



Freedom's Web: Student Activism in an Age of Cultural Diversity

Professor Robert A. Rhoads

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From the Mills College strike of 1990 to the Chicano Studies movement at UCLA, from African-American student unrest at Rutgers University in 1995 to student protest in California against the passage of propositions 187 and 209, issues of cultural diversity have rocked college campuses for much of this decade. Indeed, Robert Rhoads locates the key to understanding renewed student activism in the 1990s within the struggle over multiculturalism. In *Freedom's Web: Student Activism in an Age of Cultural Diversity*, he focuses on how students have utilized what many scholars describe, both affectionately and pejoratively, as "identity politics" to advance various concerns tied to diversity issues.

While the 1970s and much of the 1980s were relatively quiet decades in comparison to the 1960s, the divestment movement of the mid-1980s served as a catalyst for multicultural reform of the American college campus. Thus, in the 1990s, students once again began to turn to campus demonstration as a means to advance social change. Through illustrative case studies, Rhoads reveals the significant connections between contemporary student activism and the efforts of a previous generation of student activists to advance participatory democracy and civil rights.

The author refutes claims such as those made by Arthur Schlesinger and Dinesh D'Souza that the politics of identity and the celebration of cultural diversity have contributed to the balkanization of the academy. Instead, Rhoads builds a convincing argument that identity politics is a response to cultural hegemony reinforced through longstanding monocultural norms of the academy. Balkanization, he concludes, is more the byproduct of traditional academic structures that promote exclusion over inclusion, authoritarianism over democracy, and xenophobia over a concern for others.

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