

## MARIO SAVIO, "AN END TO HISTORY" (2 DECEMBER 1964)

Dominic Manthey  
Penn State University

**Abstract:** Mario Savio's speech in Berkeley's Sproul Hall came near the end of a semester-long struggle by the Free Speech Movement (FSM), culminating in the movement's largest sit-in and hundreds of student arrests. More than goal-oriented or instrumental speech, Savio's "An End to History" is best understood as an exercise in identity-creation, in which Savio gave expression to a unique FSM identity emerging out of New Left ideology. Specifically, Savio's literary style and commemoration of the civil rights movement were part of a process of rhetorically forging a "post-citizenship" *ethos*, one which also reinterpreted radical behavior not as a strategy but as an enactment of a new consciousness and personal awareness.

**Keywords:** Mario Savio, University of California, Berkeley, new social movements, social movement rhetoric, New Left rhetoric

The University of California, Berkeley (UCB) was no stranger to student activism in the early 1960s. In fact, the number of student organizations on campus was well above the national average.<sup>1</sup> Far from emerging out of nothing, the student-led Free Speech Movement (FSM) evolved out of a mixture of repressive administrative measures, passionate student reactions, and months of failed communication. At the heart of this conflict were two major collective actors: the UCB students and a university administration that the activists saw as bureaucratic and unresponsive. Beginning in late September of 1964, the situation at Berkeley escalated, culminating in a flashbulb moment on December 2, 1964. Headlines nationwide carried accounts of a massive student-led sit-in at Berkeley's Sproul Hall. The *Chicago Tribune* identified the key figure in the controversy: "Mario Savio, 21, of New York City, student leader of the rebels."<sup>2</sup>

On this day, Mario Savio, a philosophy major, secured his status in the history of the New Left by delivering two of his most famous speeches, the second of which was published several weeks later with the title "An End to History." After a disappointing turnout at a student protest rally just nine days earlier, the Sproul Hall sit-in on December 2<sup>nd</sup> became a turning point in the movement with "a lot at stake."<sup>3</sup> Thus it comes as no surprise that Savio, who already was recognized as one of the leaders of the student activists, would be called upon to galvanize the student body and remind them of what was at stake.<sup>4</sup> Yet, for all the interest and excitement surrounding this speech, both at the time and later among scholars and others remembering the movement, there have been few scholarly attempts to understand how the speech fits into the history of the FSM and how it helped shape the broader *ethos* emerging out of New Left ideology.

Dominic Manthey: djm513@psu.edu

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This essay argues that Savio's speech was more than an instrumental act designed to build a New Left coalition on the foundation of the civil rights movement. Nor was it primarily designed to articulate the goals, methods, or demands of the new student movement. Rather, the speech functioned mostly as an expression of the FSM's collective identity, which was shaped by broader strains of thought in New Left ideology. In the past, rhetorical critics have tended to view social movements and their leaders in terms of their instrumental use of rhetoric under the rubric of resource mobilization or rational actor theory.<sup>5</sup> Following new social movement theorists, however, scholars now recognize the potential for social movement rhetoric to operate beyond the strictly instrumental realm, solidifying "moral visions" that revolve around questions of identity more than platform or policy.<sup>6</sup> In this view of the rhetoric of confrontation, speech serves not only to promote particular goals or policies but can also shape a collective identity for protestors outside of the status quo's symbolic order. The creation of new collective identities can also be conceived of as a protest tactic that contributes crucial *symbolic* resources to a movement.<sup>7</sup> Seen in this way, Savio's address ought to be understood as a production of such symbolic resources which offered new ways of being, or new "scripts," to activists.<sup>8</sup> "An End to History" achieved this by making use of the evolving New Left ideology of the time. In particular, Savio's literary style and his word choice reflected the unique intellectual milieu of the New Left at Berkeley. Furthermore, his commemoration of the civil rights movement, while on its face a strategic coalition-building appeal, may be seen instead as an effort to shape the students' self-identity as significant historical actors and agents of social change. Savio's transcendental and existential rhetoric, which prefigured much of the New Left's rhetoric in later years, served to expand the personal into the political rather than articulate concrete political objectives. This analytical perspective can help illuminate the unique role of the FSM in the formulation and evolution of New Left ideology.

In this essay, I begin by reflecting back on the activities of Savio and the FSM that led up to the speech, "An End to History." First, I briefly trace New Left ideology as it emerged out of other social movements of the time, especially the civil rights movement. I then examine the more immediate context of the speech, recounting the events at Berkeley leading up to and including the day of the speech. Next, I take a close look at the speech itself, illuminating how the literary and philosophic style of the speech complemented an emerging ideology revolving around existential and intellectual authenticity rather than citizenship or material conditions. I also reflect on the implications of Savio's commemoration of the civil rights movement and how it related to the FSM's search for identity among its young, idealistic, and in many ways privileged followers. Finally, I consider the impact and legacy of the speech, showing how it helped shape a collective identity for the evolving New Left that still finds expression in some of the social movements of today.

