's first two months in office, she said.

Laurie Essig, an associate professor of sociology, gender, sexuality, and feminist studies, echoed that point, saying the conversations at Middlebury were filled with people talking past each other and not

enough listening and understanding.

## A HARDENED DIVIDE

Mr. Murray's talk also exposed deep divides among faculty members. In a Facebook post, Ms. Stanger wrote that she was surprised that faculty members had screamed at her from the audience, alongside students.

While these differences may have existed before, now a literal line has been drawn. Just before Mr. Murray's visit, dozens of faculty members published a letter asking Ms. Patton to not introduce him.

For Mr. Moss, that's troubling. He said he wants to continue to have civil debates with his colleagues that end with dinner and not a shouting match. It's important to keep talking to each other to work to understand differing positions, he said.

As the campus evaluates what went wrong, Ms. Essig said some people will have to learn to live with a tension that may not have an easy fix.

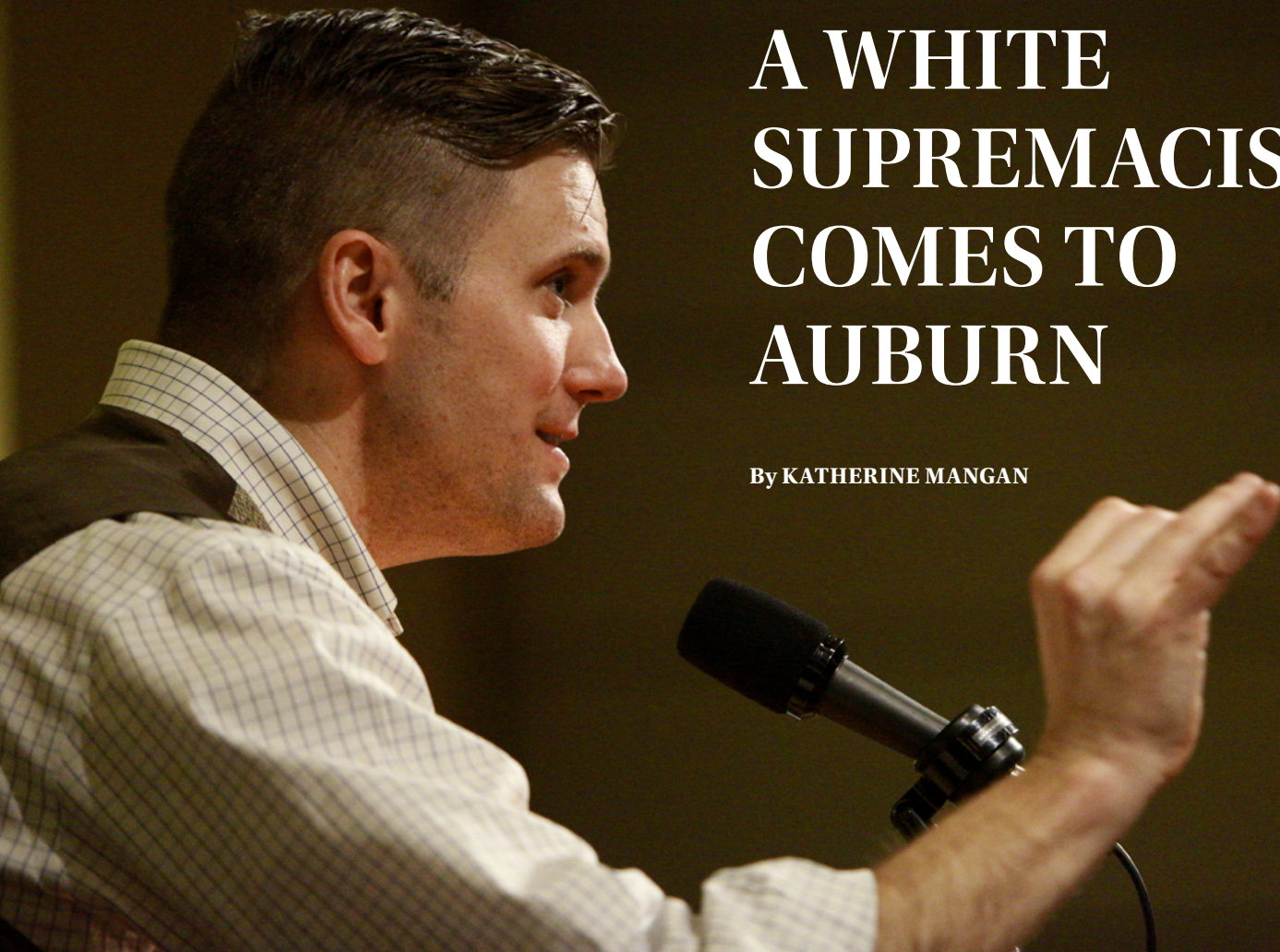
Still, faculty members, especially those who have tenure, should ask themselves "What role did I play in this?" she said.

Ms. Essig, who was among those who signed the letter asking Ms. Patton to cancel her introductory remarks, said she didn't attend Mr. Murray's talk, but she said she could have met with more student groups to discuss how their protests would come off in right-wing news reports.

Now, it's up to not just administrators, but students and faculty to move on, Ms. Essig said.

"We should be able to say, 'I don't agree with you but I understand that you don't see it my way either, so let's come up with a solution that works for both of us,'" she said.

*Originally published on March 7, 2017*



# A WHITE SUPREMACIST COMES TO AUBURN

By KATHERINE MANGAN

JULIA ROBINSON FOR THE CHRONICLE

Despite campus administrators' attempt to cancel the event, the white supremacist Richard Spencer went ahead with a speech at Auburn U. on Tuesday night. Mr. Spencer (shown speaking in Texas in December) focused his remarks at Auburn almost entirely on defending the so-called alt-right movement.

