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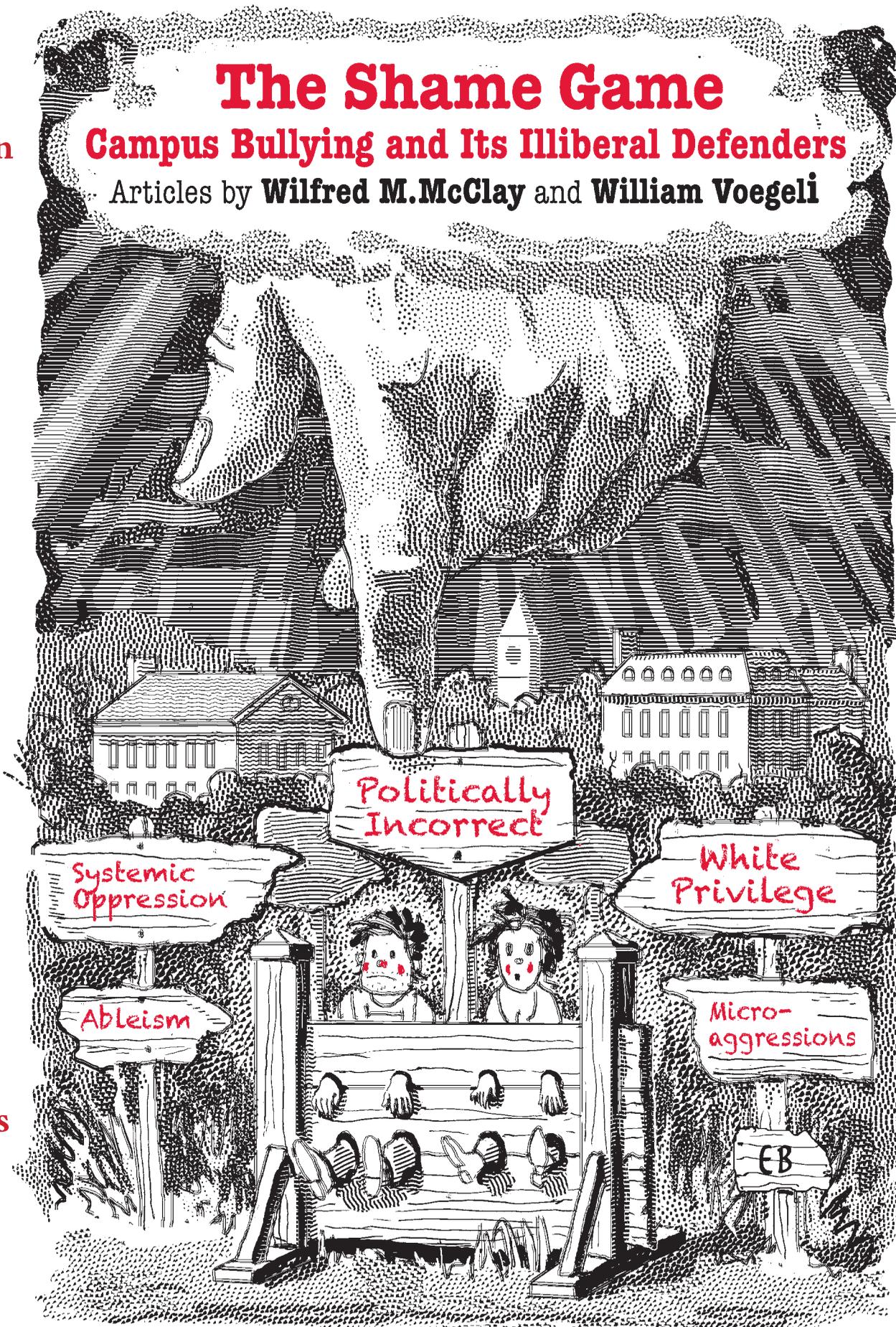
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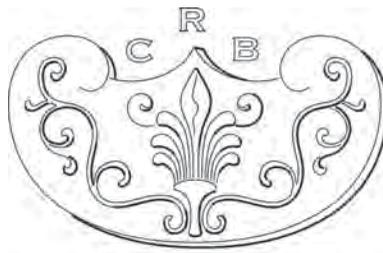
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Essay by William Voegeli

UNSAFE SPACES

SOMEDAY, A HISTORIAN WRITING A book on the protests that brought normal activities to a halt on dozens of American college campuses in 2015 will ponder the choice of an epigraph. “I need some muscle over here” is one candidate. These were the words shouted by Melissa Click, an assistant professor of communications at the University of Missouri, when reporters attempted to cover a demonstration on the university’s campus. After a video of their confrontation went viral, Click issued a statement, saying that she had apologized to the journalists and expressed regret that her plea to physically intimidate them had diverted attention from the protesters’ “campaign for justice.”

