

Mario Savio

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Mario Savio (December 8, 1942 – November 6, 1996) was an American political activist and a key member in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. He is most famous for his passionate speeches, especially the "put your bodies upon the gears" address given at Sproul Hall, University of California, Berkeley on December 2, 1964.

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Biography


Early life

Savio was born in New York City to a Sicilian steel worker father. Both his parents were devout Catholics and, as an altar boy, Savio was planning to become a priest.^[1] He told Karlyn Barker in 1964 that it was a question as to whose side you are on. 'Are we on the side of the civil rights movement? Or have we gotten back to the comfort and security of Berkeley, California, and can we forget the sharecroppers whom we worked with just a few weeks back? Well we couldn't forget.'^[2]

Savio's part in the protest on the Berkeley campus started when on October 1, 1964, former student Jack Weinberg was manning a table for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The University police had just put him in a police car when someone from the surrounding crowd yelled 'sit down.' Savio, along with others during the 32-hour sit-in, took off his shoes and climbed on top of the car and spoke with words that roused the crowd into frenzy.^[3]

The last time he climbed on the police car was to tell the crowd of a short-term understanding that had been met with UC President Clark Kerr. Savio said to the crowd, "I ask you to rise quietly and with dignity, and go

Mario Savio



Mario Savio on Sproul Hall steps, 1966

Born	8 December 1942 New York
Died	November 6, 1996 (aged 53) Sebastopol, California
Nationality	American
<i>Alma mater</i>	Martin Van Buren High School, San Francisco State University
Occupation	University lecturer
Known for	Political activism

home", and the crowd did exactly what he said. After this Savio became the prominent leader of the newly formed Free Speech Movement.^[4] Negotiations failed to change the situation; therefore direct action began in Sproul Hall on December 2. There, Savio gave his most famous speech, on the "operation of the machine", in front of 4,000 people. He and 800 others were arrested that day. In 1967 he was sentenced to 120 days at Santa Rita Jail. He told reporters that '[he] would do it again.'^[4]

In April 1965, he quit the FSM because 'he was disappointed with the growing gap between the leadership of the FSM ... and the students themselves.'^[5]

"Bodies upon the gears" speech

Speaking on the steps of Sproul Hall, on December 3, 1964:

We were told the following: If President Kerr actually tried to get something more liberal out of the regents in his telephone conversation, why didn't he make some public statement to that effect? And the answer we received, from a well-meaning liberal, was the following: He said, 'Would you ever imagine the manager of a firm making a statement publicly in opposition to his board of directors?' That's the answer!

Well, I ask you to consider: 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. The faculty are a bunch of employees, and we're the raw material! But we're a bunch of raw materials that don't mean to be—have any process upon us. Don't mean to be made into any product. Don't mean... 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's 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 passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon 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!

Later life

Between 1965 and his death, Savio held a variety of jobs, including as a sales clerk in Berkeley.^[6] In 1965, he married Suzanne Goldberg, whom he had met during the Free Speech Movement. Two months after their wedding, they moved to England because Savio had won a scholarship to the University of Oxford. While there, they had their first child, Stefan. Savio did not complete his degree at Oxford, and they moved back to California in February 1966.^[6] In 1968, he ran for state senator from Alameda County on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket, but lost to Nick Petris, a liberal Democrat.^[6]

In 1980, he married a second time, to Lynne Hollander, an old acquaintance from the Free Speech Movement.^[7] He returned to university at San Francisco State University soon after. In 1984, he received a summa cum laude bachelor's degree in physics and earned a master's degree in 1989.^[8] In 1990, Savio and Hollander moved with their 10-year-old son, Daniel, to Sonoma County, California, where he taught



External videos



Bodies Upon The Gears Speech

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhFvZRT7Ds0>) on YouTube

mathematics, philosophy and logic at Sonoma State University.^[9]

FBI controversy

In 1999, it was revealed that Savio had been tailed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation from the moment that he had climbed onto the police car in which Jack Weinberg was detained. He was followed for more than a decade "because he had emerged as the nation's most prominent student leader."^[6] There was no evidence that he was a threat or that he had any connection with the Communist Party, but the FBI decided he merited their attention because they thought he could inspire students to rebel.^[6]

Even after he had left the FSM, the FBI called him to their Berkeley office. They told Savio that they had received letters of a threatening nature towards him, but they would not speak with Savio's attorney present. However, Savio would not agree, and instead criticized the FBI 'for failure to make arrests and take action in the South where human rights are being violated every day.'^[4] At this point the meeting ended.

