

FREE SPEECH 101

The Utah Valley Uproar Over Michael Moore

Joseph Vogel

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Joseph Vogel

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Free Speech 101: The Utah Valley Uproar Over Michael Moore

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And this I believe: that the free, exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes, undirected.

John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*

This book is dedicated to the disenfranchised, the minorities, and the peacemakers, who have so consistently been the conscience of America.

P U B L I S H E R ' S N O T E

The decision to publish this book, *Free Speech 101*, was a difficult one. As the draft edition of the work and the relevant e-mails and other reference materials were reviewed, it became obvious that the decision to invite Michael Moore to appear at Utah Valley State College had caused a considerable explosion of emotion on both sides of the issue. As editing progressed and the materials were analyzed in more detail, it became increasingly obvious that these emotions were very personal to all involved, and that publication of the work (including names, quotes, dates, and facts) would, in all probability, ignite some of these emotions and controversies anew.

However, the decision to publish this book was not influenced by the personal feelings of any of the participants: the antagonists, the supporters, or the decision makers (whether they were in the community, the college, the legislature, or the general public). It was made because the underlying issue throughout the controversy — constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech — trumps personal preferences, be they conservative or liberal, Republican or Democrat. Suppression of the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech, whether by influence peddling, money, political power, coercion, personal preference, community preference, or even majority vote, cannot be tolerated in a free society.

The controversy regarding Michael Moore was founded in political preference, and we believe, along with Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis, that “public discussion is a *political duty*,” and “should be a fundamental principle of the American government.” (Emphasis added.)

In our opinion, the best protection against what is perceived as offensive or controversial speech is not suppression, but more speech. And the only acceptable limitation on the right to free speech is the right not to listen.

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[A] function of free speech under our system of government is to invite dispute. It may indeed best serve its high purpose when it indicates a condition of unrest, creates dissatisfaction with things as they are, or even stirs people to anger. Speech is often provocative and challenging. It may strike at prejudices and preconceptions and have profound unsettling effects as it presses for understanding.

Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart¹

P R O L O G U E

The news exploded across the state of Utah on Monday, September 13, 2004. Controversial film maker Michael Moore was coming to Utah County. The initial reaction matched the pendulum's swing: some people were outraged; some people were thrilled. Between those extremes, some thought they must have heard it wrong. Some even thought it was a joke. Was the creator of *Fahrenheit 9/11* really coming to a place that consistently voted more than 85 percent Republican in every presidential election?

The College Times, a campus newspaper, initially released the story that Mr. Moore would speak at Utah Valley State College. But before lunchtime, nearly every newspaper, TV news channel, and radio station in the state of Utah was aware of it. In a matter of hours, the entire state was in an uproar.

I first heard that the story had broken from my fiancée, Tiffany Van Tassell. She was already at the college that Monday morning

1. As quoted in *Free Speech and Political Protest*, Marvin Summers, 1967. D.C. Heath & Company, Vintage/Median: 1967 Paperback.

and called me while I was driving to school to ask if I had seen the college paper.

“No,” I replied.

“Well,” she said apprehensively, “you might want to get to your office as soon as possible. The whole campus is talking about Michael Moore, and some people aren’t very happy.”

Michael Moore’s people had warned us about this, and we had anticipated some controversy over our decision to bring him to the heart of Utah Valley. I wasn’t too worried, though. A few people were bound to be a little upset. *After all*, I thought, *it’s just one speaker. People will get over it.* I told Tiffany I’d soon be on campus where I could get a copy of the paper, and that I’d speak with her later.

I arrived on campus just before ten o’clock and went to my first class before heading to my office. I had been elected Student Body Vice President of Academics a few months earlier and to date, my duties had involved little that was controversial. I knew my decision to ask Michael Moore to speak would raise a few conservative eyebrows, but I wasn’t prepared for the firestorm to come.

When I finally arrived at the student government offices, I couldn’t believe what was happening. The personnel were in a frenzy. There was a flood of messages. To get into my office, I had to step over a jumble of papers that had been slipped under my door. Some were scattered around as if they had been pushed to ensure that they made it into the room. Others were wadded up, undoubtedly restricted in some way as they were forced under the door. When I sat down at my desk, I immediately noticed that my answering machine was full and my computer contained numerous e-mails. I was told by the office secretaries that KSL TV Channel 5 had come by earlier looking for me and that Fox TV Channel 13 wanted to know if they could meet with me that afternoon for an interview. Every time I tried to read, listen to, or return a message, more would come in. When I finally talked

to my friend, Jim Bassi, our student body president, I found he was experiencing the same thing. We were astonished to say the least. We had anticipated that Michael Moore's visit would be a big event, but we had no idea the announcement would spread so quickly or generate so much activity.