Missouri was the first campus disordered by demonstrations last fall. The president and chancellor ultimately resigned after protesters claimed the administration had been insufficiently vigorous about preventing and condemning racially offensive acts. The campaign eventually included one student’s hunger strike and the football team’s threat to refuse to play a scheduled game.

Yale University was the next campus to suffer convulsions. Another possible epigraph comes from a confrontation between a group of students and Professor Nicholas Christakis, master of Silliman College, one of the residential colleges at Yale. “It is not about creating an intellectual space!” one student shouted at him. “It is not! Do you understand that? It’s about creating a home

here!” Before turning to walk away, the student yelled, “You should not sleep at night. You are disgusting!”

The young woman’s tirade was triggered by an e-mail from Erika Christakis, Nicholas’s wife, who is also a Yale faculty member and the associate master of Silliman. She was responding to an e-mail from Yale’s Intercultural Affairs Committee, which urged all students to refrain from wearing any Halloween costume that threatens “our sense of community or disrespects, alienates or ridicules segments of our population based on race, nationality, religious belief or gender expression.” Erika Christakis’s message to the Silliman students was that, yes, community cohesion does indeed require a reluctance to give offense, but reluctance to *take* offense is also important. If “you don’t like a costume someone is wearing, look away” she said, “or tell them you are offended. Talk to each other. Free speech and the ability to tolerate offense are the hallmarks of a free and open society.”

Even if we could agree on how to avoid offense—and I’ll note that no one around campus seems overly concerned about the offense taken by religiously conservative folks to skin-revealing costumes—I wonder, and I am not trying to be provocative: Is there no room anymore for a child or young person to be a little bit obnoxious...a little bit inappropriate or provocative or, yes, of-

fensive? American universities were once a safe space not only for maturation but also for a certain regressive, or even transgressive, experience; increasingly, it seems, they have become places of censure and prohibition.... Have we lost faith in young people’s capacity—in your capacity—to exercise self-censure, through social norming, and also in your capacity to ignore or reject things that trouble you?

Christakis may not have meant to be provocative, but her rhetorical questions about students taking things in stride instantly provoked impassioned responses. The clear message was that for many students today, the appropriate counterpart to an increased aversion to giving offense is a hair-trigger readiness to take it. An open letter to Christakis that called her e-mail “jarring and disheartening” quickly drew over 700 signatures. “Giving ‘room’ for students to be ‘obnoxious’ or ‘offensive,’” it declared, “is only inviting ridicule and violence onto ourselves and our communities, and ultimately comes at the expense of room in which marginalized students can feel safe.”

There were calls for both Christakis to resign from Silliman, which they haven’t done. Five weeks after her e-mail, however, Erika Christakis announced that she would discontinue teaching courses for the time being. “I worry that the current climate at Yale is not...conducive to the civil dialogue and



open inquiry required to solve our urgent societal problems," she said in a statement. The university's administration betrayed little dismay over her decision. "It makes the situation more straightforward from a [human resources] point of view," the Yale College dean stated.

The most resonant epigraph for a book on last year's campus protests, however, was provided by Yale junior and Silliman resident Jency Paz: "I don't want to debate. I want to talk about my pain." This line appeared in her article for the *Yale Herald*, "Hurt at Home," which promptly removed the article from its website after the piece attracted national attention, almost all of it negative. Journalist Judith Shulevitz, for example, described the essay as "one of the more astonishing documents of our times."

Paz, too, was criticizing Nicholas Christakis, whom she accused of failing "to acknowledge the hurt and pain" caused by his wife's e-mail, preferring instead to respond by "making more arguments for free speech." She compared him unfavorably to her father, "a really stubborn man." Nevertheless, "when I have come to my father crying, when I was emotionally upset...he heard me regardless of whether or not he agreed with me." Because Christakis lacked such empathy, Paz continued, "I have friends who are not going to class, who are not doing their homework, who are losing sleep, who are skipping meals, and who are having breakdowns."

