

Polarization and Liberal-Bashing: Lessons from the Berkeley Free Speech Crises in the Early Trump Era

Robert Cohen, Ph.D.

Professor of History and Social Studies

New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

Thursday, October 11, 2018

12:00 – 1:15 pm, 3200 Dean's Suite, Conference Room 3238

Abstract: UC Berkeley, the birthplace of the iconic Free Speech Movement of 1964, which ended university regulation of the content of political speech, became, at the dawn of the Trump era, the site of a major riot that shut down the appearance of a far right speaker. Had this university center of freedom of speech suddenly politically repressive? Donald Trump thought so, tweeting and threatening: "If U.C. Berkeley Does Not Allow Free Speech and Practices Violence On Innocent People with a Different Point of View -- NO FEDERAL FUNDS?" This paper digs beneath the surface of such slanderous tweets and shallow reporting to explore the fate of the Berkeley free speech tradition in an age of illiberalism, polarization, and university-bashing.



Robert Cohen is a professor of history and social studies in NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. He is an affiliated member of NYU's History Department. His historical scholarship focuses on politics, higher education, and social protest in twentieth-century America. His social studies work links middle and high school teachers with the recent advances in historical scholarship, and develops curriculum aimed at teaching their students to explore history as a critical discipline – and one that is characterized by intense and exciting debate. Professor Cohen received his PhD and MA from the University of California, Berkeley Department of History, and a Ed.M. and a BA in History from the State University of New York at Buffalo.