That night I stayed at the office until well past ten. Throughout the day I had been listening to and responding to messages from students and members of the community, doing interviews with the press, and watching the news. It was both exhilarating and emotionally draining. Some people expressed appreciation and admiration. But mostly in those first few days after the announcement, the people who contacted me were furious at our decision, and not shy about letting us know that fact in no uncertain terms.

I was a college junior, a 23-year-old student, and after the day's activities I recognized that I had made a decision that had affected a lot of people. It was astonishing, and in fact, a little terrifying. Utah Valley State College (UVSC) was a place *The Salt Lake Tribune's* Derek Jensen aptly described as "one of the most conservative campuses in one of the most conservative counties in one of the most conservative states in the country."² Now it seemed that in just one day, half the state of Utah believed that UVSC was suddenly taking a sharp plunge into hell — and I was the one responsible for it. I was being called a lying, selfish, immature, irresponsible, anti-American, anti-God *liberal*. People said I had shamed my family, my college, my country, and my faith. One e-mail sent to our student government advisor Phil Clegg (later printed in Provo's *Daily Herald*) went so far as to say I should be "tarred, feathered, and run out of the state."³

The uproar generated by Mr. Moore's appearance and the re-

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2. Derek Jensen, "'Fahrenheit 9/11' director steaming up Utah County." *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 September 2004.
 3. David Randall, "Moore Visit Sparking Controversy," *Daily Herald*, 16 September 2004.

percussions that followed continued for the next six months and beyond. The furor eventually made its way across the country via articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*,⁴ *Time* magazine,⁵ *The Washington Post*,⁶ and *The Associated Press*.⁷ It even appeared online as one of YAHOO's top stories.⁸

In Utah, the Michael Moore story was voted Utah Valley's Top Story of 2004 by the *Daily Herald*, and it made the Top Ten for Utah in both *The Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret Morning News*. "The impending visit by the filmmaker became a media frenzy," the *Herald* recounted, "sparking over 100 news articles in major Utah papers in a little over a month and 165 news items on local television."⁹

A few days before Mr. Moore's visit, I was talking on the phone with his sister and tour manager, Anne Moore,¹⁰ about all the crazy things that had been happening to me and others as a result of his pending visit. Those "things" included death threats, bribes, near-constant pressure to cancel, a recall effort, and a lawsuit; all with one intent — to stop Michael Moore from speaking. She couldn't believe it. I told her that very day we had heard some people were planning to purposely flood the highways and parking lots with vehicles on the day of the event to prevent people from attending the speech.

After hearing all these things, Anne asked me why I thought Michael's appearance had captivated the state in this way? What was it that was causing such an intense and caustic reaction?

I told her that Michael Moore coming to Utah County was the

4. John Gravois, "The Making of a Political 'Circus,'" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 22 October 2004.

5. Jeff Chu, "Fighting Words 101," *Time*, 7 March 2005.

6. Travis Reed, "Michael Moore Brings Bush-Bashing to Utah," *The Washington Post*, 20 October 2004.

7. Paul Foy, "Michael Moore Headed to Lion's Den of Republican Utah," *The Associated Press*, 8 October 2004.

8. "Michael Moore Brings Bush-Bashing to Utah," YAHOO, 20 October 2004.

9. *Daily Herald*, 5 January 2005, p. A2.

10. Anne Moore, phone conversation of 18 October 2004.

equivalent of him showing up uninvited at the Republican National Convention. To many in the community, he wasn't just a filmmaker; he was the embodied enemy of truth, goodness, and patriotism. He was anti-American, a liar, and a traitor — all descriptions I had previously received in my unsolicited correspondence. The fact that we were actually *paying* such a person to speak seemed more than some could bear.

But more than anything else, his coming had become a symbolic issue. After all, we were in the midst of one of the most bitter and divisive national elections in United States history; we were engaged in a war many questioned; and we were dealing with a community of sincere but sometimes overly-zealous people who held firm convictions. In this cultural climate, Michael's coming was indeed enough to create an explosion of controversy and contention. In many ways, it was a microcosm of what was taking place on a national scale in the presidential elections — divisive rhetoric, mudslinging, and prejudice — all executed with passionate zeal on both sides. But in Utah, the divide was even further exacerbated. It was perceived by many as an ideological clash, an actual battle of good versus evil.