The claim that students the same age as soldiers serving in combat zones have emotional crises because their professors don't act as comforting parents sounds like a parody of pathological hypersensitivity, one that even the most mean-spirited satirist of academia would reject as over-the-top. Paz's Debate vs. Compassion frame, however, nicely captures the idea that inclusion and even therapy should supplant free inquiry and discourse as the modern university's highest concern.

One-Sided

AS IT HAPPENS, YALE'S OFFICIAL POLICY says exactly the opposite. According to the 1974 Report of the Committee on Free Expression at Yale, chaired by historian C. Vann Woodward, "The history of intellectual growth and discovery clearly demonstrates the need for unfettered freedom, the right to think the unthinkable, discuss the unmentionable, and challenge the unchallengeable." As a consequence, "the university must do everything possible to ensure within it the fullest degree of intel-

lectual freedom." Though the university is indeed "a special kind of small society," the Report said, "it is not primarily a fellowship, a club, a circle of friends, a replica of the civil society outside it."

Without sacrificing its central purpose, it cannot make its primary and dominant value the fostering of friendship, solidarity, harmony, civility, or mutual respect. To be sure, these are important values... But [the university] will never let these values, important as they are, override its central purpose.

The Woodward Report quoted Oliver Wendell Holmes's ringing dissent in *U.S. v. Schwimmer* (1929): the most compelling constitutional principle is "free thought—not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate." For the postmodern Left, however, such thinking has outlived its usefulness and become pernicious. "No-platforming" is a British term not yet in American parlance, but the underlying idea is gaining traction: freedom for thought that we hate does not mean there is freedom for thought we believe to be animated by hate. The head of the U.K.'s Hope Not Hate Campaign said that it is acceptable, even necessary, for demonstrators to disrupt public events advocating deplorable ideas, such as opposition to a boycott of Israel, because it is imperative to "deny fascists, organised racists and other haters the freedom to spread their poison within communities unchallenged."

In the same spirit, the most prominent organizer and rhetorician of the past year's protest movements, DeRay Mckesson, dismissed charges that protesters' tactics amounted to silencing other voices or enforcing intellectual conformity. The complaint that campus activists have reduced the right to free speech, he told an interviewer, is "code for the idea that all ideas are to be afforded equal merit. It's code for this notion that there should be a 50-50 split for how we discuss topics." To indulge those who insist on free speech, Mckesson contends, is to take the position that "discussing the benefits of slavery, for instance, is to be afforded the same merit as discussing the ways to end the impact of slavery."

This belief that it is justifiable to silence, rather than refute, opinions one finds absurd or abhorrent is dangerous for any society, since it pushes us onto a slippery slope that jeopardizes anyone's right to say anything. It is particularly antithetical to the purpose of a university, however, since it impairs not only the freedom to speak but the opportunity to learn. "He who knows only his own side of the

case, knows little of that," John Stuart Mill wrote in *On Liberty*. If someone is going to acquire a genuine understanding of how and why wrong ideas are wrong, "He must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them; who defend them in earnest, and do their very utmost for them. He must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form." Anyone's intellectual immune system, then, will be weakened by the excessive moral hygiene that makes spaces safe by sanitizing them of dangerous ideas. By Mill's logic, students, in particular, will be harmed in ways that undermine the whole purpose of attending college. People who have been spared the ordeal of encountering arguments they find noxious, he wrote, "have never thrown themselves into the mental position of those who think differently from them, and considered what such persons may have to say; and consequently they do not, in any proper sense of the word, know the doctrine which they themselves profess."

Some observers have stressed that even the merit of the 2015 demonstrators' goals does not justify curtailing free expression. In an interview where he stated that the students at Missouri and Yale had legitimate grievances, President Obama nevertheless made a point of saying, "I do worry if young people start getting trained to think that if somebody says something I don't like, if somebody says something that hurts my feelings, that my only recourse is to shut them up, avoid them, push them away, call on a higher power to protect me from that." The *Washington Post's* reliably liberal columnist Ruth Marcus agreed. The possibility of the "reasoned interchange" colleges exist to foster "is foreclosed when a tempered communication" like Ms. Christakis's "is greeted by vitriol and outrage."

