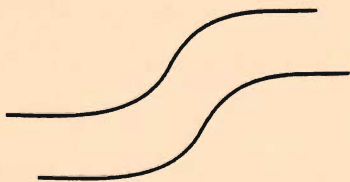

Fortieth Anniversary

*WHAT WAS THE
FREE SPEECH
MOVEMENT?*



JEFF HIRSCH

This is a modification of a speech given by the author on October 1 (California's Free Speech Day), 1994, on the steps of Sproul Hall, Berkeley, near the free speech marker.

The speech was also given at the following locations in 1994:

Casa Zimbabwe Cooperative - Oct. 1

(Free Speech Day Celebration)

Kappa Sigma Fraternity House - Oct. 17

International House - Oct. 27

Delta Upsilon Fraternity House - Nov. 7

Alpha Phi Sorority House - Nov. 14

Davidson Hall (Unit II) - Nov. 15

Acacia Fraternity House - Nov. 21

Lambda Phi Epsilon Fraternity House - Nov. 28

Since 1994 it has been read many times at Ohlone College in Fremont, California. The first version was read in the ASUC Senate Chamber, Eschelman Hall, on September 12, 1994.

What was the Free Speech Movement?

Jeff Hirsch

The first printing in 1994 preceded
the October 1 speech.

The second printing in 1994 followed it by
two months.

The third printing was in 2004.

The Free Speech Movement, or FSM, was a catalyst for a decade of political ferment on America's (and the world's) college campuses.

It left an environment where people could launch massive protests against the Vietnam war, for the environment, for women, for ethnic studies.

What was the FSM?

It was the sexy blond skier and partier I saw picketing Sproul Hall before the start of classes, protesting against the new UC administrative ban against political

activity at Bancroft and Telegraph. She said this was a serious issue.

It was a united front of student groups, an unprecedented political parabola arcing across the entire political spectrum, suddenly denied their traditional freedom to set up card tables on the 90-by-26 foot strip at Bancroft and Telegraph. From these tables they solicited donations and memberships in their organizations and advocated various political activities. These were their lifeline; without them they'd be powerless.

The FSM was our attempt to dampen the corrupting effect on UC of perceived political pressure from the

likes of right-wing Oakland Tribune publisher and editor-in-chief, William F. Knowland.

It was an insistence on engaging in substantive politics over sandbox politics.

It was Brad Cleaveland and his call for educational reform.

It was youthful rebellion with a cause.

It was a questioning of authority. Did the administration have the right to set arbitrary rules governing political activity? The first rule was that there were to be no tables, as they obstructed traffic. Later, it was that there could be tables where they'd long been (so much

for the administration's traffic argument), but with information only (no advocacy of actions like voting or registering to vote. Remember this was 1964 when many had risked their lives during Mississippi Freedom Summer and there was on California's ballot the racist Proposition 13 which permitted discrimination in housing on the basis of race, creed, or color!). Later yet the administration declared that students could advocate actions, but not ones that might later lead to arrests for civil disobedience or anything else. This is known as prior restraint of speech.

The Free Speech Movement was a demand that the First Amendment be in force at UC, that admission to

Cal not require a forfeiture of Constitutional guarantees.

It was a co-mingling of our thoughts with the Founding Fathers’.

It was a dawning realization that authority can be capricious...and can be combated...and conquered.

It was Mark Bravo, David Goines, Donald Hatch, Elizabeth Gardner Stapleton, Brian Turner, students committed to the civil rights struggle who risked their futures sitting at tables in defiance of the ban. They were told to report for disciplinary action.

It was the 300 plus who, seeing the deans cite the few, joined in solidarity, sat at the tables just long enough

to sign their names to petitions saying they co-jointly manned the tables and that whatever punishment was to befall the few should befall the many, then march off later that afternoon for “their” 3:00 P.M. disciplinary action. Imagine the deans’ surprise! They ordered a handful and got a hall full of students eager that justice be done: “One for all and all for one.”

It was a group ruled by a sense of justice.

It was Jack Weinberg, sitting first at a table, then arrested for that, sitting in a police car he was carried to, for 32 hours. Two burning question of history: Did Jack go? If so, how?

The Free Speech Movement was anyone who sat down around the police car in the first few minutes. That took courage.

The FSM was the police car, our peaceful capture. We didn't go out hunting for it. It came to us, to give our cause of constitutional liberties a launching pad. It was our symbol of proud defiance.

It was all the speakers who took off their shoes and spoke to the assemblage on October 1 or 2 from atop the trapped police car.

It was all the thousands there, not all standing as one for free speech, but, at least, listening.

It was Susan Felter, walking out of physiology class wondering where her lab partner was, then seeing him addressing the thousands from atop the police car.

It was a rebellion against a seemingly disinterested, impersonal, irrelevant knowledge factory.

It was a cry for humanity in education.

It was the silent generation gaining its voice.

It was Wendy Chapnick, rest her soul, who became near hysterical back at her co-op that night at the thought that arrests might well be made and that lives could be affected (She was later arrested).

