

February 10, 2017

Dear UC Berkeley Faculty,

We are writing today to weigh in on the debate surrounding Milo Yiannopoulos's potential re-invitation to speak on our campus.

We understand that many of you are concerned about the modes of protest on our campus on February 1 as well as the potential curtailing of Milo Yiannopoulos's First Amendment right to speak freely. As students and alums who have been organizing for the past several months in an effort to raise awareness about this individual's serial harassment of marginalized people, we write at this time both to clear up what we believe are emergent misunderstandings about the events on February 1, and to urge those who might be thinking about re-inviting this speaker to campus to reconsider their support for this course of action.

First, we write as fierce defenders of the principle of free speech. Many of you may recognize the undersigned students and alums as individuals who have called upon this right in our own advocacy for public education, for survivors of sexual violence, for transgender people, for solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives and other Black liberation movements, and for immigrants and refugees (particularly for undocumented people and/or those from Muslim majority countries).

However, we oppose Milo Yiannopoulos not simply because we find his politics in direct opposition to all of the positions referenced above, but because we believe that his particular speech acts fall beyond protected civil discourse and constitute forms of harassment and hate speech which should not be protected and promoted by our university. We are now in the midst of a growing national debate on this issue, and we are hopeful that UC Berkeley will uphold our commitment to protect free speech rights while also making clear that targeted harassment and incitements to harm or even kill others will not be tolerated. To be clear: many of us who have been active in the debate surrounding Milo Yiannopoulos's visit have been subjected to threats of rape, harm, and death. These speech acts and threats of violence must be opposed here and everywhere.

Second, we write to share a summary of the numerous channels through which we communicated these concerns to our administration in the months leading up to Milo Yiannopoulos's scheduled presentation on February 1. **We are concerned that a great deal of this work has been rendered invisible to faculty, some of whom may have come to this discussion only after the dramatic events of February 1.** Below is a partial list of our efforts beginning in November 2016 to build awareness among members of our campus community about this speaker's history of harassment and incitement to violence:

1. Following [Milo Yiannopoulos's outing and sexual harassment of a transgender student](#) at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee (after which this student quit school, fearing for her safety), we talked with our communities about their thoughts on free speech versus harassment and realized many people supported the former but were opposed to the latter, consonant with First Amendment limitations.

2. We wrote [op-eds in high-profile news media](#) about the differences between free speech, hate speech, and harassment.
3. We met with many people targeted by both Yiannopoulos and the Trump administration to hear their concerns and solutions for this talk; it was at this time that many people asked us to begin urging for cancellation of the event.
4. We developed [a large-scale letter writing campaign](#) to faculty and administrators urging for cancellation of the event on the grounds that Yiannopoulos's speeches have targeted and harassed students and created unsafe campus environments.
5. We worked with members of our community, particularly transgender people and people of color, who wanted to draft letters to the UC Berkeley administration urging for cancellation.
6. Once the ticket sales for the event began, we urged friends to buy out all of the tickets so the auditorium would be empty. (We later learned that a only fraction of tickets were made available for public sale, and that Milo Yiannopoulos's team is very familiar with this tactic and just lets more people in the day of the show.)
7. We organized a mass call-in campaign to Chancellor Dirks and President Napolitano urging for cancellation on the grounds that Milo Yiannopoulos harasses students and puts their safety in jeopardy.
8. We visited another school, UC Davis, that invited this speaker and witnessed alarming numbers of neo-nazis and white nationalists gather and network with one another at these talks in order to strengthen their movement. We took note of how physically unsafe these spaces became as a result.
9. [Faculty wrote an open letter to UCB administration urging for cancellation](#); many of them were doxxed (a tactic where personal information like names and addresses of individuals and family members is shared on the internet and/or where people are slandered or defamed) on *Breitbart* for signing onto the letter. Afterwards, faculty began receiving threatening messages meant to silence and intimidate them.
10. [Faculty wrote a second letter, linked in the *Daily Cal*](#), about Milo Yiannopoulos's harassment and hate speech; some faculty received death threats for contributing to this article.
11. We submitted over fifty union grievances stating that the Milo Yiannopoulos talk constitutes a hostile work environment under Article 20 of the UAW 2865 student workers contract, which protects against harassment and discrimination.
12. We developed [a toolkit](#) that critically examines the history of free speech rights, pointing to historical exclusions as well as limits to this right outlined in the Constitution. The toolkit also describes how Milo Yiannopoulos uses a distorted notion of free speech as a means to strengthen the white nationalist movement. The students who wrote and designed this toolkit were subsequently doxxed (i.e., had their personal information, including home addresses, published on the far-right propaganda site affiliated with Milo Yiannopoulos and Steve Bannon known as *Breitbart*) and were defamed on numerous men's rights

websites. We began receiving personal, sometimes threatening messages meant to silence and intimidate us.

13. We wrote numerous [op-eds in our school newspaper](#), for which some students opposed to Milo Yiannopoulos's visit received very chilling death threats.

14. We consulted lawyers on the matter of free speech vs. harassment so we could better understand the legal framework and learned that, despite university administrators' claims, Milo Yiannopoulos's speech may not be protected under the First Amendment.

15. After the near-death shooting of a person protesting Milo Yiannopoulos's January 20 talk at UW Seattle, we reached out to local and state politicians to convince our administration that this talk was a threat to public safety.

16. We held several large public meetings to discuss and debate the merits of allowing this speaker a platform vs. urging for cancellation on the grounds of certain harassment and likely violence; it was at this point that the Berkeley College Republicans began following some of us (students and faculty) in attempts to intimidate us.