**T**ENSIONS RAN HIGH at Auburn University on Tuesday evening as Richard B. Spencer, a white supremacist whose uninvited visits have roiled college campuses, delivered his message of racial division to a packed hall.

"The alt-right is about identity," he told the crowd, his voice thundering into a crescendo as he went on. "Period. End of statement. It's about being a white person in the 21st century. That is why we're dangerous!"

White people, he said, are burdened with "this black cloud, this eternal guilt trip" that prevents them from achieving greatness. "The great challenge to the system is when you say 'I am German. I am English. I am white.' That is what they don't want to hear. That is the true challenge. And that is fundamentally what the alt-right is about."

Outside, as Mr. Spencer prepared to speak, students and others shouted at each other about free speech, Black Lives Matter, and whether or not Mr. Spencer, the president of a white nationalist think tank called the National Policy Institute, should be allowed to appear on the public college's campus.

In a chaotic webcast filmed by a group that supports Mr. Spencer, a voice could be heard shouting, "Whites are a minority who have no political power and are being slaughtered!" Another yelled for the many white supremacists who had converged on the campus from outside Auburn — some from outside the state — to leave.

As a fight broke out between two men, police officers wrestled them to the ground, handcuffed them, and led them, at least one of them bloodied, away from the scene. The police later confirmed that three people had been arrested on disorderly-

conduct charges.

For a moment, the tone turned more lighthearted. Accompanied by drums, protesters shouted, “Good night, alt-right” while a man in an orange bodysuit with a green crown danced. His sign read “I don’t carrot all about your outrage.” In the background, strains of “Why Can’t We Be Friends” played.

#### ‘A HECKLER’S VETO’

The talk almost didn’t happen — at least in the organized forum Mr. Spencer had hoped for. After initially agreeing to allow him to speak, the university on Friday canceled Mr. Spencer’s appearance, citing “legitimate concerns and credible evidence that it will jeopardize the safety of students, faculty, staff and visitors.” The decision came amidst tension over anti-Semitic fliers that had been posted around campus promoting the creation of a “white student union.”

“What they’re doing is granting a heckler’s veto,” Mr. Spencer said in an interview with *The Chronicle* on Monday, referring to the suppression of speech because of the fear of a violent reaction by hecklers. “If this happens once, it’s a very bad precedent. I will not allow it to stand.”

Mr. Spencer, who had vowed to appear at the university anyway, challenged the university’s decision to cancel his talk, arguing that there was nothing alarming about his views and no reason to think he posed a danger to anyone. On Tuesday afternoon, a federal judge granted an injunction that effectively required the university to let the event go on as scheduled. Mr. Spencer hailed that decision as a victory for the “alt-right” and for free speech.

He focused his speech, at the university’s James E. Foy Hall, almost completely on defending the so-called alt-right movement — a term he is largely credited with coining to describe a far-right belief that embraces white supremacy and anti-Semitism and rejects political correctness.

“We have to demand meaning. We have to demand identity. We have to become something greater than ourselves,” he told the crowd, which responded with cheers, laughter, and a few jeers. “We have to become part of a family. A story. That’s what the alt-right is.”

Mr. Spencer elicited his first boos when he said college football should be banned. It makes no sense, he said, “for alumni to be funding these kinds of programs — bringing in people they have nothing in common with, who they wouldn’t

invite into their homes, who engage in all kinds of abuses, including sexual abuse of white women.”

He went on, alternating between jocular familiarity, insulting jabs, and fired-up rhetoric that left many audience members unsure whether to laugh, boo, or cheer.

“You are a white person. You have a deep connection with Rome, with Athens, with this whole world that’s been ripped away from you. Instead, they substituted some stupid, bullshit football game!”

It’s much easier, Mr. Spencer said, being black. “Having an identity that comes to them like dew comes in the morning. It’s natural. You don’t need an intellectual movement to create it.”

A black student challenged him, asking what he knew about being black and he admitted he didn’t really know.

In addition to the large contingent of campus and local police on hand, Mr. Spencer brought his own security detail, which he said includes “a number of people who are very close to me and effectively never leave my side.”

#### AUBURN RESPONDS

In a letter released just hours before the scheduled talk, Auburn’s provost, Timothy R. Boosinger, and its vice president for inclusion and diversity, Taffye Benson Clayton, confirmed that the judge

**“You are a white person. You have a deep connection with Rome, with Athens, with this whole world that’s been ripped away from you. Instead, they substituted some stupid, bullshit football game!”**

had ruled in Mr. Spencer’s favor. They said that it is “more important than ever that we respond in a way that is peaceful, respectful, and maintains civil discourse.”

The letter defended the university's decision to cancel the speech in the wake of "attempts by uninvited, unaffiliated, off-campus groups and individuals to provoke conflict that is disruptive to our campus environment."

The Auburn administrators added that the university understands the rights afforded by the First Amendment. "However, when the tenets of free speech are overshadowed by threats to the safety of our students, faculty, and staff, we have a responsibility to protect our campus and the men and women who unite our academic community."

While the controversy was heating up, critics of Mr. Spencer quickly organized a music festival with local bands and free pizza, hoping to lure people away from Mr. Spencer's appearance. They raised more than \$1,000 through an online campaign that stressed their goal of sending a message of support for minority-group members and denying Mr. Spencer a platform for his white supremacist views. That move was similar to the response at Texas A&M University at College Station, where Mr. Spencer's appearance in December angered many on the campus and was countered with a "unity rally" in the football stadium.