It was all the people who camped on bricks around

the police car October 1. A funny story concerns one couple trying to sleep. Finally, the young woman says, “Let’s just pretend like we’re married and sleep back-to-back.”

It was living with tension and fear as more than 600 police came onto our campus: We agreed to the “pact of October 2nd.”

It was learning about a college administration that was less than honorable in fulfilling its part of the pact, amongst other things, never willing to debate the merits of an idea, endlessly evading the real issue.

It was a world turned upside down. When I was

growing up, I'd have thought that leaders, especially leaders with Ph. D.'s, would make sound, well-thought-out decisions, that police protected everyday citizens, and that newspapers truthfully reported what was happening. During the FSM, I saw that educational leaders made poor decisions, that those poor decisions were backed by state power, and then the major newspapers like the Tribune, Examiner, and Chronicle distorted the truth big time. It was very unsettling to me that the only honest reportage came in some socialist publication I once saw and the student newspaper.

It was about democracy, slow, painful, laborious,

lasting through the night, the height of inefficiency, yet in the morning's light, the coalition, like the flag, was still there.

It was all the people who labored long and hard behind the scenes at Print Central, Phone Central, etc. central and, of course, Central Central.

It was a startled realization of vast emergent human potential.

It was Mario Savio, time and again, but never more eloquently than on Sproul Hall steps on December 2: "If this is a firm, and if the Board of Regents are the board of directors, and if President Kerr in fact is the manager,

then I'll tell you something else: the faculty are a bunch of employees, and we're the raw material! But we're a bunch of raw material[s] that don't mean to have any process upon us, don't mean to be made into any product, don't mean to end up being bought by some clients of the University; be they the government, be they industry, be they organized labor, be they anyone! We're human beings!

“There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part, you can't even tacitly take part, and you've got to put your bodies on the gears and upon the

wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all."

It was Joan Baez, leading us in singing, "We Shall Overcome", on our way into Sproul Hall.

It was Michael Kroll, dimpled cheeks and upraised fingers forming "V-for-Victory," greeting us with a smile as we came in.

It was the 2000 who went in, hoping the administration would hear us.

It was dancing the hora for Hanukah.

It was the old, great silent films projected on the
Sproul Hall walls.

It was the discussions on every floor.

It was the sense of community and importance.

It was people climbing ropes to get into Sproul
Hall to be arrested.

It was the 773 who were arrested in Sproul Hall.

It was the 17-year-olds who stayed, hoping to be
arrested, only to be advised not to be arrested.

It was the shared experience of police brutality,
arms wrenched behind our ears, glasses deliberately

knocked off, though it was probably worse if one were a leader or if one answered the question, “Would you rather be dragged out or walk out like a gentleman?” as I did, “I’d rather be dragged out like a gentleman.”

It was Art Goldberg, who calmly explained how to go limp and be dragged out, then went limp and was dragged out, mentoring all the way.

It was Howard Jeter, a Black activist twice our age, who asked politely where the bathroom on the police bus was, or if he could just go out and come right back. The answers of “None” and “No” had him pleading with the police and led us to raucously rock the bus back and

forth, chanting

“Let him take a piss!

Let him take a piss!

Let him take a piss!”

It went on and on like that.

It was badminton with a jailhouse bunk bed as “net,” our hands as rackets, and a mattress button with trailing thread as shuttlecock. This was my own personal modification of the game, but it seemed much appreciated by the fellows in our jailroom.

It was my mild-mannered banker grandfather who retorted, when chided by a reactionary acquaintance about

my arrest (Page 1 in the county newspaper!): “My grandson has as much right to free speech as you do.”

It was the many faculty who arranged our bail.

It was young Professor Reggie Zelnik who by his amazing support risked his career.

It was Ann Fagan Ginger who spoke from atop the police car...and lost her job for it.

It was Don Denny regaling me, Mario, and “Charlie Brown” with one of his wonderful, stuttered stories on the way back to campus.

It was the whirring of cameras when we returned to campus.

It was my old girl friend telling me how proud she was of me and taking me out to lunch at LaVal's. I'd been on a hunger strike, it was my first meal in two days, my stomach had shrunk, and I could only eat half a sandwich, but it was the end-all-be-all-hands-down-all-time-best half sandwich ever.

It was my logic TA who offered extra help. ("You did this for me. Now I must do this for you.") I don't know if it was the extra help or that particular content, but I do know that I earned 100% on that next exam.

It was him and all my friends and others who mounted the campuswide strike.

It was the unionists who honored the picket lines.

It was the gruff union man who created a spectacle in the women's co-op I dined at, calling together all who were around, asking me to stand in the center of the room, then he slipped behind me, dropped to his knees, and moved his lips quickly to my posterior. Since no one, including me, had any clue what he was doing, it's good he explained, "You remember I disagreed with you on this point. You said the unions would come in behind your strike and I said that if they did that, I'd kiss your ass. They did... and I just did."