17. We met several times with UC Berkeley administrators and read aloud death threats we've received, urging them to protect our right to free speech in the context of threats meant to chill us (for reference, please view images of a few of these threats students at UC Berkeley and UC Davis have received at the end of this message).

18. We learned that undocumented students would be targeted by Milo and that the UC Berkeley administration knew this and offered them no protection. Milo Yiannopoulos intended to project images of undocumented UC Berkeley students, urging fellow students to call ICE and have them deported. This act of targeted anti-immigrant harassment would have put members of our community in serious danger. At least [one prominent undocumented student organizer has expressed public appreciation for the events that led to Milo Yiannopoulos's talk being cancelled](#).

Third, we write to share a more detailed account of the meeting several of us held with the Chancellor and other UC Berkeley administrators on January 30, 2017. At this meeting, we warned the administration of the likely potential for violence and begged them to cancel the event. When a student asked Nils Gilman (Chancellor Dirks's Chief of Staff) under what conditions administrators would cancel the event, Gilman responded that, although the administration technically had the authority to cancel it, they would only do so if there was "clear and present danger," which he specified as either "terrorist threats" or "if there's about to be a riot." At this point, Vice Chancellor of Equity and Inclusion Na'ilah Nasir raised concerns about the potential for a "race war" to erupt on Sproul Plaza in this political climate. Given these conversations, we believe that the UC Berkeley administration was anticipating dramatic protest on the night of February 1, had been given ample opportunity to avoid it, but still chose to move forward with this event despite these concerns.

Fourth, we write to address concerns about reports of interpersonal violence on February 1. While we don't have any direct knowledge of the acts of interpersonal violence that occurred (evidently involving pepper spray and blows to the head and body), our sense is that, in some cases, anti-fascist demonstrators struck counter-demonstrators who were harassing students, who were engaging in embodied violence, or who were shouting racist slurs. In other cases, those struck were speaking to media or were simply standing around in the crowd. There seem to have been a couple of cases of misidentification on the part of anti-fascist demonstrators. Our view is that, as was demonstrated at the University of Washington, Yiannopoulos' events have generally drawn crowds of far-right people (including members of the neo-fascist group Identity Europa), some of whom seem interested in harassing or injuring oppressed students, and some of whom are armed. Given this history, we understand and share the sense that embodied self-defense against vigilante far-right violence is legitimate and timely. We are also critical of the way that a commitment to self-defense has the potential to shade into a fetishization of violence, or a disregard for important distinctions between direct and indirect harm or danger. However these questions are adjudicated -- and we recognize that different people will likely have different views on the ethical and political stakes associated with these acts of interpersonal harm -- we do not think that such incidents bear on the question of whether Yiannopoulos should have a platform on our campus to engage in harassment and incitements to harm or kill students and other members of our community.

Fifth, we write to share that the UC Berkeley administration knew that Milo Yiannopoulos planned to target the sanctuary campus movement on the night of February 1, likely projecting images of undocumented students on our campus and urging fellow students to call Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers to deport them and their families. It is distressing that administrators knew this and still chose not to offer protection for students who would be exposed to this harassment and fierce anti-immigrant violence. The administration's awareness of this issue is documented in [this article](#) from the *SF Gate*.

Sixth, we write to let you know that the fire that erupted on Sproul Plaza, the image of the protest that was most dramatized by the press, was in fact not started by black bloc protesters: "[T]he protesters didn't light the fire, the generator ignited by itself after it was damaged. I'll say it again: The [black] bloc didn't start the fire. That's not just a Billy Joel reference, it's what actually happened. This claim has been repeated so often by sloppy reporters, who refuse to tell stories that don't fit their comfortable hear-both-sides narrative, that now it's accepted as fact" ([Desmond Meagley](#), *Daily Cal*, Feb. 7). In fact, other first person reports assert that this fire, wherein an overturned light fixture suddenly ignited, was started after a police officer shot projectiles at it (the police had been shooting at the crowd of protestors and perhaps missed their human targets).

Seventh, we write to share that despite the administration's attempts to produce fear and alienation around those who engaged in black bloc tactics, students have on the whole received their efforts more positively than faculty might expect. Take, for example, this collection of op eds written by transgender students, undocumented students, students of color, and others who would have been exposed to harm had Milo Yiannopoulos been granted a platform to speak. [This collection of reflections](#) appeared in the *Daily Cal* on February 7 praising the black bloc for doing what our administration failed to do.

In addition, [this recent *Berkeleyside* op-ed by former UC Berkeley Graduate Assembly President Iman Sylvan](#) reads, “Rather than learning from the events that transpired at [Yiannopoulos’ engagement at UC Davis](#), or at the University of Washington and preemptively cancelling the event, the university called in [police reinforcements](#) from across the state to intimidate and terrorize protesters. Rather than remove one fascist from our campus, our Chancellor chose to invite rubber bullets, tear gas and handcuffs. Within a few hours, [black bloc was] able to do what diplomatic students and faculty have failed to do for months – cancel Milo Yiannopoulos’ event. On Wednesday night, riots were the voice of the unheard.” We agree with this assessment and ask the faculty to consider these perspectives as they join the debate.

Bearing all of this in mind, we urge faculty to join in solidarity with those of us who are most vulnerable to the harassment and hatred that Milo Yiannopoulos will bring to campus, should he be invited to return. We invite you to join us in our duty as teachers to protect our most marginalized students. We invite you to join us in protecting our bodies and our lives by rejecting the re-invitation of this individual to our campus.

In Respectful Solidarity,

[[*names redacted for protection*]]