

Students, community members hold Black Lives Matter rally

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At its peak, about 60 people gathered at Martin Luther King Jr. Civic Center Park on Saturday for a rally supporting Proposition 16, the Black Lives Matter movement and #EndSARS in Nigeria.

Student organizers put together the rally intertwining the three issues that could have a significant impact on Black lives, with support from various donors and local organizations, including the Berkeley Community Safety Coalition and the ASUC Office of Academic Affairs Vice President Nicole Anyanwu.

"There is a system working against us, even in 'progressive' Berkeley," said Nathan Mizell, UC Berkeley junior and vice chair of the Berkeley Police Review Commission, at the rally.

Berkeley City Councilmember Cheryl Davila said at the rally that she is in support of Prop. 16, a ballot measure that would reinstate affirmative action for race and gender in California's public sector, because she has experienced injustice and racism throughout her life.

Berkeley school board candidate Laura Babitt shared similar sentiments, adding that the "real solution" to racial injustice is reparations. Babitt said she supports Prop. 16 as an interim step until reparations are passed.

"The system is somewhat rigged; therefore, Prop. 16 is necessary," Babitt said at the rally. "As Black Lives Matter, the jobs we create and the opportunities we provide is necessary."

Alecia Harger, a UC Berkeley student and campus organizing co-director for the ASUC Office of the External Affairs Vice President, said Prop. 16 is a step in the right direction for a more equitable future. She added that it is important that advocates for Prop. 16 continue their activism after Nov. 3.

Beyond affirmative action, Black Lives Matter and the general Black experience were also major talking points. Mizell said the commissions in Berkeley do not represent young Black people, as they are too white and too old.

Mizell also discussed Berkeley Police Department stops data, which show that Black people are more likely to be searched and, of those searched, less likely to be arrested or cited.

"There are systems out there that operate and profit off of us accepting the status quo," Mizell said at the rally. "Black Lives Matter at every second of every day. ... Stand up, be ready and Black Lives Matter. Let's go!"

For Anyanwu, ending the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, or SARS, in Nigeria, which is said to be committing police brutality against protesters and Nigerian residents, ties in with the theme of Prop. 16 and Black Lives Matter.

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According to Anyanwu, the anti-police brutality movement crosses country borders, and as Nigeria is a country that prioritizes education, Prop. 16 and #EndSARS are connected.

"I was lucky enough to have been born in America, but my experiences are still as a Black person," Anyanwu said. "We wanted to combine the two (Prop. 16 and #EndSARS) and lift up Black Lives Matter."

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