It was the car headlights stretching out of sight on

the highway outside the gates of Santa Rita the night of December 4, as the last ones to be arrested were released, clueless and frightened at the gate, some not knowing even which way Berkeley might be — but the faculty came, as one woman said, “to take you home.”

It was Michael Rossman and Steve Weissman, Mona Hutchin, Sandor Fuchs and Lee Felsenstein, Bettina Aptheker and Ron Anastasi.

It was Suzanne Goldberg, Jackie Goldberg, and Art Goldberg.

It was the high drama in the Greek Theater, with Clark Kerr trying to shine it on, making minor conces-

sions. If everything had gone perfectly for him, he might, just might, have pulled it off. However, many faculty were concerned with the police presence on campus, and when Mario Savio strode to the microphone and was jumped by the police who threw him down and dragged him off the stage by his tie, the administration's battle was hopelessly lost.

The FSM was key dates: October 1 (the capture of the police car, now Free Speech Day in California), December 2-4 (2, when we took over Sproul Hall; 3, when we were arrested; and, 4, when we were released and saw the terrific campuswide strike), and December 8. On that

date, two big things happened. First, the pro-FSM candidates swept all seven ASUC Senate races — by wide margins. Then, that night, the faculty’s Academic Senate met and, essentially, adopted the FSM platform, by a vote of 824-115. These two events finally put to rest the administration - sponsored lie (repeated by newspapers) that the FSM just represented a small minority of students. To its credit, the next day the Chronicle engaged in serious crow-eating, but the then-right-wing Tribune and Examiner never did.

The FSM was full of humor, as in Dusty Miller’s Christmas carol, “Joy to UC:”

Joy to UC

The word has come

Clark Kerr has called us Reds

If you are 49%

You can't work for the government.

The knowledge factory

Turns out more GNP

Without your subversion

On its property.

The FSM was where the action was.

It was a sense of being at one with the winds of
change.

It was ecstasy.

It was the best of times, the most exciting, the most important, when we stood tall in defense of a great principle.

It was a sense that if we are committed and united, we can change the world.

It was a shining moment in history.

It was the best time of our lives.

It is worth remembering.

Author's Note:

The preceding largely represents my 30-year-old recollections of the FSM, though it incorporates others' recollections as well. I wish I knew enough to add an epilogue involving people in distant times or places affected by the FSM. I did hear one story of a Brazilian democrat so moved on her arrival in Berkeley (sacred land) that she kissed the free speech ground plaque. If you have any stories to share, please send them to me at 2605 Hilgard Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Hirsch was involved in the Sixties' Civil Rights, Anti-War, and Free Speech Movements, has written One-Man Berkeley in the Philippines and Other Autobiographical Jottings and an unpublished manuscript On Sets, Logic, and Probability. In addition, he has taught at 29 different colleges, including College of San Mateo and Ohlone College in Fremont, California, where he currently teaches statistics and mathematics. He supplements his teaching income doing comedy under the name, The Professor.

Early reviews of Jeff Hirsch's What was the Free Speech Movement?:

“Impassioned.”

—Karen D. Brown, East Bay Express

“Jeff Hirsch’s speech was enlightening, informative, and inspiring.”

—Tara Bloyd, 22-year-old Cal student

“It inspires me to know that students do have the power to reach a nation.”

—Gina Beagles, Alpha Phi, and former Ohlone student

“Filled with vigor, passion, and intensity...(it) exemplifies the resurgence of the Berkeley ideal.”

—Jonathan Reiter, “on behalf of all the
brothers of Kappa Sigma.”

“...intense idealism...”

—Doug Rodgers, Acacia Fraternity

“The major events (described)...actually did shape the history of the campus, city, and wider social circles. Thank you for bringing this history to me, and for encouraging my generation to perhaps confront more vigorously and interestedly the equally severe social problems of today.”

—Ben Carlson, International House

“The F.S.M. set the example for other freedom movements to follow...The F.S.M. should not be forgotten & should be celebrated by all who call themselves students.”

—Rigoberto Gallardo, Ohlone College
Security Guard

More early reviews of Jeff Hirsch's What was the Free Speech Movement?:

"I enjoyed Jeff's charming and heartfelt sketch of the FSM."

—Michael Rossman, FSM leader

"What a delivery! It gave me goose pimples the way I was so effectively transported to events I lived through 30 years ago. One of the best speeches I've ever heard on any topic!"

—Laura X, Women's History Research Center, Inc.

"A remarkable account...It is an important, well-written story that will inspire anyone who takes the time to read it..."

—David Menache, Casa Zimbabwe House Manager

"Inspiring...(Hirsch) issued a challenge to my generation to seek, preserve, and defend constitutional liberties; that by presenting a united front, you are never powerless, no matter the machine."

—Jennifer Schaefer (aged 23) registered nurse.

"Jeff & his booklet are doing that task that needs most doing: reaching the kids of today -the future!"

—Margot Adler, National Public Radio

"We should be happy to be known through Jeff's booklet."

—Mario Savio, FSM leader