Standing in the midst of this maelstrom, I often felt torn. As a Utah native and as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (sometimes referred to as Mormons), I felt a certain loyalty and sympathy for my people; yet it was difficult for me to understand why some were reacting the way they were. Where was the tolerance, I wondered? Utah was originally settled by Mormon pioneers who were forced to flee their homes because of intolerance — because others didn't agree with their beliefs. Had people forgotten this heritage? Why not let each student listen and make up his or her own mind about what Mr. Moore had to say? What were people so afraid of? And why did they feel so threatened by the philosophy of one person?

In a very personal way, I learned the answer to these and other

questions as I went through what became a harrowing experience. I learned about the nature of politics, the problem of labeling people's beliefs, and the value of thoughtful, open-minded individuals. I learned about how the media works and what it's like to be in the public spotlight, the subject of intense criticism and misunderstanding. I learned about patriotism, faith, and fear. I saw people band together for various causes, each believing they were in the right and each labeling those who felt or thought differently as their enemies. I saw people reduced to colors (blue or red representing a Democratic or Republican affiliation). I saw hate, rage, and hysteria. I witnessed corruption. I saw the influence of money and power. I learned how a college functions and about the role of students. I watched a campus come to life with dialogue and activity. I witnessed many people defy stereotypes and, despite disagreements, acknowledge the greater principles of free speech, tolerance, and understanding. I experienced the thrill of standing before a packed arena for an event that much of the state had anticipated and had desperately tried to stop, and then humbly experienced the process of packing up my office as I left my position behind because of my choice to speak out rather than be silenced.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote: "I have always felt that ultimately along the way of life an individual must stand up and be counted and be willing to face the consequences, whatever they are."¹¹

I feel a kinship with those words. This story relates an experience I feel needs to be told. It is my attempt to "stand up and be counted." With this book, I am exercising a right that I value now more than ever — the freedom to speak, to listen, and to think without censor — and I am proud to live in a country where you, the reader, can pick up this book unhindered and do the same.

11. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Clayton Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Warner Books, 1 January 2001, ISBN 0446676500), 88.

Freedom of expression is the well-spring of our civilization. . . . Therefore the liberty of man to search for truth ought not to be fettered, no matter what orthodoxies he may challenge. Liberty of thought soon shrivels without freedom of expression.

Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter¹

C H A P T E R 1

The First E-mail

On August 17, 2004, I was enjoying the last few days of my vacation in Oceanside, California, when I received an e-mail from Jim Bassi. Jim and I had become good friends in recent years, and after his election as Student Body President and my election as Student Body Vice President of Academics at UVSC, we had grown even closer. Although we had some differences, we worked well together. It was a plus that we also shared an interest in politics and sports. When we weren't in meetings together, we were playing basketball or relaxing with the latest Jib-Jab² on his computer.

Attached to Jim's e-mail was information he had received from the Greater Talent Network, a speaker bureau that offers hundreds of prominent figures for speakers at various events. It read in part:

Don't miss your chance to bring Michael Moore to your campus on his 2004 fall tour! His extended tour to get people to the polls and register new

1. *Dennis v. United States* 341 U.S. 494, 551 (1951).

2. www.jibjab.com is an internet parody creation site owned by JibJab Media, Inc.

voters now includes selected dates in late September and the first three weeks of October. Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, now the highest-grossing documentary in history, will be released on DVD October 5, so now is the perfect time to tie in your event with the release!

Jim's comment was enthusiastic: "This would be a cool guy to get . . . can you imagine the turnout?"³

As Vice President of Academics, I worked with the Academic Senators at the college to provide educational opportunities for students in their respective departments. Ironically, in our first meetings together we decided to change our focus regarding speakers and put more time and energy into other areas. With that goal in mind, the senators had suggested contests, forums, award banquets, and internships to get students involved in activities and provide them with academic opportunities.

We made this decision because of our previous experience with speakers. If you acquired a speaker with name recognition, students would come. We had been fortunate to have two high profile speakers during the previous year: Yolanda King [daughter of Martin Luther King, Jr.] appeared in the Ragan Theater, capacity 450. Patch Adams, the clown/doctor played by Robin Williams in the *Patch Adams* movie, appeared in the campus ballroom, capacity 700. Both events were entertaining and well attended. But if the speaker did not have name recognition, you would be lucky to get 20-50 people to attend — and most of those would either be students receiving extra credit from their teachers or members of the student government.