### **The New Left and the Changing Landscape of Political Activism in the U.S.**

The New Left emerged in the early 1960s in response to what many perceived as the repressive and dehumanizing politics of the Cold War era. German philosopher Herbert Marcuse, described by Douglas Kellner as the "father of the New Left," articulated many of the foundational ideas for the movement, including an emphasis on "the full development of the individual in a non-repressive society . . . along with a sharp critique of domination and

liberation.”<sup>9</sup> Some historians consider the wave of socialism and then communism in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as ideological precursors to the New Left, which is accurate insofar as all three shared a general concern with the autonomy of the individual and collective welfare. However, rather than finding expression through political institutions, as the early socialists and communists tried to do, the New Left agenda was “less clearly defined” and consisted of “a polyglot of New Left social movements.”<sup>10</sup> In many ways, the New Left was more a state of mind than it was a political party with institutional structures and goals.

The New Left ideology was shaped by a number of grassroots movements, each articulating the ideology in relation to their own specific social and political context. While each movement represented a unique configuration of beliefs, some basic concepts were foundational. Three beliefs, in particular, were most common: faith in participatory democracy, an urge to redefine what counted as “political,” and a general embrace of community, particularly as an extension of the political.<sup>11</sup> Just as the civil rights movement—in its diverse manifestations—had specific sets of socio-cultural relations to negotiate with and consider in concert with the New Left’s “expansion of the political,”<sup>12</sup> the students at the University of California, Berkeley also had a different environment in which to express New Left thought. For scholars of communication and rhetoric, the diverse speeches from this period provide opportunities to reflect on how different texts reflected the general ideals and principles of the New Left, while simultaneously articulating unique interpretations of those ideals for their own political or social purposes.

New social movement theorist James Jasper identifies another significant characteristic of social movements emerging during this period: their rhetoric of “post-citizenship” or “post-industrialism.”<sup>13</sup> Whereas the issues of slavery, women’s suffrage, and even the civil rights movement involved actors excluded from society who were petitioning to the state for inclusion—in effect, for “citizenship”—the social movements of the 1960s increasingly focused on ideas and values which were not about inclusion or the specific material conditions of the “industrial” age. As Jasper explains: “New political struggles, typified by the student movement, would characterize post-industrial society: struggle over cultural meanings, the quality of leisure activities, and autonomy and democracy, rather than over pieces of the economic pie.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, students did not come to their activism with “explicit beliefs,” but were “in the process of forming” those ideological commitments.<sup>15</sup> As the civil rights network expanded, influencing the political activity at Berkeley, the students appropriated many of the ideals of that movement and combined them with *post-citizenship* sensibilities, focusing more on issues of identity rather than specific policy goals. Savio’s “An End to History” is an example of that symbolic process of forging an identity. Typical of such movements, the FSM was “not linked to a collective identity . . . defined independently of the movement,” but instead sought to forge its own identity from its position of opposition. That may explain why, as Jasper concludes, that New Left rhetorics “flow easily into each other.”<sup>16</sup>

### *The Free Speech Movement at Berkeley*

The student-led protests at Berkeley during the 1964-1965 school year were informed by several political and cultural currents both locally and throughout the United States. Indicative of the rising New Left sensibilities, the students at Berkeley were beginning to resist administrative authority. Two years before the emergence of the FSM, Berkeley President Kerr

gave an infamous speech that came to represent much of what the students found abhorrent about the university. He depicted the school as “factory-like . . . producing knowledge the way other factories produce cars or soap.”<sup>17</sup> This speech foreshadowed many thematic currents—particularly the growing corporatism of the university—which would become prominent in the FSM’s rhetoric. To Savio and others in the FSM, Kerr’s speech reflected how the university was becoming more of a “bureaucratic machine” than an institution of higher learning.

