

New York Times Book Review

Letters

February 7, 1982

Free Speech Movement

To the Editor:

John William Ward, in his review of A. Bartlett Giamatti's "The University and the Public Interest" (Dec. -20), was absolutely wrong in *his* description of the order of events on the Berkeley campus of the University of California in the academic year 1964-65. He wrote: "The Free Speech Movement at Berkeley (which then Professor Giamatti called the 'Filthy Speech Movement') began with one student sitting on the steps of Sproul Hall holding a placard with one word on it, a blunt, four-letter Anglo-Saxon word that family newspapers like The New York Times still refuse to print." The Free Speech Movement actually began over the issue of the abrogation of the First Amendment rights of Berkeley students to raise funds, *hold* rallies and organize demonstrations from public areas of the campus. The Movement had pretty much successfully run its course before the placard incident at Sproul Hall occurred - the University administration had capitulated after Mario Savio, attempting to speak, was dragged off the stage of the Hearst Greek Theater by the necktie around his neck, and the faculty overwhelmingly voted to endorse the Movement's objectives.

After that tumultuous fall 1964 semester, a person, acting on his own during the following semester, did indeed display the placard with the inscribed four-letter Anglo-Saxonism. The press and the surviving losers of the battle with the student civil rights organizations coined the term "Filthy Speech Movement" in an attempt, by many of them, to vindicate and salvage their previous position abridging the students' right to expression.

I write as a witness and student participant in the events whose sequence Mr. Ward confounds in his essay. That he is in error also has been amply documented in a number of scholarly and more popular works.

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