According to hundreds of pages of FBI files, the bureau:

- Collected, without court order, personal information about Savio from schools, telephone companies, utility firms and banks and compiled information about his marriage and divorce.
- Monitored his day-to-day activities by using informants planted in political groups, covertly contacting his neighbors, landlords and employers, and having agents pose as professors, journalists and activists to interview him and his wife.
- Obtained his tax returns from the Internal Revenue Service in violation of federal rules, mischaracterized him as a threat to the president and arranged for the CIA and foreign intelligence agencies to investigate him when he and his family travelled in Europe.
- Put him on an unauthorized list of people to be detained without judicial warrant in event of a national emergency, and designated him as a "Key Activist" whose political activities should be "disrupted" and "neutralized" under the bureau's illegal counterintelligence program known as COINTELPRO.^[10]

The investigation finally ended at the beginning of 1975 and at that point an investigation in to the FBI's abuse of power began. Savio's ex-wife, Suzanne Goldberg, said that the "FBI's investigation of her and Savio [was] a waste of money and an invasion of privacy."^[6]

Death

Savio had a history of heart problems and was admitted to Columbia-Palm Drive Hospital in Sebastopol, California, on November 2, 1996. He slipped into a coma on November 5 and died the following day,^[11] shortly after being removed from life support.^[12]

Legacy

A Memorial Lecture Fund was set up to honor Mario Savio upon his death. The MSMLF hosts an annual fall lecture on the University of California, Berkeley campus. Past lecturers include Howard Zinn, Winona LaDuke, Lani Guinier, Barbara Ehrenreich, Arlie Russell Hochschild, Cornel West, Christopher Hitchens, Adam Hochschild, Amy Goodman, Molly Ivins, Jeff Chang, Tom Hayden, Angela Davis, Seymour Hersh, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Naomi Klein, Elizabeth Warren, Robert Reich, and Van Jones.^{[13][14]}

The Memorial Fund also set up the Mario Savio Young Activist Award to honor an outstanding young activist with a deep commitment to human rights and social justice and the qualities of leadership ability, creativity, and integrity. Recipients of the award since it was first bestowed in 1998 include Michael Leon Guerrero, Niki Fortunato Bas, Jia Ching Chen, Jim Keady, Harmony Goldberg, Genevieve Gonzales, Rocio Nieves, Jason West, Erin Durban, Noemi Ramos, Christopher Goodman, Patrisse Marie Cullors, Julissa Bisano, Chelsea Chee, Timothy Den-Herder, Reyna Wences, Rigoberto Padilla-Perez, Ellen Choy, Josh Healey, Christna Sot, Molly Katchpole and Howard Watts III.^[15]

In 1997, the steps of Sproul Plaza, from which he had given his most famous speech, were officially renamed the "Mario Savio Steps".^[16]

Mario's famous speech is sampled in many songs including "An Ounce Of Prevention" from the album *On Little Known Frequencies* by the band From Monument to Masses, "Timelessness" by the band Fear Factory, "The Movie's Over" by the Australian band Cog, "Article IV" by the Santa Cruz band Good Riddance, "Here Come The Pigs" by Deadsoul Tribe and "Wretches and Kings" from the album *A Thousand Suns* by Linkin Park. It is also paraphrased in an episode of *Battlestar Galactica* (Lay Down Your Burdens, Part II),^[17] given by Chief Galen Tyrol, the head of a union. It is also used in the intro to the podcast of the Dean Blundell Show on 102.1 the Edge, Toronto's largest radio station.