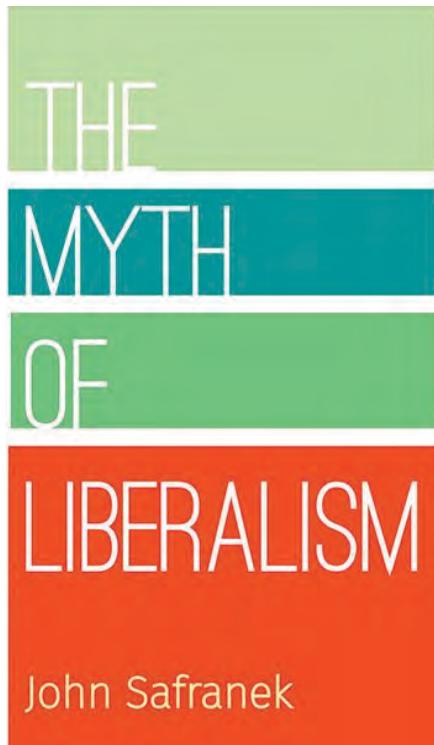
Outgrowing Free Speech

THE CAMPUS PROTESTERS HAD CRITICS left and right, but were not without their defenders. Daniel Drezner, a Tufts professor and *Washington Post* columnist, took the position that although Yale students were unjustified in stridently criticizing the Christakis, neither was the commentariat justified in "piling on" to condemn those students. Collegians have been dispensing overwrought, half-baked opinions for centuries, he argued, but only with the advent of social media have such puerilities become national discussion topics.

That's a reasonable point, but only if it's applied comprehensively rather than selectively. Erika Christakis, after all, also contended that the immature things immature people

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say and do should be judged leniently. The reigning idea on today’s campuses, however, is that words—or at least some words, offending some people—are capital offenses, not misdemeanors. At the same time Missouri and Yale were in the news, Thaddeus Pryor, a Colorado College junior, went on a social media site to reply to the comment #blackwomematter: “They matter,” he wrote, “they’re just not hot.” The college deemed those six words an offense against its “Abusive Behavior” and “Disruption of College Activities” policies, and suspended Pryor for almost *two years*, prohibiting him from setting foot on campus or taking college courses elsewhere for credits that could later be transferred to Colorado College. After the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education challenged the ruling, he appealed to have his punishment reconsidered. Once Pryor confessed that his remark was “mean” and “hurtful,” the college reduced the suspension from 21 months to six.

By the time last fall’s protests spread from Missouri and Yale to other institutions, the basic political question had become established in news stories and commentary as a contest between social justice and free speech. Some of the Left’s more astute writers warned that a battle waged on that terrain won’t end well. *Slate’s* Michelle Goldberg worried that “a dynamic is emerging in which being contemptuous of free speech arguments becomes a way to prove one’s radical bona fides.” Students at Clemson, for example, have demanded that the college administration “prosecute criminally predatory behaviors and defamatory speech committed by members of the Clemson University community (including, but not limited to, those facilitated by usage of social media).” Smith College activists, with the administration’s support, barred reporters from covering a campus sit-in, except for those who first explicitly promised that their articles would endorse the protest movement’s goals and tactics. Demonstrators at Amherst College demanded that students who had placed “All Lives Matter” and “Free Speech” posters around campus should “be required to attend extensive training for racial and cultural competency,” and called for a “revision of the Honor Code to reflect a zero-tolerance policy for racial insensitivity and hate speech.” Conservatives, Goldberg lamented, are “right to be delighted” at the prospect of facing such censorious adversaries in the court of public opinion.

In fact, kids today do seem less than zealous about free speech, which doesn’t augur well for the future of inalienable rights. A 2015 Pew Research Survey about the government’s role regarding “statements that are

offensive to minority groups” found younger Americans more amenable to censorship.

Age cohort:	“Government should be able to prevent” such statements	“People should be able to say these things publicly”
18—34	40%	58%
35—50	27%	70%
51—69	24%	71%
70—87	12%	80%

The responses to the 2015 demonstrations made clear that young people haven’t, on their own, come up with the idea that it is often better to curtail than defend free speech. Older writers and academics have been working to undermine its primacy for a long time. Jelani Cobb, for example, a University of Connecticut historian and writer for the *New Yorker*, dismissed the argument that the Christakis’ antagonists at Yale were diminishing free speech as “outraged First Amendment fundamentalism.” What the protests showed, and what the protesters’ critics failed or chose to ignore, is that even at a prestigious school like Yale, “no amount of talent or resources or advantage can shield you entirely from the minimizing sentiments so pervasive in this country.” The way to fashion an accommodation between free speech and civil rights, Cobb argues, is to recall that the “enlightenment principles that undergird free speech also prescribed that the natural limits of one’s liberty lie at the precise point at which it begins to impose upon the liberty of another.”