Based on our previous experience, we decided to dispense with assigning each senator the responsibility of bringing in several

3. Jim Bassi, E-mail to Joe Vogel, 17 August 2004, Subject: "Fwd: Michael Moore Extends His 2004 Fall Tour!"

department-specific speakers, and focus instead on getting a few high-profile speakers that we knew would attract student interest and draw a crowd. We felt this new speaker policy was the best way to fulfill our purpose as the Academic Senate and to enhance the “university status” of the institution as a whole. This was an important concept for a school that was developing rapidly and looking for more recognition and respect, especially since it was situated in the shadow of nearby Brigham Young University (BYU). In only 15 years, UVSC had gone from a small community college to one of the largest academic institutions in the state. Its athletic program had recently made the jump to Division I, and it was anticipated that with its growth and improvement in other areas, advancement to university status wasn’t too far away.

Jim knew about the new direction we had taken regarding speakers, and from time to time he forwarded e-mails to me describing various speakers for my consideration. But this e-mail dwarfed anything he had sent previously. This was Michael Moore! And because of the controversy Mr. Moore had generated with his documentary film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and the fact that we were on the eve of a national election, Mr. Moore would easily be our biggest draw of the year — much bigger than any speaker from the previous year, or from any year that I could remember. Our goal was to bring in speakers who would energize the campus and generate meaningful dialogue among the students, and Michael Moore definitely fit those criteria.

As circumstances would have it, we were already attempting to acquire our first high-profile speaker before I received Jim’s e-mail. Former President Jimmy Carter was scheduled to speak at Sundance (a resort complex just 20 minutes away from UVSC) in mid-September, and we were trying to pull him over to address the UVSC student body during his visit. I was working with our administrative advisor, Phil Clegg, on this project, but since September was fast approaching and we still hadn’t heard back from

his people on our offer, I had concluded that it probably wasn't going to happen. That meant we had to find someone else for our fall speaker.

At the time Jim sent me the e-mail about Michael Moore, I hadn't seen *Fahrenheit 9/11*. I had heard and read a lot about it and had seen one of Mr. Moore's earlier documentaries, *Roger and Me*, but that was all. What I did know was that he was one of the hottest figures in politics. He had become a household name, and even though a lot of people hated him, the controversy only seemed to magnify his notoriety across the country.

I thought about what Jim had said: "Can you imagine the turnout?" Michael Moore in Utah County, just a few weeks before elections. Unbelievable! Stuff like that just didn't happen in "Happy Valley," as our community had been nicknamed. Could we do it? More importantly, did we *want* to do it?

While contemplating that question as I drove home from California I decided the answer was "yes." It didn't matter to me whether I agreed with all of his views or not. I am probably considered a "conservative" by most people (at least as far as my personal lifestyle is concerned). Politically, I consider myself an independent. I learn as much as I can about the issues and try to vote, not particularly for the party, but for the candidate that I think will do the best job. I've always tried to keep an open mind and explore all angles of an issue, and I've never been afraid to listen to people with ideas or convictions different from my own. I knew bringing Michael Moore to UVSC would be controversial — it might even shake our valley up a bit. *But then*, I thought, *maybe that would be a good thing.*

Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions. It is the one un-American act that could most easily defeat us.

Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas¹

C H A P T E R 5

Letters and E-mails

I thought the reaction to Michael Moore’s visit might lessen after the barrage of the first day, but I was wrong. Because word had spread across the state, the controversy — both pro and con — expanded exponentially. At one point during the following day, I left my office to attend one of my classes. I was only gone for a couple of hours, but when I returned I had fifty new voice messages and a large number of e-mails waiting for me.

The number of supporters seemed to be increasing, but there were many more opposed. Many of the messages were ugly, scary, and very personal. One of the many phone messages I received sticks out in my mind. I even wrote it down. The caller threatened to “come after me,” and “make my next month a living hell.” Another caller said I was “evil,” and that bringing Michael Moore to UVSC was like inviting Hitler or Saddam Hussein to speak. He concluded by saying my decision to invite Mr. Moore to the campus was evidence that I was supporting Satan. One e-mail received by the administrators of the college showed up later in most of the newspapers and was on the news programs that night. It went so far as to say I should be “tarred, feathered and run out of the state on a rail.”²

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1. From a speech delivered to the Authors Guild Council, 3 December 1951. Recorded: Neiman Reports, No. 1 (January 1953), 7: 20.
 2. David Randall, “Moore visit sparking controversy,” *Daily Herald*, 16 September 2004, p. C1.

