



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on April 27, 2017

Radicals Stop Coulter Speech at Cal-Berkeley

“What made it possible for Western civilization to develop science and the social sciences in a way that no other civilization had ever done before?” asked Edward Grant, an historian of science.

“The answer,” Grant wrote in his book *God and Reason in the Middle Ages*, “I am convinced, lies in a pervasive and deep-seated spirit of inquiry that was a natural consequence of the emphasis on reason that began in the Middle Ages. With the exception of revealed truths, reason was enthroned in medieval universities as the ultimate arbiter for most intellectual arguments and controversies. It was quite natural for scholars immersed in a university environment to employ reason to probe into subject areas that had not been explored before, as well as to discuss possibilities that had not previously been seriously entertained.”



Alas, today the university is increasingly an institution blocking that “deep-seated spirit of inquiry” Grant attributed to the centuries-old mission of the university.

The cancellation of the scheduled speech at University of California-Berkeley for Thursday by conservative pundit Ann Coulter is sadly only the latest example of how colleges have evolved from champions of free speech into perhaps the foremost enemies of that foundational principle.

“The university canceled it,” Coulter told *BuzzFeed News*, contradicting the reporting of several news outlets that she had canceled her appearance, long scheduled for April 27. “No,” she insisted, “the university canceled it and YAF [Young America’s Foundation] acquiesced in the cancellation, against my strong wishes. I did everything I could to make this come off.”

UC Berkeley Chancellor Nicholas Dirks cited “safety concerns” in explaining why he opposed her speaking on the 27th. He said that the campus police had “made it clear that they have very specific intelligence regarding threats that could pose a grave danger to the speaker, attendees and those who may wish to lawfully protest the event.”

The university argued that student organizations do not have an absolute right to host events whenever they want. “Student organizations’ access to event venues on campus is subject to the availability of venues of appropriate size and the ability of the university to provide adequate security.”

In other words, if campus leftists promise to violently disrupt an event featuring a speaker with conservative views, that event can be nixed, while events hosting a progressive left-wing personality can be held on schedule.



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Dirks had offered to re-schedule Coulter on May 2, which drew a lawsuit from the College Republicans who had invited her, and a tweet from Coulter. In her tweet, Coulter said, "We've already spent \$ for 4/27 Berkeley spc & I can't do May 2." She added that there were no classes at Berkeley on May 2, thus defeating much of the purpose of the visit.

YAF had also sponsored the speech, but released a statement on Tuesday critical of the university, arguing that they had made it "impossible to hold a lecture due to the lack of assurances for protections from foreseeable violence from unrestrained leftist agitators. Ms. Coulter may still choose to speak in some form on campus, but Young America's Foundation will not jeopardize the safety of its staff or students."

After the College Republicans and YAF both bailed on their sponsorship of the event, Coulter said, "I looked over my shoulder and my allies had joined the other team." While this statement may be unfair to the two groups, one can certainly sympathize with Coulter.

Coulter talks on college campuses have drawn violent protests in the past. In 2004, Coulter was hit in the face with a pie during a speech at Centennial Hall on the campus of the University of Arizona. Interestingly, while the two men involved were arrested by campus police, all criminal charges against them were later dropped. Both the UAPD and Coulter claimed that they were not notified when to show up for the trial.

It is true that Ann Coulter is a very provocative person, who delights in saying outrageous things. Even many conservatives have problems with some of the positions she has taken at times. Yet, one would think the university would be open to a wide enough range of expression that can encompass Coulter.

But Coulter is not the only person considered "right wing" who has been denied an opportunity to attempt to peacefully persuade students to her world view. Sometimes this is accomplished by the universities themselves, simply by their biased selection of commencement speakers. For example, a review of the recent graduation speakers at Cal-Berkeley reveals that students hear a steady diet of either some corporate executive or liberal politicians and journalists, such as Ted Koppel, Leon Panetta, Janet Reno, and Madeline Albright. There is little doubt that an invitation to deliver the commencement address to a Pat Buchanan, a Ron or Rand Paul, or a Ted Cruz, would touch off organized protests, leading to the cancellation of that invitation — even if university leadership would offer such an invitation.

Invitations from student groups (like the College Republicans) to noted conservative figures usually leads to attempts on the Left to stop them from being heard. Among the many examples are Middlebury College of Vermont where protesters were incensed by the invitation to Charles Murray, a social scientist who has opined that welfare benefits have actually increased latent poverty in the United States. A previous invitation at Berkeley to David Horowitz (who is famous for rejecting the views of his parents, both card-carrying members of the American Communist Party) was rescinded by threats of violence from campus radicals. When Heather MacDonald, the author of *The War on Cops*, a rousing defense of local police, was invited to speak at Claremont McKenna College in California, radicals blocked entry to the building where she was speaking. Even then, some banged on the windows while she was speaking to a very small group that had actually made it into the room.

A probable motivation of the Berkeley administration to block Coulter was the aborted planned appearance in February by Milo Yiannopoulos (a former editor at Breitbart) that led to violent radicals doing about \$100,000 in damage to the campus.



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This continued assault upon free expression on the nation's university campuses is escalating to the absurd. At the University of Oklahoma, a professor even called campus police when a student handed him a Christian tract to read. *The Onion*, a newspaper specializing in satire, recently included a satirical piece that when some pages of the *Wall Street Journal* were found on a park bench on the Berkeley campus, it led to campus-wide lockdown.

When Yiannopoulos announced that he planned to give a "free speech" award on the Berkeley campus, named after Mario Savio, one of the leaders of the 1964 "Free Speech Movement" at the college, Savio's son, Daniel Savio, was livid, calling Yiannopoulos' comments "some kind of a sick joke." The younger Savio argued that there should be limits to free speech, if it threatens certain people that Savio calls vulnerable.

"Is freedom of speech such an important principle that we can afford to uphold it even when it means sacrificing the safety of some other folks?" Savio asked. He offered as an example of speech that needs to be restricted verbal attacks on transgenderism.

Fortunately, even some on the Left do not agree with those desirous of shutting down speech with which they do not agree. Senator Bernie Sanders, the Independent socialist from Vermont, said, "I don't like this. I don't like it. Obviously, Ann Coulter's outrageous. To my mind, off the wall. But you know, people have a right to give their two cents-worth, give a speech, without fear of violence and intimidation."

Liberal political comedian Bill Maher expressed similar thoughts recently on his HBO program, *Real Time*. "They invite someone to speak who's not exactly what liberals want to hear and they want to shutter it. I feel this is the liberals' version of book burning, and it's got to stop."

If one takes Savio's standard that there is some speech that needs to be "shuttered," in Maher's words, an important question comes to mind. Just who is going to decide what speech is acceptable? After all, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution explicitly states that Congress can make "no law" that abridges the freedom of speech. It does not go on to say that is the case unless it offends someone.

Photo: Ann Coulter



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