This balancing is indeed a central question. A common, pithy expression of the principle is, “Your right to swing your arms ends just where my nose begins.” As reworked by those who defend the student protesters, however, the modern meaning becomes, “Your right to speak your mind ends just where my *feelings* begin.” Roxane Gay, who teaches creative writing at Purdue University, argues that the Yale students protesting Erika Christakis’s e-mail were defending their “dignity, emotional wellbeing, and safety.” For Columbia journalism professor Bruce Shapiro, the e-mail was “a childish, poorly thought-out message” that, in effect, told “students of color to shut up about the emotional legacies of racism.” At Princeton, 107 faculty members signed a letter supporting protesters at that institution.

Imagine how difficult it must be, for some, to have to live and learn in a place that celebrates people who believed passionately in white supremacy;



to experience daily a sense of alienation and have no place to which to retreat and find comfort. Imagine the exhausting task of having to constantly educate your fellow classmates about the particulars of your experience and the complex histories that shape them. And, finally, imagine being told, in effect, “be quiet” and endure.

The compassion commandos of 2015 are history’s first revolutionaries to mount the barricades in the name of their own emotional fragility. Half-a-century ago—Students for a Democratic Society, and all that—radicals hid out in safehouses. The ones young enough to be their grandchildren now plead for safe spaces. Historian Josh Zeitz argues that the ’60s activists “clamored to be treated as emancipated adults,” while their successors “demand faculty ‘create a home’ in which they remain children in the protection of more powerful elders.”

A Generation of Snowflakes

THIS POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IS OF A piece with larger social trends. One reason college students cannot take sophomoric Halloween costumes and social media posts in stride is that, more and more, they can’t take anything in stride. Peter Gray, writing for *Psychology Today* a few weeks before the protests started at Missouri and Yale, said that college faculty members and administrators are increasingly concerned, and startled, by their students’ inability to cope with everyday frictions. One, for example, sought counseling because her roommate called her a “bitch,” while two others did so to cope with the trauma of seeing a mouse in their apartment. What Gray calls “the dramatic decline, over the past few decades, in children’s opportunities to play, explore, and pursue their own interests away from adults” is giving us a generation of snowflakes, each one utterly unique, precious, and delicate.

We have raised a generation of young people who have not been given the opportunity to learn how to solve their own problems. They have not been given the opportunity to get into trouble and find their own way out, to experience failure and realize they can survive it, to be called bad names by others and learn how to respond without adult intervention. So now, here’s what we have: Young people, 18 years and older, going to college still unable or unwilling to take responsibility for themselves,

still feeling that if a problem arises they need an adult to solve it.

Emotional fragility becomes a cause, rather than just a psychological or sociological problem, when the element of “identity politics” is added to the compound. It’s not just that a political disposition or agenda derives from an identity—black, female, gay, etc.—but that an identity is either affirmed and sustained, or threatened and assaulted, by one’s social and political environment. The personal is political, as the second-wave feminists declared, which means the political is personal. Expressing political ideas that harm, or are alleged to harm, anyone’s frail sense of self is not just wrong or even wicked, but acts of aggression, micro- or not so micro-. In order to turn spaces that have been rendered unsafe for one’s identity, dignity, or self-esteem into safe spaces, the acts of aggression—saying the wrong thing, or saying something the wrong way—must be met and overwhelmed by more assertive acts of counter-

The compassion commandos of 2015 are history’s first revolutionaries to mount the barricades in the name of their own emotional fragility.

aggression. I may not agree with what you say, and if I feel that it diminishes me I will deny to the death your right to say it.