More immediately, the FSM was a reaction against administrative measures enacted in the fall of 1964, which prohibited any form of overt political expression or activity at Bancroft and Telegraph Avenue, one of the most heavily-trafficked spots on the Berkeley campus.<sup>18</sup> Many of the students viewed this measure as only the latest manifestation of a larger trend toward the bureaucratization of the university and a growing disregard for student goals and aspirations. There is now strong evidence that President Kerr was merely complying with directives from the higher administration that were designed to silence political dissent on campus. After the *Oakland Tribune* sent a journalist to investigate free speech regulations on campus, the chancellor, Edward Strong, became more repressive toward campus protests, such as an anti-Goldwater protest at a Republican convention that involved Berkeley students.<sup>19</sup> The university administration was concerned with losing political allies if it was perceived as endorsing the protests or being overly lenient toward protesters. When Strong’s administration realized that the popular protest site at Bancroft and Telegraph Avenue was not protected by the First Amendment—it was not technically public property—they went ahead with new administrative restrictions. Local partisan politics such as this compounded with the general political climate in California—a state that was midway between Pat Brown’s gubernatorial term, soon to be followed by Reagan’s—and added to a culture of “us-vs.-them” political thinking, setting the stage for the student-led conflict to be interpreted as a symbolic, generational battle.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the backlash against Berkeley’s administrative actions, the growing politicization of Berkeley’s students contributed to the emergence of the FSM. For some years there had been links between student organizations and the civil rights movement, including active chapters of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). These groups sent students southeast to participate in the Freedom Rides in Mississippi in the summer of 1964.<sup>21</sup> These students learned, and later imported to Berkeley, new strategies and tactics of social protest, such as methods of non-violent resistance used during the Berkeley protests in December of 1964. The students also brought back new ideas about participatory democracy and, perhaps most importantly, a strong impression of the cultural and social oppression that stemmed from the systematic and institutional neglect of certain groups. Mario Savio would later recall this experience as foundational to his later work in the FSM:

Knowing that the Negro people here daily live in this terror has only served to strengthen my commitment. Mississippi was an abstraction to me before. And I could only think of what some abstract ‘one’ should do—namely to go to Mississippi to fight nonviolently—for freedom. But Mississippi is no longer abstract—the fight is mine . . . [The Freedom Summer in Mississippi was] the event which more than any other created the white student movement.<sup>22</sup>

The FSM first attracted widespread attention when, on September 30, 1964, eight UCB students were suspended for violating the new ban on student political activity on the corner of Bancroft and Telegraph Avenue.<sup>23</sup> In an act of collective defiance, student members of CORE, including Jack Weinberg and Mario Savio, gathered at the intersection to solicit funds for their organization. When officers came to arrest them, the protestors used a tactic from the civil rights, going limp and forcing the police to conspicuously drag them along the concrete.<sup>24</sup> Many people credit the spectacle of these arrests with helping to spark the four-month campaign of student protests, which was “originally an effort to resist university attempts to bar CORE and other political groups from certain areas of campus.”<sup>25</sup> Eventually, however, the students involved began to raise larger questions about student rights and the role of the university in American society. And thus the Free Speech Movement was born, channeling immediate indignation toward the university administration into a larger movement that would help forge the identity of a new counterculture.

Over the next four months, students from various organizations, including SNCC and CORE, would formally organize the FSM and sketch out plans to resist what they deemed repressive university measures impinging upon freedom of speech. Many critics dismissed the student protests and depicted them as misguided or worse.<sup>26</sup> Although sometimes remembered as radicals—and certainly dubbed so by many media outlets at the time<sup>27</sup>—the FSM was “basically reformist in character,” wanting little more than “free speech for students,” as well as educational reforms, including smaller classes, professors more involved in teaching than research, and less impersonal bureaucracy.<sup>28</sup> These more moderate goals were emphasized in earlier speeches.<sup>29</sup> As the protests escalated in size, however, the rhetoric became more radical and began to focus on forging a new collective identity for a whole generation of students.

#### *December 2, 1964*

In order to fully understand the FSM, it is crucial to understand how Savio’s “An End to History” departed from his usual speeches.<sup>30</sup> His philosophy professor, John Searle, would later describe the two addresses that Savio gave on December 2, 1964, as “very atypical” and “too damn rhetorical.”<sup>31</sup> In contrast to his earlier speeches, “An End to History” did not focus on specific, local concerns or outline specific courses of action. Instead, it made sweeping, philosophical statements about American life and the generational divide. The fact that this speech became so well-known—and is oftentimes considered representative of the movement—may be surprising. Yet, in another sense, it should not seem too surprising, for the speech is not about local or time-bound issues but larger, more timeless concerns. Less overtly instrumental and more expressive than Savio’s earlier speeches, “An End to History” transcended the historical moment in which it was delivered and continues to speak to us today.

Coming off the disappointing turnout at a demonstration nine days earlier, the FSM hoped that December 2, 1964, would go down as a significant moment in the history of the movement. Highlighted by a performance from famed folk singer-songwriter Joan Baez, the day culminated in a mass sit-in inside of the centrally located Sproul Hall.<sup>32</sup> Mario Savio’s first speech came earlier in the day, before Baez’s performance, and was delivered to approximately

6,000 students who had gathered outdoors at Sproul Plaza. Here he delivered a speech calling for the disruption of “the operation of the machine.”<sup>33</sup> Later, he delivered “An End to History” to an audience of roughly 700 students inside Sproul Hall.<sup>34</sup> Since other popular FSM student speakers, such as Martin Roysher, Michael Rossman, Steve Weissman, and Charles Powell, spoke before Savio, many of the strategic and deliberative issues facing the FSM already had been discussed and debated. Thus, it should come as no surprise that Savio delivered a different kind of speech—one focused more on questions of philosophy and identity than on movement strategies.<sup>35</sup>