Although the threats were very discomfoting, I assumed that in all probability they were just threats, and that none of the people would actually take punitive action. Most who threatened me in this manner did so anonymously and obviously did not leave their names or phone numbers. But as I reflected on the phone recordings and the multitude of e-mails I had received, it occurred to me that they were exercising the very right they wanted to deny Michael Moore — the right of freedom of speech. Over the ensuing weeks, a flood of e-mails of Biblical proportions engulfed me and all those involved in the decision to bring Mr. Moore to UVSC: all the student government officials; Student Body President Jim Bassi; the administration; and the president of UVSC, William Sederburg. Some of the e-mails were sent anonymously; other senders were unafraid of publicly expressing their opinions. Those that I retained and many others that I acquired later bear the names of the senders and their e-mail addresses. It was interesting to note the distinct variance in the *tone* of the e-mails, depending on their intended recipient.

Following is verbiage from a few of the many hundreds of e-mails in my possession that represent both sides of the controversy. As you read these e-mails, keep in mind that they came from a community that is known for its religious commitment, its emphasis on education, its moral integrity, and its conservative bent.

E-mails in opposition:

“You f***** idiots!!!!!! \$50,000 of the students [sic] dollars into that fat lards [sic] pockets!!!! You guys are morons!! He will just come and mock the people of this valley, and mock our religion!!! What morons!! \$50,000 dollars! You idiots!!!!!!” *From Chris Johnson, class of 97. Sent September 14, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: No Micheal [sic] Moore.*

“As a DEVOUT Republican and LDS Christian, I do not want this man at my school or even in my city. . . . He is a traitor to this country, to God, and to the free world. . . . What is he going to talk about? Hate, bigotry, and treason is all.” *From Bryan Horn. Sent September 13, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: Michael Moore at UVSC.*

“Your [sic] not spending your money on someone who promotes anything good or uplifting in the world. . . your [sic] paying a man to speak about evil, terror, and everything that is horrific in this world. By giving him this money, you are only helping to fund the massive terror moviement [sic] against the United States. The more money he gets, the more movies that are flat out propoganda [sic], falsehoods, and degredation [sic] of the American spirit he can make.” *From Bryan Horn. Sent September 14, 2004, to Joe Vogel. Subject: Re: Michael Moore at UVSC?*

“Anyone who decided in this student government to bring in Mr. Moore should RESIGN. Which part of RESIGN don’t you understand? Most people don’t agree with this fruit cake anyway. However its [sic] just not the place to have politics . . . some people just want a [sic] education. Stop wasting Tax Payer money.” *From Tyler. Sent September 14, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: Resign.*

“You are an idiot!!!! My question is WHY Michael Moore? What does he offer? Tell me why Michael Moore and not the leader of the KKK.” *From Mark Winston. Sent September 22, 2004 to Student Government. Subject: No form letter! Tell me WHY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

“I am DISGUSTED that you would host Michael Moore. My children will never go to your college. Worse you are paying the guy 50,000 to lecture you on what? This guy speaks garbage. Have you even thought who is going to listen? If I was enrolled in your school, I would drop out right now! Please cancel this speaking engagement with Michael Moore.” *From Trent Hendrickson. Sent September 14, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!*

“. . . I formally request that you please do what is in your power to communicate the disappointment that many of us feel as parents (of current student body members and/or future attendees at the UVSC) regarding the use of college funds to invite someone of the [sic] such immoral character as Michael Moore. Mr. Moore has demonstrated on numerous occasions his willingness to lie and misinform in the most devious means possible in order to further his liberal agenda. . . . Mr. Moore’s deceit and lies do not qualify him for the honor of speaking for the Democratic party or the liberal viewpoint. . . . Please do all you can to encourage cancellation of his invitation to speak. Failure of your taking the right action will certainly influence my attitude toward the college and my willingness to encourage any of my children or extended family to attend UVSC in the future.” *From Steve Ross. Sent September 15, 2004, to Wendy Mills. Subject: Michael Moore Visit.*

“. . . You could at least invite someone with motivational and/or educational skills to speak to an

academic audience such as ours. I will not attend, nor do I condone the expenditure for, such a speech from a man who knows only destructive, malevolent, unfounded, and hurtful criticism of others.” *From Austin William Mills. Sent September 14, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: Michael Moore.*