In the resulting dispensation, the power to denounce and silence grows with the contention that one’s own dignity, emotional well-being, and psychological safety are at risk. Weakness equals strength. The boundaries of debate are set by the most emotionally fragile. What *they* cannot tolerate, both in the sense of putting up with and of enduring, determines which ideas and modes of expression are impermissible. The ideas that remain in bounds are those that people *can* put up with. Strength equals weakness, then, which creates an incentive structure that rewards over-reacting to objectionable speech, and penalizes under-reacting. Erika Christakis’s advice to take provocations in stride was, in itself, an intolerable provocation because it ran contrary to everything modern undergraduates have been taught about how to defend their identity and maximize their leverage.

Encourage hysteria, and you get more hysteria. Last year Northwestern University professor Laura Kipnis published an essay, “Sexual Paranoia Strikes Academe,” in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. It argued that universities’ restrictive codes of sexual conduct were the product of “feminism hijacked by melodrama” about “helpless victims and powerful predators.” Her assertion that students “were being encouraged to regard themselves as...exquisitely sensitive creatures” was instantly proven correct. Campus protesters denounced the Kipnis article, which one declared “terrifying.” A public letter said that it “spits in the face of survivors of rape and sexual assault everywhere.” A petition, claiming that the essay had “caused tremendous hurt,” called on Northwestern to issue “a swift, official condemnation of the sentiments expressed by Professor Kipnis in her inflammatory article” and demanded that “in the future, this sort of response comes automatically.”

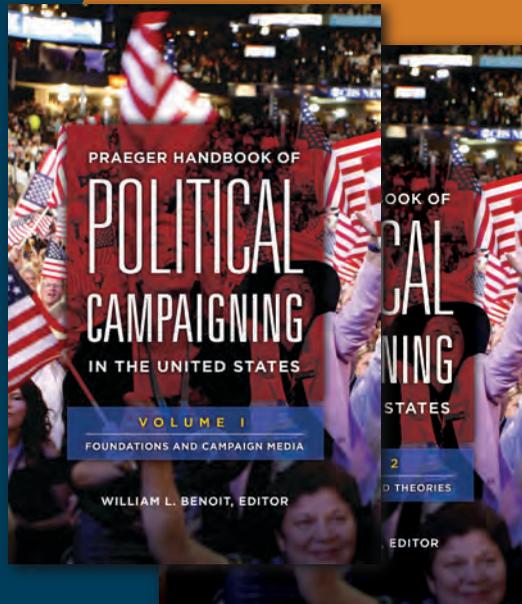
Northwestern did not condemn the article, but did open an investigation after two graduate students formally complained that Kipnis had violated federal law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex. In a follow-up *Chronicle* essay, Kipnis reported learning that one student alleged her article had had “a ‘chilling effect’ on students’ ability to report sexual misconduct.” The other asserted that Kipnis had retaliated against her and created a “hostile environment,” compounding the initial act of gender-based discrimination, and thereby committing a new one. The charges rested on the first essay and a *single tweet* by Kipnis.

Geoffrey Stone, a University of Chicago law professor, argued that since the case against Kipnis was “ludicrous on its face,” Northwestern should have “dismiss[ed] it as quickly and decisively as possible.” Instead, the university said that it was required by federal law to investigate the students’ complaints, which it did over the course of several months. Kipnis was exonerated, but the investigation itself amounted to a form of punishment. Prudent faculty members at Northwestern, or any institution where a similar sequence of events is conceivable, will self-censor when writing or lecturing, scrutinizing every phrase for the landmine that could ruin a career.

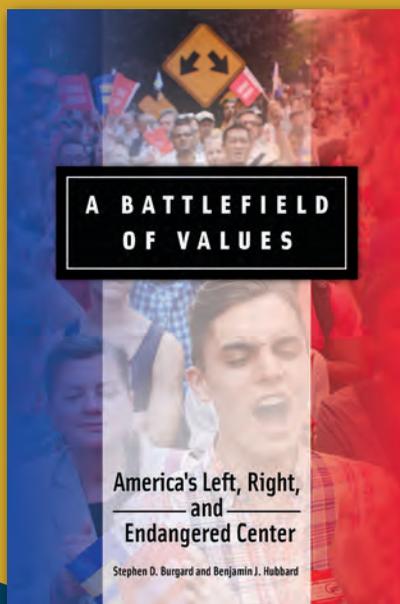
Cobb makes a further point. The way the “free-speech diversion” has been used against the student protesters amounts to a tactic for “avoiding discussion of racism” and “victim-blaming.” Advocates of an abstract right to give offense are, in effect, insisting that oppressors should be able to go on subordinating those who have been subordinated in the