Savio’s “An End to History” is best understood as an attempt to craft a new sense of identity for the FSM in transcendental and literary terms. Savio identified the movement as part of a larger struggle for human rights, and more so, for an authentic identity. Savio’s references to the American civil rights movement may have failed as a strategic attempt to forge a coalition between the FSM and civil rights activists, but when viewed in terms of identity-formation Savio’s references to the civil rights movement make more sense. Talking about the connections between the two movements allowed Savio to construct a resonant narrative which emphasized authenticity and the creation of history itself. Although Savio and about 700 other students at the sit-in ended up in police custody, the speech was not a rabble-rousing speech or an incitement to violence.<sup>36</sup> Instead, it was about expanding the political into the personal. In this speech, Savio’s personal reflections exploded into a discussion of the transcendent, the existential, and the intellectually esoteric. The speech may have exaggerated or oversimplified the FSM’s connections to the civil rights movement, but that connection was essential to Savio’s post-citizenship narrative and the new identity he hoped to forge for the FSM.

### The Speech

#### *Literary and Philosophic Style*

Mario Savio’s style contributed to the new identity he forged in “An End to History” in two distinct ways. The use of literary references and the meditation on philosophical issues, such as the nature of history, forged a style that likely resonated on a personal level with his audience of UCB students. Savio’s speech displays a locally situated expansion of the *personal into the political* by connecting literary themes with political activism. Savio’s style also complemented his ideology of post-citizenship, focusing less on specific policies and concrete enemies than on the broader requirements of personal fulfillment. After first describing the injustices against the civil rights movement in Mississippi, Savio described the enemies at Berkeley as “financial plutocrats” (1). In the same sentence, he invoked Aldous Huxley’s dystopian novel, *Brave New World* and denounced “impersonal bureaucracy” (1). This reflected a style of enemy-construction that students at a prestigious university could likely relate to. Yet, the enemy remained ambiguous: the concept of “plutocracy” is abstract and does not point to specific enemies. Instead, it suggested a more *intangible* struggle against repressive structures and ideologies. The allusion to *Brave New World* reinforced this notion of a more immaterial enemy—one which operated more through everyday actions and thoughts and less through violent coercion. Unlike the civil rights movement, the FSM could not point to a specific

oppressor or claim to be the victim of overt violence. Thus, Savio needed to identify a more abstract enemy—a faceless enemy, of sorts.

Savio further appealed to the FSM's shared intellectual identity by describing the situation at Berkeley as "truly Kafkaesque" (2). In order for this philosophical and literary allusion to be successful—and judging by the immediate outcome of the sit-in and its historical reception, it was at least somewhat successful—"Kafkaesque" was recognizable as a theme of existential absurdity and a fitting description of the situation at Berkeley. The civil rights movement, by contrast, fought against a clear and manifestly unjust system: segregation. The FSM, however, did not face such manifest injustice, nor were its participants singled out because of the color of their skin. Thus, Savio turned to more abstract literary references to frame the movement's identity as a striving for personal authenticity in the face of a seemingly arbitrary, unjust, and absurd bureaucracy, as well as a calling for participatory democracy as a means of personal fulfillment. Savio's rhetoric of literary and existential struggle typified an emerging New Left identity that would cast the movement as a struggle for social justice and personal authenticity. As was evident from Savio's speech, such rhetoric is often devoid of material goals and concrete enemies.

At the heart of Savio's speech was a philosophical discussion of the nature of history and human agency. The use of philosophic ideas likely pushed Savio's listeners toward introspection, encouraging them to question their personal assumptions about themselves and society. Savio's discussion of historicity was no doubt one of the more esoteric and abstract parts of the speech, and one would be hard-pressed to ascertain the strategic or instrumental purposes of such a discussion. Yet, as part of Savio's attempt to shape a new identity for the student movement, his discussion of the "ahistorical" and the threat of believing "that history has in fact come to an end" served as the lynchpin of the speech (7). It may have served no *instrumental* purpose in terms of goal-setting or policy choices for the movement. However, it helped shape the students' identity as *agents* of historical change in a post-citizenship context. Concerned with larger cultural and societal issues, Savio's philosophic rumination on the nature of history eventually connected his listeners to what he deemed the key *site* of cultural change in the post-industrial age: the university. As Savio argued:

The university is the place where people begin seriously to question the conditions of their existence and raise the issue of whether they can be committed to the society they have been born into. After a long period of apathy during the '50s, students have begun not only to question but, having arrived at answers, to act on those answers. This is part of the growing understanding among many people in America that history has not ended, that a better society is possible and that it is worth dying for (9).