At Auburn, some students decorated sidewalks around the campus with colored-chalk messages of love and peace.

### **BLAMING THE BLACK BLOC**

In his interview with *The Chronicle*, Mr. Spencer said it was "ironic" that the university was worried about the safety of its students. "Do they really fear that Richard Spencer is going to be randomly attacking people?" he asked. "The aggressors are the black bloc."

The term, which dates to a tactic used in the 1980s in Germany, refers to protesters who wear head-to-toe black clothes and masks to conceal their identities. In February, the University of California at Berkeley canceled an appearance by Milo Yiannopoulos, a conservative provocateur, after vandalism and violence broke out. The university said much of the mayhem was provoked by black-clad protesters who weren't affiliated with the university. A flurry of posts on social media this week from groups both in support of and opposition to Mr. Spencer led to speculation that similar groups might be planning to descend on the Auburn campus.

Some of those groups are self-described anarchists often referred to as antifascist or "Antifa."

"I would be perfectly happy to engage in people who disagree with me, but Black Bloc is not like that. They don't want to talk — they want to attack and shut you down," Mr. Spencer said.

"The idea that I have caused this is absurd," he

said of criticism that his inflamed rhetoric incites violence. "People who say that might be overestimating my powers."

## **"Do they really fear that Richard Spencer is going to be randomly attacking people? The aggressors are the black bloc."**

He said it's possible that the controversy over another "alt-right" leader's altercation with a protester in Berkeley, Calif., on Saturday might have created further tensions that could erupt at Auburn. (The protest, which resulted in several injuries and 20 arrests, did not take place on the Berkeley campus.)

But he said he didn't think Nathan Damigo, the student at California State University at Stanislaus, did anything wrong when he was seen on video punching a female protester in the face. It wasn't, he said, a "sucker punch" like the one that landed on Mr. Spencer while he was talking to a reporter during the inauguration festivities for President Donald J. Trump.

"Nathan was in a maelstrom and the girl who was punched had said on her Facebook page that I'm here to get the scalps of 100 Nazis."

Mr. Damigo founded Identity Evropa, a white-nationalist group that has been recruiting on college campuses.

It's hard to know how many of the audience members who loudly cheered Mr. Spencer, when he called diversity "awful" and said white people were the most oppressed in the world, were connected with the university. Dozens of people who responded to a call from alt-right groups to show up came from outside the region.

Outside his speech, anti-Spencer protesters seemed at times frustrated and incredulous at the racist rants coming from some of the pro-Spencer activists. "Have you completely lost your mind?" a student wails.

As Mr. Spencer exits the stage, the chants outside the building, against Nazi scum and Commie infiltrators, reach a fever pitch. He drives off, mission accomplished, leaving behind a campus more divided than ever.

*Originally published on April 19, 2017*

# In Renting Out Space, Do Colleges Invite Trouble?

By PETER SCHMIDT

**N**O ONE officially connected with Auburn University invited Richard Spencer to speak there. On Tuesday night, however, the university ended up hosting the prominent white supremacist anyway, thanks to a policy that let a resident of the distant Atlanta area rent an auditorium there.

Auburn's administration had attempted to cancel the speech, citing safety concerns. But Cameron Padgett, the auditorium renter, had challenged that decision in U.S. District Court as a violation of his First Amendment rights, and Judge W. Keith Watkins on Tuesday ordered the public university to let the event proceed.

Texas A&M University found itself in a similar position last fall, as a result of a policy that let an outsider rent a room in its student center so Mr. Spencer could speak there. Rather than trying to cancel the speech, which they held to be protected under the U.S. Constitution, administrators there beefed up security and simultaneously staged an "Aggies United" event in the football stadium to help defuse tensions.

Last month, to help prevent such a crisis down the road, the university revised its policy governing the rental of campus facilities to outsiders. Its new policy requires external clients seeking to hold an event there to secure sponsorship from a recognized student organization, one of the university's academic or administrative units, or another campus in the Texas A&M system. It puts the sponsors on the hook for any unpaid costs or property damage.

"That makes a lot of sense, what Texas A&M is doing," says Randy A. Burba, chief of public safety at Chapman University and president of the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators. Mr. Burba says he has not heard of other colleges contemplating similar changes in their space-rental policies, but he expects "that will change drastically" in the wake of the Auburn and Texas A&M controversies.

Among the questions that the recent developments raise:

## **Where else might space rentals cause colleges headaches?**

Although colleges' students and employees account for the lion's share of demand for rented space on campus, a substantial share of institutions, especially in the public sector, rent out space to people with no direct connection to them, according to Donna-Jo Pepito, director of research for Nacas, an association of college auxiliary services. Often, colleges' willingness to rent space to outsiders changes over the course of the academic year, with availability peaking in summer and during winter break, when demand on campus has ebbed.

Most of the time, outsiders rent space for decidedly uncontroversial events, such as wedding receptions or meetings of local civic groups. Even if they seem intent on provoking controversy by bringing in inflammatory speakers, there won't be a stir if no one cares that they're there. *The Texas Tribune* reports that the man who rented space for Richard Spencer's appearance at Texas A&M had been bringing white supremacists and other extremists to campus for years. The previous ones, however, spoke to small audiences and drew little protest or media attention.

Like Milo Yiannopoulos, a fellow right-wing provocateur, Mr. Spencer has changed the game by adeptly using social media and his venue choices to gin up controversy and to draw big crowds of both supporters and opponents, some of whom arrive itching to do battle.