“I would like to know WHY my tuition is being used to support such an Anti-American as that Nazi Michael Moore? He is an affront to everything that MOST students stand for. . . . Please STRONGLY reconsider your position in the matter as I am STRONGLY reconsidering if UVSC is the school for me.” *From Gerald King. Sent September 14, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: Michael Moore.*

“. . . UVSC is paying between \$20,000-\$50,000 to have him [Michael Moore] come to a PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL [sic] institution. So not only do the students pay for this, Utah tax payers pay for an uneducated anti-government speaker to come and speak to an educational [sic] audience. . . .” *From Sean Vreeland, United States Veteran, UVSC Student (Senior). Sent September 14, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: RE: Michael Moore coming to UVSC.*

“. . . he [Michael Moore] will only hurt the student’s [sic] views of the government due to his false accusations. . . . Mr. Moore didn’t even graduate college.” *From Sean Vreeland. Sent September 14, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: RE: Michael Moore coming to UVSC.*

“Are you beginning to see the finance [sic] harm

you have caused UVSC? As a former elected official I can tell you bluntly, if you don't represent your constituency, you SHOULD RESIGN! You give elected officials everywhere a bad name.” *From Christal Williams. Sent October 2, 2004, to William Sederburg, [Joe Vogel and Jim Bassi]. Subject: More donors walking out on UVSC.*

“This is an outrage. I'm pissed as hell. 50,000 for a proven liar. . . . Somebody better get fired for this one!! If this is a PR stunt it could not of [sic] hurt the school more to bring this clown into a [sic] ultra conservative community. Nice job UVSC and Joe Vogel.” *From Troy Willardson. Sent September 15, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: I am embarrassed to be a student at UVSC!!!!*

“My son attended your school last year before he left on his mission. We will be looking for a new school when he returns. We will not support a school that pays \$50,000 to a man of such corrupt character as Michael Moore. This is a conservative community. . . .” *From Gene Ady. Sent September 15, 2004, to Instant Info. Subject: Help_Questions.*

“I hope the legislature shuts your money off for bringing that scumbag michael moore [sic] in to speak. He can contribute nothing!!” *From Ben Bridges. Sent September 15, 2004, to Instant Info. Subject: opinion.*

“. . . This is absolutely ludicrous! I want to know what they [sic] Hell you guys are smoking. . . . If we want to bring someone in because they are a master of deceit, lies, and falsehoods then lets [sic] bring

in Mark Hacking [a Salt Lake City, Utah, man who made national headlines for murdering his wife]. . . .UVSC is spitting in the face of all our service men and women Moore's hatred and deceit is [sic] the fuel and motivation the terrorists need. . . ." *From Jessica Skabelund. Sent September 15, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: Michael Moore.*

"I just read in *The Salt Lake Tribune* that your university is giving \$50,000 of student activity fee money to multi-millionaire Michael Moore, whose only claim to the public limelight is his ability to spew hatred, vitriol and unbelievable lies. Shame on anyone involved in this decision. . . ." *From Kevin Cecotti, PNC Credit Administration. Sent September 15, 2004, to Instant Info. Subject: For shame.*

"I was planning on attending school in Jan [sic] at UVSC but will withdrawl [sic] my acceptance because of your choice to bring in Michael Moore next month. . . ." *From steven prisbrey [sic]. Sent September 14, 2004, to UV Start. Subject: New Freshma [sic] to UVSC.*

" . . Lets [sic] screw over all the students here at UVSC and use their fee money to fund this B*** S***!!!!!! . . . Way to go! You are a text-book [sic] example of what a perfect student government should be. A bunch of brainless idiots!" *From Jeff Longfellow. Sent September 18, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: Student Fees?*

"Please tell me this is all a big hoax!!??? You wouldn't really ask Michael Moore to come to your school,

he doesn't shave, and probably doesn't bath [sic], he cant [sic] talk without saying the F word in every sentence. Hes [sic] full of hate, it spews out of his mouth like green slime. Hes [sic] a sorry piece of work" *From Vicki Emery. Sent September 17, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: Michael Moore.*

"As a former student of UVSC, I am APPALLED! to hear that taxpayer money is being spent to line the pockets of a man who is so full of vile, [sic] hatred, and bitterness. A man who is an avowed SOCIALIST, an anarchist, and a LIAR!!! Have you gone mad? Has the "anti-American" bug bitten you, too? . . . Are you so open-minded that your brain has fallen out? . . . If UVSC wants to waste money on this idiot, then don't ever come asking me for money." *From Michael Du Par. Sent September 17, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: Michael Moore.*