Savio's philosophic discussion of history thus circled directly back to the Berkeley campus, amplifying the university's importance for creating serious change through precisely the sort of speech he was delivering—a philosophical manifesto. Savio's rhetorical style promoted a post-citizenship identity, one which focused on interrogating one's existential authenticity, as an end in itself to his intellectually ambitious listeners.

Savio's distinctive word choice reinforced a New Left identity revolving around existential and intellectual authenticity rather than material conditions. In the conclusion of his

address, Savio described America as “a bleak scene . . . becoming ever more the utopia of sterilized, automated contentment” (14). This reference harkened back to his earlier allusion to Huxley’s *Brave New World*, while highlighting the absurdity of universities preparing students for careers that were “for the most part intellectual and moral wastelands” (14). The biggest fear was not violent oppression, but an existential torpor—the loss of one’s own identity. Savio’s word choice reflected the identity already embraced by his audience in Sproul Hall. Not only would these students likely recognize his literary allusions, but they were more sensitive to the political implications of living a “sterilized” life than they would be to the threat of discrimination or oppression. In the logic of Savio’s speech, personal boredom and blind compliance were the biggest threats to the FSM *ethos*. As Savio stated, the threat of “automated contentment” (14) stemmed from a larger concern, one which the students of FSM could identify with more than the civil rights workers of the south: the threat that “society provides no challenge . . . [and] is simply no longer exciting” (14). In short, Savio’s philosophic and literary style helped to frame the FSM movement as a struggle for post-citizenship identity. That is, it was a speech concerned with personal fulfillment and authenticity, not social position or specific political powers.

### *Commemoration of the Civil Rights*

Savio’s speech continually made use of the civil rights movement as a rhetorical touchstone, both as a source of identity-creation and as a point of comparison for the events at Berkeley. As Savio began his address he immediately connected it with the Mississippi civil rights movement: “Last summer I went to Mississippi to join the struggle there for civil rights. This fall I am engaged in another phase of the same struggle, this time in Berkeley” (1). Savio’s speech thus used the civil rights movement as a rhetorical resource, importing the emotional intensity and demand for change inherent to it into his own proffered identity. Perhaps anticipating objections, Savio defended the comparison: “the two battlefields may seem quite different to some observers, but this is not the case. The same rights are at stake in both places—the right to participate as citizens in democratic society and the right to due process of law” (1). In a sense, Savio was correct—both movements were fighting for what they saw as the fundamental rights of an American citizen. However, there is at least one clear and overriding difference: the students at Berkeley were attending college at a prestigious institution, whereas black citizens in the South were the unwilling victims of racial discrimination.

As goal-oriented, strategic speech, Savio’s attempt to connect the two movements might have seemed a stretch. However, as an articulation of an emerging New Left identity, Savio’s references to the civil rights movement seemed fitting. The FSM was addressing post-citizenship and post-industrial concerns, and with this shift away from material concerns came an increased focus on the more abstract and personal nuances of identity and authenticity. This new focus helps to explain Savio’s emphasis on the more *immaterial* concerns of the civil rights movement—its spiritual and intellectual dimensions. In the FSM’s view of the world, the enemy was not a particular person or policy but “depersonalized, unresponsive bureaucracy” (2). This focus on an abstract rather than a material enemy echoed at least some of the rhetoric of civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. For the FSM, the threat of bureaucratic alienation—and the idea that history had come to an end—may have been different from the civil rights movement’s concern with socioeconomic and institutional oppression. But both problems



ultimately resulted from the same root cause: a poverty of moral and spiritual values among those exercising power in America.

Throughout the speech Savio emphasized the connections between the students' concerns and the problem of racial discrimination: "The most crucial problems facing the United States today are the problem of automation and the problem of racial injustice" (5). Talking about these two issues in the same breath might have seemed puzzling to veterans of the civil rights struggle. However, Savio's focus on automation as a problem—as a serious threat to personal autonomy—anticipated the New Left's focus on personal sovereignty in the decade to come. It also should not come as a surprise that Savio's greatest complaint about the administration was that "it is very hard to make contact with the human being who is behind these organizations" (8). Building on New Left sensibilities, Savio's rhetoric went beyond goal-oriented, material concerns to focus on what was "personal" to the FSM at Berkeley: the perceived lack of humanity and transparency among university administrators. Interpreting this problem as akin to racial discrimination in America solidified a post-citizenship identity that cast the FSM as the vanguard of a movement that would change the world by raising the moral consciousness of individuals.

