

I feel very honored to have been asked to say a few words about Charlie Sellers' leadership role, first in organizing the Committee of 200 in 1964 that successfully mobilized faculty support for the Free Speech Movement at UC Berkeley, and a few years later in organizing the experimental Strawberry Creek College on our campus.

The success in 1964 of the Free Speech Movement in establishing First Amendment freedom of speech on the Berkeley campus helped define the character of life at Berkeley for the next decade and longer. It was also an iconic moment in defining the 1960s themselves, as campus after campus saw similar student movements, especially after the rapid escalation in 1965 of the Vietnam War.

Most historical accounts of the FSM have focused, appropriately, on the students' activities, and particularly on the leadership role played by Mario Savio. But the students could not have achieved their objective of free speech if a version of their demands had not been endorsed by a Faculty Senate resolution on December 8, 1964, by an extraordinary vote of 824 to 125. This was five days after 800 students had been arrested in a sit-in at Sproul Hall, the seat of the UC Chancellor's offices; and one day after a campus meeting in the campus Greek Theater, called to restore order and calm. This effort failed after Savio, trying to speak, was attacked and dragged violently off the stage by the campus police.

The December 8th faculty senate resolution emerged out of the a draft produced the night before at a dramatic emergency meeting of the faculty's informal Committee of 200, a few hours after the fiasco in the Greek Theater. It was at this memorable, life-changing meeting that I first met both Charlie Sellers and Charles Muscatine, the two men who would later invite me to join them in starting Strawberry Creek College. Because of a brief comment I made in the meeting, I was invited to join them in a smaller drafting committee of seven or eight, the so-called Ex Com, which put the final touches on the resolution passed by the Senate the next day.

What I learned much later was that Charlie, along with Charles Muscatine, was one of the original organizers of the Committee of 200, which originally was referred to as the Sellers Committee and as a rule held its Ex Com meetings in Charlie's office.¹ Charlie and Charles had first met only four days earlier, on December 4, in the queue of professors lined up at the Berkeley jail to bail out the students arrested in the

¹ Carl E. Schorske, "Intellectual Life, Civil Libertarian Issues, and the Student Movement at the University of California, Berkeley, 1960-1969," an oral history conducted in 1996 and 1997 by Ann Lage, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2000, http://www.archive.org/stream/intelllifecivil00schorich/intelllifecivil00schorich_djvu.txt.

December 3 sit-in.² But they made a great team, with Muscatine supplying organizational skills developed a decade earlier in the California oath controversy.

Charlie, as a civil rights activist and member of the small Berkeley CORE group, had been protesting with the students since October 1, when Jack Weinberg of CORE was arrested on campus and detained in a police car. That car was eventually immobilized for 32 hours after it was surrounded by a crowd that grew to be a thousand or more. But Charlie had started picketing with the students right after Weinberg's arrest, when there were only fifteen or so in the picket line. Charlie also spoke from the roof of the captured police car, and was the first tenured faculty member to support the FSM.³

As I said earlier, the faculty-student victory for Free Speech changed UC Berkeley, and the lives of many of us teaching there. The new open microphone was available every weekday for one hour on the Sproul Hall steps, much later renamed the Mario Savio Steps. Together with Charlie, I participated in anti-war protests using that microphone, while Charlie also worked with his civil rights contacts to organize anti-war protest in the South, as well as on a national level.⁴

At the same time Charlie collaborated successfully with the Berkeley Democratic Black Caucus to nominate and elect to Congress in 1968 Ron Dellums, an anti-war candidate.⁵ Charlie was respected and trusted by the Black Caucus because of his work with CORE in the 1950s to promote fair housing and fair employment for blacks in Berkeley. When Malcolm X spoke on campus in 1962, the Caucus chose Charlie, even though white, to introduce him.

Meanwhile the momentum for change at Berkeley produced a movement, in response to the critiques voiced by Savio and other students, to reform undergraduate education at Berkeley. One result was so-called Muscatine Report, containing recommendations from a Senate Select Committee on which Charles and I served. Perhaps its most ambitious recommendation was for a mechanism to establish new experimental programs, and Charles and Charlie soon became the

² Charles Muscatine, ORAL HISTORY,

http://archive.org/stream/loyaltyoath00muscrich/loyaltyoath00muscrich_djvu.txt

³ One reads in John Searle's Wikipedia entry that he "was the first tenured professor to join the 1964-5 Free Speech Movement." This is probably not quite true.

⁴ See "Letter from Charles Sellers to MLK: Correspondence April 29, 1967,"

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-charles-sellers-mlk>. In this letter Sellers writes to Dr. King promoting the Washington Convocation On The National Crisis. He encloses a proposal that he and Cecil Thomas discussed with Mrs. King over the phone. The proposal details the organized effort to marshal public sentiment against current US policy in Vietnam. Five hundred prominent Americans would be invited to the convocation, to be held in Washington, DC.

⁵ Harriet Kathan and Stanley Scott, Editors, *Experiment and Change in Berkeley: Essays on City Politics, 1950-1975*, 120.

only professors ever to avail themselves of it. The two of them established Strawberry Creek College, officially the Collegiate Seminar Program, with the premise that freshmen were capable of writing serious interdisciplinary research papers. (Charles and Charlie soon invited me to join them, but I was not in the same sense a co-founder.)

For its lifetime of six years, the College distinguished itself by combining a strong sense of the values of traditional culture together with a strong sense of the ideological limitations of that culture. This tension reflected the divergent personalities of Charles and Charlie: Charles, although a political radical, also identified with culture as Matthew Arnold defined it, “the best that has been thought and known.” Charlie, profoundly alienated by his years at Harvard, shared more deeply Savio’s ambivalence about the university and what it stood for. (Thus for example we see in Sellers’ *The Market Revolution* a critique of cultural icons like Emerson – a critique I would not have expected from Charles.) These nuanced differences between the two made them a great team, in politics as in education. And their work together, far more than has been generally recognized, helped make Berkeley a more stimulating and productive environment for all of us, both in politics and also in education.

I would like to close with a few words about Charlie Sellers’ modesty. I believe I may have spent more time with Charlie than with any other UC faculty member, including Charles. Time after time, usually with Carolyn, we have driven together in search of birds in the California desert. We have often talked about the FSM, but I never heard from him more than that he had been one among many leaders of that movement. That Charlie was the first faculty member to join the FSM protesters, that the Committee of 200 was originally known as the Sellers Group, and that it met at first in Charlie’s office – all these important facts I have only learned recently from the Internet, in preparing for these remarks.

To sum up, Charlie in his lifetime managed not only to improve the writing of American history, but also to help improve Berkeley in one of its most vital and memorable decades.