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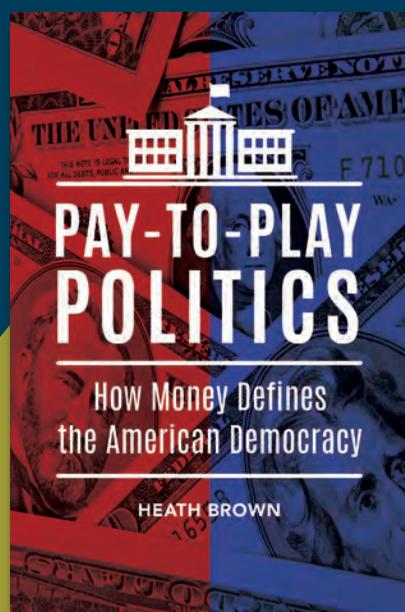
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past. “The freedom to offend the powerful is not equivalent to the freedom to bully the relatively disempowered,” he maintains.

Kate Manne and Jason Stanley, philosophy professors at Cornell and Yale, respectively, agree. “The notion of freedom of speech is being co-opted by dominant social groups, distorted to serve their interests, and used to silence those who are oppressed and marginalized,” they wrote in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Invoking ostensibly neutral free-speech principles both ignores and perpetuates inequalities. When “people lower down in social and institutional hierarchies criticize the speech acts of those higher up, it often reads as insubordination, defiance, or insolence. When things go the other way, it tends to read as business as usual.”

Social Justice vs. Mere Justice

THESE ARGUMENTS REMIND US WHY *social* justice figures so prominently in leftist discourse. In arid debates about generic citizens’ abstract rights and duties, “mere” justice can lock in pre-existing injustices. Franklin Roosevelt called for a “New Deal” in 1932, for example, implying that it was not good enough for every person at the table to go on playing the card game by the same set of rules. The imbalance between the “malefactors of great wealth” and the “forgotten man” had become so severe that true justice—social justice—required dealing everyone new cards, and even taking chips away from those who had amassed too many in order to give them to players with too few.

In a similar vein, Lyndon Johnson said in 1965 that the landmark civil rights legislation and court decisions of the preceding decade were only the beginning of America’s path to racial justice and equality. “You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘you are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.”

Let us stipulate LBJ’s contention that it is less than fair to say: henceforth, we will treat the previously advantaged and previously disadvantaged equally, and that’s as much as we’ll do to correct past injustices. That tells us what fairness isn’t. But neither Johnson nor anyone else in the ensuing 50 years has put forward a clear, convincing account of what *is* completely fair. The implied social justice goal—realization of the future we would have enjoyed if past injustices had never occurred—is deeply problematic. Properly understood, it requires breathrak-



ing epistemological confidence. Counterfactual questions about the world we would now inhabit if the cruelties and exploitations of the past had never been perpetrated are no longer speculative premises, but expected to elicit specific answers that will guide real governance. In order to deal all people the cards they individually deserve, or put them at the right starting line, so that the race results will reflect only their natural abilities rather than their artificially acquired advantages and disadvantages, metaphysical questions differentiating our authentic from our spurious qualities must be given specific answers.

Solving such mysteries is impossible, of course, but the way of dealing with this impossibility is to govern on the basis, not of formally neutral and universally applicable standards, but in accordance with hazy “visions” and “ideals” about the society that will transcend and triumph over historical inequities. Progressives, as their name implies, owe their deepest allegiance to an ever better regime to be realized in the future. They invoke its nebulous standards whenever they find it necessary or convenient to set aside more readily ascertainable principles that are tainted by their association with an actual regime that has an actual past, including actual moral failings. The classic expression of this attitude was given by Senator Carl Schurz in 1872: “My country, right or wrong; if right, to be kept right; and if wrong, to be set right.” If notions of right and wrong become completely elastic and contingent, however, we define patriotism down to nothing more than devotion to one’s own political preferences and agenda.