Savio moved from identifying with the civil rights movement to eventually suggesting that the repression on university campuses might actually be more detrimental to society than racial discrimination. As the nexus of social critique in American society, the university should be a place of free thought and challenging ideas. For a student to lose his or her critical voice within the university, then, was to inhibit positive change. Savio stated: "the university is the place where people begin to seriously question the conditions of their existence and raise the issue of whether they can be committed to the society they have been born into" (9). Likely, Savio's depiction of the university as central to America's social consciousness appealed to his fellow students. But it foreshadowed later tensions between the New Left and civil rights activists, many of whom never even had the opportunity to get a formal education. Moreover, some civil rights activists bristled at comparisons between privileged college students and people brutally oppressed because of the color of their skin. Viewed instrumentally as an attempt to connect the students' cause to the civil rights movement, Savio's speech seemed doomed to failure. Yet viewed in the context of the New Left's emerging post-citizenship identity, Savio's privileging of the university as the site of authentic social critique makes sense. In that context, speech itself became a vehicle for change—a change of consciousness that gave students *agency* in the evolution of history.

### *Personal Speech as a Site for Radical Action*

The general lack of instrumentality in Savio's speech is perhaps most clearly reflected in his framing of radical action. Savio characterized the threat posed by the university's repression of free speech as fundamentally personal and existential. From there, he reinterpreted what it meant to engage in radical action: to reclaim one's existential identity, one had to resist through speech. First, Savio warned against becoming "raw material" for "a factory that turns out a certain product needed by industry or government" (11). This threat to personal fulfillment and moral purpose did not manifest itself in traditionally "industrial" ways, but instead was reflected in how citizens were indoctrinated to feel comfortable in society. Savio repeatedly connected this threat with the personal life of the students. He described the

students at the university who took part in the free speech movement as “wandering aimlessly about. Strangers in their own lives, there is no place for them. They are people who have not learned to compromise” (13). Their existential struggle was against social forces, embodied by the university, which conspired to “suppress the most creative impulses” in favor of conformity and the regulation of free speech (13). By questioning society’s impact on one’s personal identity and right to self-expression, Savio anticipated a hallmark of New Left ideology: the resistance to personal alienation that later became emblematic of the student movement.

While “radical” typically suggests calls for drastic change in existing institutions or policies, Savio’s radicalism was reflected in his concern for the self and his opposition to the intellectual indoctrination committed by the university. Savio painted the university as the culprit once again for this particular brand of injustice:

the university is well structured, well tooled, to turn out people with all the sharp edges worn off, the well-rounded person . . . and this means that the best among the people who enter must for four years wander aimlessly much of the time questioning why they are on campus at all, doubting whether there is any point in what they are doing, and looking toward a very bleak existence afterward in a game which all of the rules have been made up, which one cannot amend (13).

The alternative to this future of personal disaffection, Savio argued, was to engage in free speech. Savio did not set specific standards or goals for the Free Speech Movement, but its very existence was figured to have the potential to ease or eliminate the personal alienation that society had produced. Indeed, to be radical no longer meant to engage in violent revolution due to exploitive material conditions, but rather to cultivate self-awareness and moral purpose through uninhibited speech.

Savio repeatedly stressed that the solution to the “bleak scene” he described was through the exercise of one’s own voice. Reflecting on the motives of the university administration and its repression, he stated: “because speech does often have consequences which might alter this perversion of higher education, the university must put itself in a position of censorship” (11). The university’s repression of speech was framed as the largest affront not only to personal fulfillment but also to radical change. Savio summarized the attitude of the university this way: “Speech with consequences, speech in the area of civil rights, speech which some might regard as illegal, must stop” (12). Freedom of speech was the most personal and important right of students at the university, so for those who identified with Savio’s rhetoric the fight for free speech became a fight against the existential alienation threatening society. Not advocating for any specific change in policy or even for any particular kind of speech, Savio’s address was not goal-oriented so much as it aimed to shape a new type of radical identity—one of personal liberation. Indeed, it was the inherently disruptive potential of speech which made it such a threat to the bureaucratic machine. Although Savio acknowledged the risk of engaging in “speech which advocates for changes . . . so radical as to be irrelevant in the foreseeable future,” that was partly what he enacted in “An End to History” because he avoided articulating any specific courses of action in favor of crafting a collective identity (11).

If read as a goal-oriented address, then, Savio’s “An End to History” might be criticized as unfocused or unclear. It clearly lacked substantive ideas about the New Left’s strategies and

objectives. When understood as part of the movement toward a post-citizenship ideology, however, Savio's speech seems representative of an evolving *ethos*—as an exercise in identity-construction. Reflecting on the relationship of the political to the personal, Savio articulated an ideology that would become central to the student movement of the late 1960s. While the civil right movement articulated the ideals and strategies of the New Left's fight for social justice, the FSM reinterpreted those same sensibilities in more personal terms. The identity being forged by Savio's speech defined revolutionary change in personal and intellectual terms, and it was best articulated in Savio's philosophic and literary style. His attempt to draw connections to the civil rights movement, while perhaps strategically ineffective and even offensive to some, complemented that vision of a New Left identity focused less on strategic goals and more on intangible concerns and personal fulfillment.

