



Written by [James Murphy](#) on September 18, 2017

Free Speech Remains a Right in Berkeley — For Now

The First Amendment to the Constitution has been saved, for the moment, as conservative commentator Ben Shapiro successfully spoke at Cal-Berkeley on September 14. Shapiro's speech and the Q & A session that followed went off without too much of a hitch. However, the event didn't happen without a struggle.



Shapiro spoke to a mostly friendly crowd of about a thousand at Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall. The building and five other buildings surrounding it were cordoned off by hundreds of riot-gear-clad police officers, who were empowered by the Berkeley City Council to use pepper spray on unruly protesters for the first time in 20 years.

"Fascism does not own this university," Shapiro told the enthusiastic crowd.

In the lead-up to the event, a common verb was "brace." On September 9, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article headlined "Berkeley braces for right-wing talk show host Ben Shapiro's visit." A *Sacramento Bee* headline was nearly word-for-word the same: "Berkeley braces for visit by right-wing speaker Ben Shapiro." In the wake of two hurricanes that Texas and Florida residents had to "brace" for, the meaning in the headline is clear. The *Times* and the *Bee* both fully expected violence to surround Shapiro's speech.

The mask-wearing far left-wing and ironically named group Antifa did attempt to crash the party, resulting in nine arrests — at least three of them weapons-related. The same group shut down the scheduled speech of self-proclaimed provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos at Berkeley with violent protests last February, and their intimidation tactics caused the cancellation of an Ann Coulter speech there in April.

Outside the event, thousands protested, some chanting, "Speech is violent, we will not silent." One sign read, "We say no to your white supremacist bull—." Shapiro, an orthodox, yarmulke-wearing Jew, condemned white supremacists during his speech, calling them "a very small, select group of absolutely terrible people who believe absolutely terrible things."

While crowing about their commitment to free speech, officials from the city of Berkeley and the university have also been whining about the supposed \$600,000 bill they had to foot in order to guarantee security for the event, as if Shapiro, and not the leftist protesters, was solely responsible for that cost.

Shapiro joked about the costs, saying, "If you're going to blame me for the \$600,000 in spending on security ... you're all Keynesians ... think of all the jobs I just created."

One wonders, did the \$600,000 include the support and counseling services offered to any UC-Berkeley students or staff members so traumatized by the event that they needed psychiatric help?



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Shapiro's speech was hosted by the Berkeley College Republicans and Young America's Foundation. Prior to allowing the event, UC-Berkeley forced the groups to come up with more than \$15,000 in "basic security costs." While it is not unheard of to charge groups something to defray the university's cost for such events, the fee was much higher than normal. For example, the student group that invited Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor to speak was charged only \$6,000 for an appearance at the same venue.

Unfortunately, Shapiro's speech may be just Act One in the defense of free speech in Berkeley. Organized by *The Berkeley Patriot*, a conservative student newspaper, Free Speech Week is scheduled to run from September 24-27. Advertised speakers include Yiannopoulos, Coulter, and former Trump advisor and progressive boogeyman Steve Bannon. September 24 has been billed as "Feminism Awareness Day." September 25 is called "Zuck 2020," referencing Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg's reported interest in running for president. September 26 will be "Islamic Peace and Tolerance Day," and September 27 will be "Mario Savio is Dead" day, a reference to the late icon of the Sixties free speech movement.

Over 130 members of the UC-Berkeley faculty have signed a letter to the Berkeley administration calling for a boycott of all classes and other campus activities during Free Speech Week. "We're not afraid of Milo, Ann or Bannon's words," claimed African-American Studies professor Michael Cohen, one of the authors of the letter. "We have a deep anxiety over the violence that their followers bring in response." There was no word on what Professor Cohen thinks about the violence of groups such as ANTIFA.

So, while the Shapiro event went off with little fuss, it would seem that UC-Berkeley has a lot more "bracing" to do.

Image of Berkeley protestors: Screenshot of [NBC Bay Area video](#)



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