"You still have time to save UVSC a few million dollars in funding. If you go ahead with the Moore visit the state legislature will find a way to cut funding to UVSC because of it. Sure they'll bury the cuts in some funding bills and find some other way to explain their actions, but you can be sure that you'll loose [sic] a few million in funding because of what you are doing. It's your choice. Which matters Moore?" *From Reed B. Haslam. Sent October 11, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: Moore mistakes.*

"I wanted to send a quick note to inform you that I will no longer support UVSC in any capacity. . . . We will no longer attend any athletic events nor

will we financially support those programs. I'm ashamed to admit I am a graduate of your once fine institution. . . ." *From Curtis Puzey. Sent September 21, 2004, to Instant Info. Subject: Help_Questions.*

And finally, to sum up the vitriolic comments from the anti-Moore camp, here is a response from an individual who had received an invitation to UVSC's annual President's Scholarship Ball:

"You and Michael Moore can go to hell!"³

Remember, these responses came from enlightened, educated, Christian people who were more than anxious to exercise their right to free speech in vilifying not only Mr. Moore, but myself and all connected with the decision to bring him to UVSC. One of the remarkable things about the e-mails is the *hatred* they expressed for Michael Moore, while at the same time vilifying him for preaching *hatred*. Perhaps they did not even realize how ironic the whole scenario was.

As previously mentioned, among the multitude of negative opinions there was an occasional positive and supportive communication. Here are a few:

"In the midst of the frenzy of negative comments about Moore's visit, I want to let you know there are many people out there who are ecstatic with your efforts to bring him to our campus. Bravo!" *From Shannon Drage, UVSC alumnus. Sent September 15, 2004, to Joe Vogel. Subject: Thank you.*

"I think you made a gutsy decision in bringing Michael Moore in. My family, friends and I will definitely be buying tickets to support this event. Don't let the controversy get you down." *From Rick McDonald, Ph.D. Sent September 15, 2004, to Joe Vogel. Subject: Note of support.*

3. John Gravois, as quoted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 22 October 2004.

“I read in today’s Salt Lake Tribune of the grief others may be giving you. But I want to commend you. Putting aside all politics and election-year passions, Michael Moore’s visit to your campus is a valuable opportunity for the student body to learn that the academic environment should include open discourse and must expose students to ideas that challenge their beliefs. If one cannot find an open discussion of divergent opinions, ideals, and passions on a college campus, I would question the quality of that institution, its students, and its mission. . . . I’m glad to see you are contributing to the level of discourse that, too often, schools in Utah are not considered to be open to. Joe, do not let the close-minded get you down. Continue to work to provide these opportunities! . . .” *From Matthew Higdon. Sent September 15, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: Support for Joe Vogel.*

“Thanks for inviting Michael Moore. I’m not a UVSC student, but I am glad that there are some people in Utah County who are not afraid to present viewpoints in opposition to the dominant culture.” *From Catherine Meyers. Sent September 16, 2004, to Joe Vogel. Subject: Positive feedback regarding your decision to invite Michael Moore.*

“It is a shame you are catching so much grief for being a thinking individual. Whether one agrees, to any degree, or not with Michael Moore Utah County is a dangerous place to have political discussions. Already there are shadows of ostracism, and harassment creeping in. . . . All this because others may not believe or live as we do. . . . Basic

law of nature, nothing can grow in a vacuum.” *From Capryce. Sent September 16, 2004, to Joe Vogel. No subject.*

“I am a student at Weber State University and I must say that this is one of the best day’s [sic] I have had in a long time. I thought it was a joke when I heard that UVSC had booked Michael Moore. I am a native Utahn, but I am also liberal, and thus I am excluded in every which way possible. I thank you for bringing Michael Moore to Utah and look forward to it with great excitement. . . . Ideally, having Michael Moore come would help to promote some bit of tolerance and respect for differing opinions, but I know better. There will be a continued uproar in Utah Valley and beyond. . . . I sat through the . . . Stadium of Fire [a Utah Valley 4th of July program] . . . and listened as Sean Hannity used the patriotic occasion to push the conservative agenda and reinforce stereotypes. Very few people complained that such a partisan individual was invited to a public event, and thus we have the inconsistency. Thank you again for providing a differing opinion. . . .”
From Jared Sanders. Sent September 16, 2004, to Joe Vogel. Subject: Thank your [sic] for giving me Michael Moore!