### Legacy

It is hard to judge the short-term impact of Mario Savio's "An End to History." The students in Sproul Hall remained for the sit-in, only to be forced out by police who arrested many of the activists. About one month after this incident, on January 4, 1965, the administration capitulated on the censorship issue, however, and shortly thereafter the FSM disbanded.<sup>37</sup> The next semester, Mario Savio left Berkeley, only to find himself struggling with his newfound notoriety beyond the campus. Savio, nevertheless, settled in California where he taught college until his death in 1996.<sup>38</sup> Savio's speeches on December 2, 1964 would remain influential for many years, as would memories of the Free Speech Movement.

The events at Berkeley would inspire student movements throughout the 1960s and 1970s, especially the antiwar movement and various movements opposed to "the status quo both on campus and off, first on race and then on gender and other areas of inequality and discrimination."<sup>39</sup> Michael Kazin, a former member of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), later reflected on Savio's influence on the famous Port Huron Statement, commenting that what appealed most to young people who embraced the term "participatory democracy" was its promise of utterly transforming a society of "over-managed, bureaucratic, formally representative institutions they believed were stifling their independence of thought and action." That, Kazin concluded, was "why Mario . . . became so emblematic."<sup>40</sup> Savio's impassioned speeches also set the tone for some of the more radicalizing rhetoric of later New Left protests, particularly constructions of the enemy as "the system" or "the machine." In Savio's own words, "the [Free Speech] Movement never died. The Movement was the mother of many movements . . . [which] spread the impulse for change."<sup>41</sup>

Yet Savio was not without his critics. Cohen notes that despite (or perhaps because of) his impassioned oratory, there was "a lingering sense of disappointment about Savio," particularly after he left Berkeley and distanced himself from politics.<sup>42</sup> More significantly, Savio's rhetoric would be questioned just two years later on the Berkeley campus, when Stokely Carmichael, then the leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), told the students they were "fooling" themselves if they thought they could join forces with the civil rights movement to bring about significant social change: "It is impossible for white and black people to talk about building a relationship based on humanity when the country is the way it is, when the institutions are clearly against us."<sup>43</sup> Perhaps, as it has been suggested, Savio never

meant for his appeals to the civil right movement to be taken as a literal call for a strategic coalition. Nevertheless, the persistent tensions between the student movement and civil rights movement seemed to belie his arguments about their shared identity.

As historian Robert Cohen has argued, while “many groups collapsed, other organizations and movements rooted in the 1960’s thrived as America entered the 1970’s, including the women’s movement, gay and lesbian liberation, the environmental and antinuclear movement, and the drive for alternatives to the two-party system.”<sup>44</sup> Many of these movements manifested sensibilities reminiscent of Savio’s post-citizenship and post-industrial ideology. Some eschewed specific calls to action in favor of more global or existential ideologies emphasizing cultural values and the relationship between the political and the personal, while many others emphasized identity over programs or policies. Savio cannot be given all the credit for the “identity politics” of later years, but he certainly was one of its most influential architects in the United States.

At Berkeley, Savio’s activism is officially commemorated through the Memorial Lecture Fund, which annually sponsors lectures by political and social activists.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the front of Sproul Plaza, where Savio gave his first address of that day, was rededicated in 1997 as the “Mario Savio Steps.”<sup>46</sup> More recently, several prominent activist groups have conspicuously evoked Savio. The “hackivist” group Anonymous played an audio excerpt of Savio’s “body upon the gears” speech in their March 12, 2011 video in which the group framed the Federal Reserve as yet another manifestation of “the machine.”<sup>47</sup> More recently, the Occupy Wall Street movement evoked Savio by reenacting some of his speeches.<sup>48</sup> Clearly, Savio’s rhetoric about the institutional and cultural obstacles to social change still resonates with political and social activists.

Today, the Free Speech Movement is mostly remembered as part of the idealistic radicalism of the 1960s—a movement that called attention to the serious social and political problems of that era, including racism, sexism, and war. However, it is interesting to note that Savio’s most famous address did not directly say much about those sorts of issues. Instead, it articulated an identity revolving around personal identity and existential fulfillment, while also raising “profound questions about the university, capitalism, and freedom that still haunt American higher education.”<sup>49</sup> In that sense, the legacy of Mario Savio’s “An End of History” may be seen in the numerous movements that stress identity, the loss of personal autonomy, and the search for authenticity in modern society.

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**Author’s Note:** Dominic Manthey is a PhD student in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences at Pennsylvania State University. The author wishes to give a special thanks to J. Michael Hogan for his advice and assistance throughout the entire process of drafting this essay.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Goines notes the escalation in student political organizations the previous school year, especially in relation to the civil rights movement. Similarly, Lipset states that the “vigor and effectiveness of the Free Speech Movement must in some part be credited to the prior existence of a well-organized and politically experienced group of student activists.” See David Lance Goines, *The Free Speech Movement* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1993), 84; and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Rebellion in the University* (New Brunswick, NJ: Little, Brown & Company Press, 1971), 98.