## **Can't events sponsored by campus groups also cause a ruckus?**

Certainly they can. Campus chapters of the College Republicans sponsored the Milo Yiannopoulos appearances that recently led to mayhem at the University of Washington and the University of California at Berkeley. A Middle-

bury College student group, the American Enterprise Institute Club, arranged the visit by the controversial author Charles Murray that last month sparked violence there.

Texas A&M officials are under no illusions that their new sponsorship requirement will prevent any reoccurrence of tensions over campus events. “We fully anticipate that we will have controversial speakers who are sponsored by people on campus,” says Amy B. Smith, a Texas A&M spokeswoman.

Now, however, outsiders won’t be able to speak there unless another system campus or some group of students or employees wants them to be heard. The university’s administration will be dealing with people somehow attached to the institution, fostering trust and offering leverage when it comes to ensuring that the event is properly planned and recovering funds for unpaid costs or damage. Ms. Smith says the new policy also helps ensure student access to meeting rooms in the face of high demand stemming from rapid enrollment growth.

Mr. Burba, of the campus law-enforcement administrators’ group, says such a sponsorship requirement will also promote broader university involvement in planning events, helping to ensure that they are framed as civil exchanges of different ideas rather than one-sided diatribes countered only by protest. “The point of a university is to facilitate debate,” he says.

Many colleges that do not require such sponsorship of outsiders’ facility rental nonetheless strongly encourage it through a tiered pricing structure. Jeff P. Pelletier, director of operations and events at Ohio State University and president of the Association of College Unions International, says his organization’s members will typically charge outsiders a full rate while offering a discount to faculty members or administrators and a bigger discount to students.

*Originally published on April 20, 2017*

### **Why let outsiders rent space at all?**

It isn’t the money. Mr. Pelletier says most college unions rent space at a rate intended to cover any associated costs and put some funds in reserve for equipment replacement and facility upgrades. If events staged by outsiders require a larger security presence than covered by the rental fee, they can cause the host college to lose a lot of money.

Such was the case at Texas A&M when Mr. Spencer showed up at an auditorium with a rental fee that assumed the type of security costs associated with a wedding reception or high-school awards ceremony. Ms. Smith says the university’s policies required it to charge the same rate regardless of how the room was to be used.

Generally, Mr. Pelletier says, college unions’ rental of space to outsiders stems from their desire to be centers of campus involvement. Typically, he says, such space requests are handled through a process that weighs projected security costs, risk-management considerations, and the logistical needs of other renters who will be in nearby spaces at the same time. For the most part, he says, unions try their best to accommodate such requests and seldom turn them down.

Plans for events that will draw large crowds draw the closest scrutiny from campus security officials, who tend to have final say over whether an event can happen. Mr. Burba says security officials at public colleges, which are bound by the First Amendment, generally have to be careful not to base decisions to block events from happening based on considerations of what will be said. Although private colleges vary in how their cultures approach free speech, most see allowing open debate as central to their missions.

“We might say ‘It would be a lot better if this event did not happen,’ but we understand why it needs to,” Mr. Burba says.



Zachary R. Wood

# 'I Don't Want to Back Down'

By SARAH BROWN

**I**N THE fourth grade, when Zachary R. Wood was attending public school in Detroit, a teacher told him he was being disruptive because he was asking too many questions.

Mr. Wood, now a junior at Williams College, was not deterred. Today he is questioning why, in his view, conservative thought is suppressed on the campus.

Mr. Wood spent much of his childhood living in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Detroit and in Washington, D.C. Thanks to a scholarship, he was able to transfer to a private school in the fourth grade, where the ambitious student found his footing academically.

During the summer before eighth grade, Mr. Wood began to devour the work of thinkers like Edmund Burke, Adam Smith, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Cornel West. As he read more and more, he shaped his ideology: a liberal Democrat who nevertheless wanted to hear all perspectives. He enrolled at Williams in 2014.

That October, Randall Kennedy, a Harvard Law professor, came to speak on campus about his 2002 book, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*. Mr. Wood asked some of his friends what they thought of the speaker. Their response: He shouldn't be there; a man arguing that it's not necessarily wrong for white people to use a racist epithet has no place at Williams. Mr. Wood was taken aback.

Soon after that, he joined Uncomfortable Learning, a student group that aims to promote intellectual diversity by bringing a range of speakers to the campus. It's funded through anonymous alumni donations. Once he secured a leadership role as a sophomore, he was "ready to make waves," he says.

That academic year, Mr. Wood invited Suzanne Venker, a longtime critic of feminism, and John Derbyshire, a conservative commentator. He was forced to cancel the former after students protested; Williams's president canceled the latter.

Mr. Wood also invited the provocative scholar Charles Murray, who spoke with little fanfare; some of his other campus appearances have been far more tense.

Mr. Wood, who recently signed a book deal, spoke with *The Chronicle* about his experience as a student, the backlash he's faced for inviting controversial speakers, and why colleges need to fix what he sees as their one-sided ideological approach.

**Q. When you came to Williams as a freshman, what were you expecting it to be like, and what did you actually find?**

**A.** I was expecting to find a community of inquirers, in an intellectual sense. I was hoping to develop meaningful friendships, relationships with professors, and to really throw myself into the life of the mind and sort of get lost in the world of ideas. I wanted to debate, I wanted to engage, I wanted to challenge. The understanding that I had coming to the college was that gaining a deeper understanding of the world and of humanity means not just that I can defend my own positions and strengthen my ability to do that, but that I can understand what matters to other people and why.

I did develop a number of meaningful relationships with my professors. But a number of my professors would present pretty much exactly what they thought and present it as just the truth: This is what needs to be accepted, this is not something you question.