On March 12, 2011, at the end of an announcement by hacktivist group Anonymous of an attack, called the Empire State Rebellion, on the Federal Reserve, the International Monetary Fund, the Bank of International Settlements and the World Bank, an excerpt of Savio's speech was included. Since the onset of the Occupy movement in the United States in Fall 2011, Savio's speech and his activism have been cited many times. His speech has also been cited and referenced by Stephen Patis's comic, *Pearls Before Swine*, by the main character, Rat, on a few occasions.

On October 16, 2012 the Sebastopol City Council rededicated the Downtown Plaza as the "Mario Savio Free Speech Plaza".^[18] On November 15, 2012 the "Mario Savio Speakers' Corner" was dedicated on the campus of Sonoma State University. At the ceremony, Lynne Hollander Savio, told the audience, *I hope you will use this free speech corner often, to advocate and organize with dignity and responsibility for the causes you believe in.*^[19]

Bibliography

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- Hal Draper, *Berkeley: The New Student Revolt*, with an introduction by Mario Savio. Grove Press, 1965. Republished in 2005 by the Center for Socialist History.
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4. ^ *a b c* Rosenfeld, *San Francisco Chronicle*.
5. ^ Michael Taylor, "Stirring Up a Generation; Mario Savio's passionate speeches and mesmerizing delivery became synon," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 December 1996, p. 1/Z3.
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7. ^ Taylor, *San Francisco Chronicle*.
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9. ^ Mowatt, *San Jose Mercury News*.
10. ^ Seth Rosenfeld, "60s Free Speech Leader got caught in FBI web," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 10 October 2004, p. A1.
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13. ^ Mario Savio Memorial Lecture Fund website: The Lectures (http://www.savio.org/the_lectures.html)
14. ^ "Van Jones, award recipients speak at 16th annual Mario Savio Memorial Lecture" (<http://www.dailycal.org/2012/11/28/van-jones-award-recipients-speak-at-16th-annual-mario-savio-memorial-lecture/>) . The Daily Californian. <http://www.dailycal.org/2012/11/28/van-jones-award-recipients-speak-at-16th-annual-mario-savio-memorial-lecture/>. Retrieved 2012-11-29.
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17. ^ [1] (http://en.battlestarwiki.org/wiki/Lay_Down_Your_Burdens_Part_II)
18. ^ "Sebastopol City Council Meeting Minutes, October 16, 2012, pg 8" (http://ci.sebastopol.ca.us/sites/default/files/events-and-meetings/approved_october_16_2012_city_council_meeting_minutes.pdf) . http://ci.sebastopol.ca.us/sites/default/files/events-and-meetings/approved_october_16_2012_city_council_meeting_minutes.pdf. Retrieved 2012-11-29.
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External links

- The Mario Savio Memorial Lecture Fund (<http://www.savio.org>)
- Text, Audio, Video of Sproul Hall Sit-in Address delivered 2 December 1964 (<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mariosaviosproulhallsitin.htm>)
- FBI file on Mario Savio (<http://vault.fbi.gov/mario-savio>)
- The Free Speech Movement Online Sound Recording Collection (<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/pacificafsm.html>) (via UC Berkeley Media Resources Center)
- The Free Speech Movement Archives (<http://www.fsm-a.org/>) (includes information about the event surrounding the speech; the Mario Savio Memorial Lecture; and Mario Savio's 1996 Memorial)

- The UC Berkeley Bancroft Library Free Speech Movement Digital Archives (<http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/FSM/>) (includes a RealAudio videoclip of the Savio 1964 Dec. 2 speech, available at a sub-page (<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/FSM.html>))
- Arthur Gatti Collection (<http://www.qc.cuny.edu/Academics/Degrees/DAH/library/SpecialCollections/Documents/Gatti%20Finding%20Aid.pdf>) (finding aid for collection that contains archival materials about the political and personal life of Mario Savio)

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