<sup>2</sup> Seymour Korman, “Nab 800 in College Sit-in,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 4, 1964, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Cohen, *Freedom’s Orator: Mario Savio and the Radical Legacy of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 178.

<sup>4</sup> Cohen repeatedly mentions that “the rapport between Savio and the demonstrators for whom he was speaking was strong” and notes his “singular dominat[ion of] public speaking” during the movement. See Cohen, *Freedom’s Orator*, 89, 91.

<sup>5</sup> For a nuanced discussion of this trend, see James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 19-42.

<sup>6</sup> Jasper describes how “moral visions” can serve as “blueprints—utopias—for how a good society would be laid out.” Importantly, Jasper stresses the interrelationship between the cognitive and emotional in the formation of a moral vision. See Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*, 135

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of how the production of key symbolic resources blurs the analytic lines between the purely “instrumental” and the purely “expressive,” see Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Mary Bernstein, “Culture, Power, and Institutions: A Multi-Institutional Politics Approach to Social Movements,” *Sociological Theory* 26, no. 1 (2008): 74-99.

<sup>8</sup> Dingxin Zhao, “Theorizing the Role of Culture in Social Movements: Illustrated by Protests and Contentions in Modern China,” *Social Movement Studies* 9, no. 1 (2010): 36.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Kellner, “Herbert Marcuse,” *Illuminations*, <http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell12.htm> (accessed May 15, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Van Gosse, “Our Left,” *Radical History Review*, 58 (1994): 207.

<sup>11</sup> Bret Eynon, “Community in Motion: The Free Speech Movement, Civil Rights, and the Roots of the New Left,” *Oral History Review* 17, no. 1 (1989): 45; Eynon, “Community in Motion,” 45-46.

<sup>12</sup> Eynon, “Community in Motion,” 48.

<sup>13</sup> Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*, 7, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*, 70-71.

<sup>15</sup> Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*, 77.

<sup>16</sup> Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*, 87.

<sup>17</sup> David Lance Goines, *The Free Speech Movement* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1993), 51.

<sup>18</sup> James L. Wood, “Remembering the FSM: Notes of an Observer,” *Sociological Focus* 13 (1980): 179.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, *Freedom’s Orator*, 79-80.

<sup>20</sup> Cohen, *Freedom’s Orator*, 79-80.

<sup>21</sup> Cohen, *Freedom’s Orator*, 63.

<sup>22</sup> As cited in Cohen, *Freedom’s Orator*, 66, 64.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, *Freedom’s Orator*, 76.

<sup>24</sup> Cohen, *Freedom’s Orator*, 180.

<sup>25</sup> Eynon, “Community in Motion,” 41.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis S. Feuer speculated that the activists were publicly acting out their own personal Oedipal Complexes. Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 449.

<sup>27</sup> Cohen notes how “the press was so hostile [which] may have made it impossible to turn back the wave of public opposition” and perhaps even largely contributed to the formation of the New Right. See Cohen, *Freedom’s Orator*, 221.

<sup>28</sup> Wood, “Remembering the FSM,” 182.

<sup>29</sup> Wood, “Remembering the FSM,” 182.

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- <sup>30</sup> Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 179.
- <sup>31</sup> Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 180.
- <sup>32</sup> Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 178.
- <sup>33</sup> Mario Savio, "An End to History," as cited in Stephen E. Lucas and Martin J. Medhurst, *Words of a Century: The Top 100 American Speeches, 1900-1999* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 423-426.
- <sup>34</sup> Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 178.
- <sup>35</sup> Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 182.
- <sup>36</sup> Korman, "Nab 800," 1.
- <sup>37</sup> Eyon, "Community in Motion," 63-64.
- <sup>38</sup> Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 268.
- <sup>39</sup> Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 64.
- <sup>40</sup> Michael Kazin, "The Port Huron Statement at Fifty," *Dissent* 59, no. 2 (2012): 86.
- <sup>41</sup> Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 267.
- <sup>42</sup> Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 13.
- <sup>43</sup> As cited in Lucas and Medhurst, *Words of a Century*, 448.
- <sup>44</sup> Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 267.
- <sup>45</sup> See the "Mario Savio Memorial Lecture Fund," [www.savio.org/the\\_lectures.html](http://www.savio.org/the_lectures.html) (accessed December 2, 2013.)
- <sup>46</sup> Sandy Kleffman, "School Goes Full Circle on Savio Steps Near Sproul Plaza Named for Free Speech Leader," *San Jose Mercury News*, December 4, 1997, 1B.
- <sup>47</sup> AmpedStatus, "A99 Operation Empire State Rebellion – Communication #1," [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), (accessed December 3 2013).
- <sup>48</sup> Lawrence Swan, "Mario Savio Lives.avi," [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), (accessed December 3, 2013).
- <sup>49</sup> Cohen, *Freedom's Orator*, 207.