“I just read in the papers that you worked hard to get M. Moore to your campus to give a talk — the first thought that came to my mind was that of a gladiator entering the arena to face thousands of hostile spectators. I applaud your courage”
From Thomas Fritz. Sent September 15, 2004, to Joe Vogel. Subject: Thanks for bringing in M. Moore.

“Although I strongly believe in voting, I’ve been

fairly skeptical in the past that my vote for student government really mattered much. You've changed my view on that, and I now feel vindicated in supporting you and your team during the last student elections. I too have been threatened before, for my editorial content in the school paper. One person once said I should move to Iraq to get my head chopped off, and I've been stopped in the halls and vilified as well. . . ." *From Michael J. Nagro. Sent September 16, 2004, to Joe Vogel. Subject: Re: Thank You.*

"I want to congratulate you on your courage in inviting Michael Moore to UVSC. Don't let anyone get you down. Unfortunately, Utah Valley's conservatives believe in free speech as long as it's convenient. Utah County is too much like a bubble and it needs to open itself up to new ideas, especially the truth about those they tend to support during the election season." *From Rafael Prado. Sent September 15, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: You're awesome Vogel!*

"This is going to be a difficult few weeks for you folks, but after it's over you can look back on this for the rest of your lives with well deserved [sic] pride for the extraordinary courage you are showing in these difficult times. . . ." *From Dr. Pierre Lamarche, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy. Sent September 21, 2004, to Student Government. Subject: Moore.*

Although receiving these positive e-mails pleased all of us involved in the decision to bring Mr. Moore to UVSC, one e-mail in particular was most gratifying and represented the values of free speech and free thought that we espoused. It was addressed to

UVSC President William Sederburg, Jim Bassi, all student body representatives, and me. The text follows:

“While I personally do not agree with the decision to use such a large chunk of funding to bring the controversial and factually questionable Michael Moore to a university that I hold in high regard, I feel like you deserve to know I both [sic] admire your courage for suggesting such a speaker in that community. I think it requires a special kind of strength to make such a decision in the face of what you must surely have known would be such a backlash. I think making that decision shows you indeed have leadership skills and integrity, in being willing to make such a tough call. As for the university, should my child [sic] one day tell me they want to attend UVSC, I would both support and encourage their decision. While the Michael Moore decision was not popular (including by me), it shows real strength to go through with it.”
From Kenn Johnson to Student Government, sent September 18, 2004. Subject: Admiration for the Moore Decision.

This last e-mail demonstrates the type of open-minded, fair response we would have hoped to receive from far more people, rather than the absolute hatred that emanated from the vast majority of comments.

In addition to the hundreds of e-mails, letters, and phone calls we received following the announcement of Michael Moore’s visit to UVSC, there were thousands of letters to the editor that poured into colleges, universities, and newspapers across the state. Because Jim Bassi and I had received several personal threats, we were advised by the administration to go to the registration office and have our personal records removed from public access, thus preventing people from looking up our addresses and phone numbers. My

mother, Jim's wife, and my fiancée were especially worried about our safety. Although we did not think anyone would actually carry out the threats, the administration was concerned that the threats might escalate into action. It was difficult to comprehend what was happening. I could readily understand people not liking Michael Moore or disagreeing with his views, but what I was witnessing was some type of mass hysteria resulting in character assassination and threats of violence. People were threatening to withdraw from UVSC, to prohibit their children from ever attending the college, and to withdraw financial support; both on an individual and a state level. All this because of one speaker.

As I worked my way through the seemingly endless stream of messages, I would occasionally put my head in my hands. My heart was heavy. What did all this reveal about our community and the state of Utah? I was reminded of the Salem witch trials of 1692 and the "Red (communist) Scare" instigated by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (Republican, Wisconsin, 1947–1957). The overwhelming number of negative communications we had received indicated that people were irrational when it came to Michael Moore — even afraid of him. It was as if they truly believed that having him speak in Utah County would destroy everything they cherished or stood for. Were the foundations of their belief that weak? I kept coming back to the fact that UVSC was an institution of higher learning — *all* learning. It should not be limited by ultra-conservative — or ultra-liberal — mandates.

Without question, those who communicated with us felt we had committed an error so grievous that it violated some unspoken rule, trampled upon some sacred institution, or destroyed a barrier that ensured some invisible protection for them and their families. And they wanted someone to pay for that error, even though it would come at the expense of our First Amendment guarantee of freedom of speech.