I can think of a class I'm in right now where it's already assumed that everyone in this class is on the left. And therefore we don't even need to think about what conservatives would say. Even questioning a fundamental progressive ideal, which was something I was very interested in doing because I wanted to challenge myself, is not well received.

**Q. Can you recall any specific examples of courses where you felt that you couldn't question something?**

**A.** I can remember a tutorial that I was in, a course on the history of racial and sexual violence in the United States. The professor was brilliant, and I learned a lot from her. But she came into class with the assumption that there was nothing to learn from our founding fathers, nothing to admire about them. What we needed to understand, according to her, was that they were walking contradictions who said they believed in liberty but they held slaves, and for that reason they were just utterly disreputable and not even worth engaging.

It's not that I don't find anything correct or accurate about that perspective. It's that I honestly felt like I couldn't even say, "Yes, but there are important things that we learn about the ideals of democracy and pluralism and free speech and the world of

ideas from Thomas Jefferson, from Washington.”

Academia is really all about contributing your knowledge, adding and critiquing and refining opinions and beliefs. And to think that we could just leave one side of the ideological spectrum out entirely — I find that to be at odds with the intellectual character of the institution itself.

**Q. Talk about your first experience with backlash from a controversial speaker, Suzanne Venker.**

**A.** Yes, in 2015. At the time, I was part of Uncomfortable Learning. We knew it was going to be controversial, but we didn’t know how controversial it would be.

As soon as I made the Facebook page and booked a room, I was bombarded with phone calls, text messages, posts on the event page itself. So now you’re a men’s-rights activist. So now you’re an antifeminist, huh, Zach. So is this how you deal with your male insecurities. I was getting messages from people saying things like, Make sure you sleep lightly. Watch out when you walk outside your front door.

There were two other leaders of Uncomfortable Learning, and they came to me and said, We’re getting heckled on campus, people are saying things behind our backs. We cannot see how this speech is going to be productive. We think we should cancel. I really didn’t want to cancel, but I understood their reasons. Williams is a very small place, and it’s not easy to have a quarter of the student body resent you. I told them, We’ll do majority rules. So we canceled it.

People were still not happy. Now they were like, You guys are chickens, you couldn’t take being uncomfortable. I said, I’m not going to let this fly. I wrote a scathing critique in the Williams Alternative of everyone who protested thinkers’ right to speak on campus. Eventually I ended up writing something in *The Washington Post* about the experience, saying, I don’t want to back down on this, I don’t want to let this go.

Then both of my co-presidents said, We’re done, Zach. It’s all you. We can’t deal with this anymore.

**Q. You wrote in an op-ed last year that, to your friends and mentors, “There is simply no way a black liberal Democrat from a disadvantaged background can support the idea of a speaker who questions feminism or the number of campus sexual assaults.” Have you felt pressure to conform to the views that others expect of you as a black man?**

**A.** Yes. It means that you support affirmative action. It means you understand that welfare is important and that poor people need more help. It means that you feel like racism is not just significant but almost paralyzing in this country, that

it’s constraining opportunities. And I agree with these things.

But I cannot tell you how many times I have sat down with professors one on one, and I happen to agree with something that a conservative thinker said on a particular issue. And it’s automatically clear to me that if I were to say that, they would be utterly repulsed.

Earlier this semester, I was talking to a professor about Black Lives Matter. I said, I understand the anger. I admire the commitment and the moral compass that guides that commitment, and I support what they’re pushing for. But the issue is far more complicated. Police kill far too many people who are black and white, and police have a difficult job, and we need to consider that. This professor was like, Hold on, hold on, wait a minute, wait a minute. Come on, Zach. Listen. There’s a reason why black people are afraid of the police. And I was like, I agree, sir.

**Q. You’ve written about receiving random pat-downs from the police in D.C.**

**A.** I could sit here if I wanted to and just tell you story after story of the time I saw police do this. But I also understand that there’s a lot of crime in these areas, and that they have jobs to do: protecting communities, preserving order. And there are things that make people look suspect and threatening, and I find them suspect and threatening, too — it’s not just a white police officer. We have to acknowledge that.

**Q. Recently we’ve seen intense protests of controversial speakers at the University of California at Berkeley and Middlebury College. Much of the violence was perpetrated by outsiders, but many students did want to shut down the events in question. You’re planning to bring more speakers next academic year. Are you worried about violence at Williams?**

**A.** It’s something that’s always in the back of your mind, that students will react in a way that’s not just unproductive but destructive. What I’d like to think, though — and I have to give the Williams administration some credit for this — they have made it clear that they want to discuss security and accommodations beforehand and make sure that students like me, who are involved in bringing in the speaker, feel safe, and that they’re committed to trying to make it work.

Will they be willing to do that if I want to bring a very controversial speaker? That remains to be seen. I do think some strides are being made around preventing these destructive things from happening.

You can never really know. All it takes is for one person to start chanting, or one person to start heckling the speaker, and then another person gets up and then another person gets up, and then peo-

ple storm out. All of these things are sort of socially facilitated.

**Q. Where do you draw the line on controversial speakers?**

**A.** I believe that every citizen of this country who is not inciting violence directly or making a threat has the right to speak. But in terms of speakers I would invite to speak as part of Uncomfortable Learning, I have to think that there is some intellectual value — not that they are right, not that the majority of the evidence is on their side, but that there is intellectual value in engaging with them.

Take Charles Murray. I vehemently disagree with his argument in *The Bell Curve*. But he wants people to understand what he thinks; he doesn't

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just want to incite protest. Someone like Milo Yiannopoulos is a little different. Would I invite him to campus? He would certainly not be the first on my list.

**Q. Who is on your list?**

**A.** One person — and this person isn't even on the right — is Reginald Dwayne Betts. He has a nuanced perspective on the issue of incarceration that is informed by personal experience in the prison system, and he has an incredible story. I'd also be interested in bringing Alan Dershowitz. I want to find speakers who can speak on issues of religion, so Sam Harris is on my list.

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

# Boos and Protests Mark Betsy DeVos's Speech at Bethune-Cookman

By ADAM HARRIS

**E**DISON O. JACKSON, the president of Bethune-Cookman University, approached the lectern at the event center here on Wednesday — standing in front of soon-to-be-graduates and more than 3,000 of their family members, friends, and supporters, at the opening of the university's spring commencement ceremony. "Turn and face forward," he said. The students turned in step.

What followed was less uniform.

A wave of anticipation had been building in the campus community and across the country in the days leading up to the historically black college's graduation ceremony. The reason: Betsy DeVos, the education secretary, would be delivering the commencement address.

The atmosphere on Wednesday as Ms. DeVos delivered her speech is indicative of a greater issue the Trump administration faces, as many believe it has strained its credibility with historically black colleges and universities by publicly reaching out to them, building their expectations, then following up with little action, or with statements that seem to step in the opposite direction.

Its public fumbles include Ms. DeVos's referring to HBCUs as "real pioneers when it comes to school choice" and President Trump's recent suggestion that a decades-old federal funding program that aids construction on black college campuses might be unconstitutional.

Such missteps, coupled with the lack of tangible evidence that the administration is actively working to help black colleges financially, have fostered skepticism and ire from students, faculty, and supporters of HBCUs. And it all came to a head on Wednesday.

## JEERS AND WARNINGS

In the days leading up to commencement, speculation swelled about protests both before and during the ceremony. As the day arrived, dozens of protesters lined the main drag outside of the Ocean Center here, the fifth-largest convention center in Florida, and several small factions of protesters gathered at various points around the building. They held signs that read "No to DeVos," and had messages for the administration to protect the legacy of the university's namesake and founder, Mary McLeod Bethune.

The protests outside, however, were just the beginning.

After the graduating students and faculty members filed into the convention center and took their seats, Mr. Jackson thanked the guests in attendance.

He mentioned Omarosa Manigault, a senior adviser to President Trump, and was met with loud boos from the audience. He was again booed when he thanked Ms. DeVos.

"You don't know her," Mr. Jackson said. "Nor do you know her story."

The university conferred honorary degrees on two people on Wednesday, Ms. DeVos and Derrick L. Henry, the mayor of Daytona Beach. Mr. Henry, who is the second black mayor of the city, was awarded his honorary doctorate first. In his acceptance remarks, he reminded the graduates that the day was about them. "Today," he told them, "you are a model of possibility for others." But once he took his seat, the events began to spiral.

Ms. DeVos was booed when she was presented as a candidate for the honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters. She was booed again when it was awarded. There was a break in the jeers for a prayer from Mr. Jackson and musical selection from the university's symphonic band, but the booing resumed when Ms.



JOHN RAOUX, AP IMAGES

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos stepped aside at one point during her commencement address at Bethune-Cookman U. while the university's president, Edison O. Jackson, admonished the hecklers who repeatedly disrupted her speech.

DeVos stood to deliver her speech.

As she greeted the candidates, many of them stood and turned their backs.

Several students sat down after a minute, but the group as a whole was admonished by Mr. Jackson, who interrupted Ms. DeVos less than five minutes into her speech. “If this behavior continues,” he told them, “your degrees will be mailed to you. Choose which way you want to go.” Many in the group immediately rose back to their feet, joining their fellow students.

Mr. Jackson eventually took his seat again and the audience erupted in applause, as the protesters among the graduating students had won a small victory. That applause quickly turned into boing again as Ms. DeVos continued her speech.

“I want to acknowledge that we arrived here with different life experiences,” she said, as several sections of the arena began chanting “hell nah.” There were again cheers when a handful of students in the audience walked out with fists raised in a black-power salute.

The heckling continued, dispersed throughout the remainder of Ms. DeVos’s remarks, but as the speech rounded to a close, students returned to their seats, the audience settled, and it was as if nothing had happened. Betsy DeVos’s first commencement address as education secretary had come and gone.

The graduation resumed and families were able to enjoy to celebrate the reason they traveled so many miles: the soon-to-be graduates.

But many were left wondering: Was it worth it?

### WHY THIS OCCASION?

The invitation to Ms. DeVos came about after she and the university’s president met during a February summit between the Trump administration and black college leaders, Mr. Jackson said during a news conference on Wednesday. They wanted to get together to find a time for Ms. DeVos to visit the campus and speak with the students.

“We are always about the business of making new friends, and if you don’t have friends, it’s difficult to raise money,” Mr. Jackson told reporters.

“Can you imagine how many institutions would love to have the secretary of education, the highest education officer in the land, be at their commencement and hopefully open new doors for this institution?” he said. “We can disagree rather than be disagreeable.”

Joe Petrock, the chair of the university’s Board of Trustees, sounded a similar note. “I have a dream that we’re going to build new partnerships and relationships,” he said, adding that he hopes to use those relationships to bring in new funding. “What a great day,” he said, “to have the secretary of education

come down to Daytona Beach, Florida, to talk about education. We have a chance to share our thoughts, our ideas, and our concerns, about building a better education system.”

But if Ms. DeVos’s invitation was simply a play for funding, alumni hope they can eliminate — or at least substantially reduce — that need, said Jasmine Burney-Clark, a 2009 graduate of the university who was among the protesters outside the Ocean Center. They plan to create fund-raising campaigns that will help the institution so that it doesn’t have to “barter with the federal government the students’ prized moment for funding,” she said.

University officials dodged one of the questions that troubled many in the campus community: Why choose commencement for Ms. DeVos to speak? Why not invite her to speak on another occasion?

The university has not said who ultimately made the decision to invite the secretary (the decision did require the board to confirm it), but it drastically changed the atmosphere of the day, said Ms. Burney-Clark. “They’ve politicized the entire graduation and turned it into their show,” she said, “not the show that the students have worked four years for and paid an extremely high tuition for.”

For their part, the graduates knew the stakes and were not fazed — all eyes were on them and they protested to make a point. More important, however, they graduated.

“We worked too hard for this,” one graduate said. “It’s not even about her.”

### A CAMPUS UNCHANGED

Back on campus after the ceremony, calm once again took hold. Graduates were taking photos and sitting with their families on the benches near trees. Some students were gathering the last of their things from the dormitories.

Ms. DeVos was here as well, but without fanfare. Her motorcade sneaked onto campus for a brief visit to Mary McLeod Bethune’s house and gravesite, where the secretary laid a wreath. During her speech, a mention of her plan to visit these memorials to the university’s founder drew the heaviest ire of the crowd. But, in an instant, it seemed, Ms. DeVos concluded her visit and left — and the campus was unchanged.

Just as the university was before Betsy DeVos came, it will be when she leaves — a fact that Mr. Jackson, the university’s president, alluded to during Wednesday’s news conference.

Bethune-Cookman will still face the same problems it has historically faced, he said. But he hopes that a new friend in Ms. DeVos will help move it forward. The university remains “committed to doing the things that will make a difference in our community,” he said.

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# *Intimidation Is the New Normal on Campus*

From now on, any speaker who arouses a protest is at risk of a beating

By JONATHAN HAIDT



ELIJAH NOUVELAGE, GETTY IMAGES

February protests against a speech at the U. of California at Berkeley by the right-wing provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos became violent, but more recent events are a clearer sign of dangers to come for American universities.

**I**MAGES of fires, fireworks, and metal barricades crashing through windows made for great television, but the rioters who shut down Milo Yiannopoulos's talk at the University of California at Berkeley didn't just attack property. Fewer cellphone cameras captured the moments when they punched and pepper-sprayed members of the crowd, particularly those who seemed like they might be supporters of Yiannopoulos or Donald Trump.

Although the violence on February 1 was clearly instigated by outside agitators — “black bloc” anarchists who show up at events with their faces masked — at least some of the people behind the masks were Berkeley students who thought it was morally permissible to use violence to stop a lecture from taking place. As one student wrote afterward, “Violence helped ensure the safety of students.” Another asked, “When the nonviolent tactics [for stopping the talk] have been exhausted — what is left?”

Still, it was easy for the academic community to think of the riot as a special case. After all, Yiannopoulos is a professional troll. He came to campus to provoke, not to instruct. And he had exposed vulnerable individuals to danger before, as when he posted the name and photo of a trans woman on-screen while he mocked her.

Any campus speaker who arouses a protest is at risk of a beating. Can this really be the future of American colleges? A month later, on March 2, the violence was harder to justify. After students shouted down Charles Murray's attempt to give a lecture at Middlebury College, he was moved to a locked room in the student center from which his talk was live-streamed. Angry students pounded on the walls and pulled fire alarms to disrupt the broadcast. As Murray and his faculty host — Allison Stanger, a political-science professor — left the building, they were blocked by an “angry mob” (Stanger's words) including both students and non-students. As Stanger and Murray tried to push their way through, with the help of two security guards, several people grabbed and pulled at them, sending her to the hospital with whiplash and a concussion. Stanger later wrote that she had feared for her life.

Perhaps because it was a professor who was injured, Middlebury students did not defend the use of violence in the way that some Berkeley students had. But even the students' coordinated effort to silence Murray is harder to justify than the effort to silence Yiannopoulos. Murray is mild-mannered, came with co-sponsorship from the political-science department, and was there not to provoke but to talk about an issue that is central to students' moral and political concerns: social and economic inequality. When two psychologists, Wendy Williams and Stephen Ceci, asked 70 professors at various colleges to assess the political leaning of

Murray's speech — given to them as a transcript with no source attributed — they rated it as “middle of the road,” leaning neither left nor right.

But for many students and professors, what Murray intended to say was not relevant. The Southern Poverty Law Center had labeled him a “white supremacist” on the basis of his writings, and that was sufficient for many to believe that they had a moral duty to deny a platform to him. So perhaps Murray was a special case, too — some said his mere presence, like Yiannopoulos's at Berkeley, posed a direct danger to students. (I urge readers to see Murray's line-by-line corrections of the Southern Poverty Law Center's entry on him, then read some of his writings and decide for themselves.)

A month after the Middlebury fracas came the Heather Mac Donald shout-down at Claremont McKenna College. But this was no special case. Mac Donald is a typical campus speaker — a journalist and political commentator who wrote a book

## Any campus speaker who arouses a protest is at risk of a beating. Can this really be the future of American colleges?

challenging prevailing wisdom on a matter of current concern.

In her 2016 book, *The War on Cops*, she argued that overstated claims about systemic racism among police officers have led police departments in some cities to adopt less assertive tactics, which has led to increased crime, including higher rates of murder, particularly of black men. Her thesis, popularly known as “the Ferguson effect,” has been hotly debated, but as the left-leaning sociologist Neil Gross summarized the state of play last September, “there is now some evidence that when all eyes are on police misconduct, crime may edge up. Progressives should acknowledge that this idea isn't far-fetched.”

Yet because Mac Donald challenged the dominant narrative and criticized the Black Lives Matter movement, some students at Claremont McKenna decided that she, too, must be denied a platform. They mobilized a mass action via Face-

book with a call to “show up wearing black” and “bring your comrades, because we’re shutting this down.” A mob outside the auditorium, estimated at around 300 people, prevented anyone from entering the building. The college decided to stream Mac Donald’s talk live from the nearly empty hall as hundreds of protesters pounded on the windows. Immediately afterward, she was whisked away through a kitchen exit by the campus police in an unmarked car.

**W**HAT ARE WE to make of this? There were no reports of violence or property damage. Yet this event is potentially more ominous than the Berkeley and Middlebury violence, for we are witnessing the emergence of a dangerous new norm for responding to speakers who challenge campus orthodoxy. Anyone offended by the speaker can put out a call on Facebook to bring together students and locals, including “antifa” (antifascist) and black-bloc activists who explicitly endorse the use of violence against racists and fascists. Because of flagrant “concept creep,” however, almost anyone who is politically right of center can be labeled a racist or a fascist, and the promiscuous use of such labels is now part of the standard operating procedure. The call to shut down Mac Donald’s talk asserted, without evidence, that her agenda is “racist, anti-Black, capitalist, imperialist, [and] fascist.” As with accusations of witchcraft in earlier centuries, once such labels are attached to someone, few will dare to challenge their accuracy, lest they be accused of the same crimes.

It is crucial to note that at all three colleges — Berkeley, Middlebury, and Claremont McKenna — the crowd included a mix of students and locals, some wearing masks. It is therefore no longer possible to assume that a crowd on a college campus will be nonviolent, as crowds of protesting students were in the fall of 2015. What would have happened to Mac Donald had she tried to enter or exit through the main entrance, without a police escort? From now on, any campus speaker who arouses a protest is at risk of a beating. Can this really be the future of American higher education?

I do not doubt that many students face indignities and insults because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability status. I respect students who take actions motivated by their concern for their fellow students. But these actions reflect choices that have far-reaching and potentially damaging consequences. First, there is the decision to appraise events in ways that amplify their harmfulness. A common feature of recent campus shout-downs is the argument that the speaker “dehumanizes” members of marginalized groups or “denies their right to exist.” No quotations or citations are given for such strong assertions; these are rhetorical moves made to strengthen the case against the speaker. But if students come to believe

that anyone who offends them has “dehumanized” them, they are setting themselves up for far greater vulnerability and isolation. Life, love, and work are full of small offenses and misunderstandings, many of which will now be experienced as monstrous and unforgivable.

Second, students in the past few years have increasingly opted for collective action to shut down talks by speakers they dislike, rather than taking the two traditional options available to all individuals: Don’t go to the talk, or go and engage the speaker in the question-and-answer period. The decision to turn so many events into collective moral struggles has profound ramifications for the entire college. Everyone is pressured to take sides. Administrators are pressured to disinvite speakers, or at least to condemn their scholarship and morals while reluctantly noting their right to speak. Petitions are floated, and names of signers (and abstainers) are noted.

The human mind evolved for violent intergroup conflict. It comes easily to us, and it can be so emotionally rewarding that we have invented many ways of engaging in it ritually, such as in team sports. But the tribal mind is incompatible with scholarship, open-minded thinking, toleration of dissent, and the search for truth. When tribal sentiments are activated within an academic community, some members start to believe that their noble collective ends justify almost any means, including the demonization of inconvenient research and researchers, false accusations, character assassination, and sometimes even violence. Anyone not with the movement is against it, and its enemies — students, faculty members, administrators — are often intimidated into acquiescence. This is how professors and students are increasingly describing their campus climate, at least at elite four-year residential colleges.

What can be done to change course? College professors, more than anyone else in the country, have a professional duty to speak up for the freedom of scholars, authors, and journalists to present unpopular ideas, theories, and research findings, free from intimidation and harassment. The next time an unpopular speaker is invited to campus, professors should talk to their classes about the norms of the academy, the benefits of having one’s cherished ideas challenged, and the impropriety of making slurs and ad hominem arguments. Then they should attend the event themselves — especially if they dislike the speaker.

But while professors are best placed to act as role models, it is only administrators who can set and enforce rules. At New York University, where I teach, the policy on protests is detailed and reasonable. It allows silent protests and brief outbursts within the lecture hall, but it states clearly that “chanting or making other sustained or repeated noise in a manner which substantially

interferes with the speaker's communication is not permitted." Most colleges have such policies, but they are rarely enforced, even after the college president offers fine words about freedom of speech. From now on, administrators must ensure that any students who violate protest policies will be disciplined or expelled. There must be zero tolerance for mob rule, intimidation of speakers, and intimidation of political minorities among students as well as faculty members. Alumni can help by making it clear that they will give no further funds to colleges that permit students to shout down speakers with impunity.

And finally, when responsible campus leaders all fail to create a campus where diverse perspectives can be heard and discussed, students who desire such a campus must stand up and make their wishes known. There are encouraging signs on this front. In the wake of the unexpected outcome of the 2016 presidential election, the editors of Harvard's main student newspaper called on administrators and faculty members to "take active steps to ensure

that students of all political stripes feel comfortable voicing their ideas, especially in the classroom."

More recently, Northwestern University became the first in the country whose student government passed a resolution calling on the administration to promote viewpoint diversity and to enforce its policies against disruptive protests.

This year may become a turning point in the annals of higher education. It may be remembered as the year that political violence and police escorts became ordinary parts of campus life. Or it may be remembered as the year when professors, students, and administrators finally found the moral courage to stand up against intimidation, even when it is aimed at people whose ideas they dislike.

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