One consequence is that discarding mere justice in favor of social justice gives authorities enormous powers *vis-à-vis* citizens, whose rights are rendered provisional rather than inalienable. If the freedom to offend the powerful is not equivalent to the freedom to bully the disempowered, as Cobb argues, then social justice requires that they must be made equivalent—more so in the short term, completely in the fullness of time. In 1989 the U.S. Department of Labor was forced, after a public outcry, to abandon the practice of “race-norming”: surreptitiously reporting aptitude test results as if all job applicants were being measured by the same standard. In fact, the adjusted score reflected only how a particular applicant had done in relation to all others of the same race or ethnicity.

The social justice project, more ambitiously, necessitates rights-norming. That the first shall be last and the last shall be first is no longer the rule of Heaven, but the basis for governing in this world. What must be done for you, and may not be done to you, now

depends on your privileged-to-victimized handicap score. Thaddeus Pryor’s low score reduced his rights, so writing that black women aren’t hot on a social media website got him kicked out of school. And because the rights of a student with a high victim score are augmented, she can yell, as one Silliman student did in public at Nicholas Christakis, “Why the f--- did you accept the position? Who the f--- hired you?” and nothing will happen. At Princeton, students with rights bonus points can occupy the president’s office, and then have over a hundred faculty members hail their “passion and intelligence,” while warning that even threats of disciplinary action against them send “a terrible signal” about “making Princeton a better place.”

To make matters worse, no competition in the rights-determining Oppression Olympics is like the 1,500-meter run, where medals are awarded on the basis of rules that can be easily understood and administered. Instead, every event is like figure skating, where judging is so subjective and idiosyncratic that arbitrary outcomes tainted by favoritism and collusion are the rule, not the exception. In the realm of social justice, all rights are accorded, all disputes resolved, on a “case-by-case basis,” which is operationally indistinguishable from, “However the hell we feel like.”

After decades of trying, for example, the organizers of the collegiate Oppression Games still have not figured out how social justice rights-norming applies to Asian and Asian-American students. No one contends that such students, in the U.S., are the perpetrators or benefactors of oppression. There is abundant historical evidence that they have been victims of it. But their perverse habit—succeeding academically, and then out in the world after graduating, without demanding or receiving special treatment to counterbalance the historical injustices inflicted on their demographically defined grievance group—is confounding. Because of Asian students’ accomplishments, universities have found it necessary to treat them as honorary oppressors, often discounting their rights more severely than those of the Ur-oppressors: straight, white males. According to Princeton sociologist Thomas Espenshade’s research on the de facto race-norming carried out by college admissions offices, to have the same chance to be admitted to a selective private university, an Asian applicant has to score 140 points higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test than an otherwise similarly qualified white applicant (out of a possible total of 1,600), 270 points higher than a Hispanic applicant, and 450 points higher than a black applicant.

Ideally, the politics of social justice would unite all the groups defined by each one’s specific victimization. This grand coalition of the variously oppressed would form a cohesive, irresistible political force devoted to transforming society by enacting an agenda that synthesized each group’s needs. The goal is the realization of the bright new world that would exist if the wicked old one—defined by macro-aggressions like slavery and micro-aggressions like affluent people in North America and Europe culturally appropriating yoga (“trendy fitness...ripped from the cultural traditions of actual living people”)—had never been committed.

Forming and maintaining any such coalition, however, appears daunting at best and impossible at worst. The contradictions of the formidable but disparate New Deal coalition—Southern segregationists making common cause with Northern labor activists and progressive intellectuals—are slight by comparison. Last year protesting students at Claremont McKenna College shouted down and took the microphone away from an Asian student who went so far off script as to say, “We should not distinguish people by their race or gender or anything. Black people can be racist.” A heckler demanded of her, “How is this relevant to the college failing to provide a space for people of color?”

How indeed? The various elements of the grand grievance coalition are hard to fit together because the ideas that fuel the whole contraption have never been sorted out. Distinguishing people by their race or gender or anything is deplorable—but also imperative. The black student union at Oberlin College, an institution whose conscience about social justice issues is among the nation’s most exquisitely sensitive, demands that rooms throughout the campus of this “unethical” school “be designated as safe spaces for Africana identifying students,” where they can attend to “the promotion and acknowledgement of our community-specific needs.” The long list of demands does not make clear whether Oberlin must also provide safe drinking fountains for Africana identifying students’ community-specific hydration needs.

Sorting Out This Mess

FIFTY YEARS AGO, BLACK POWER ACTIVISTS challenged integration as the civil rights movement’s animating cause. Ever since, it has been unclear whether the fulfillment of social justice will mean that being black becomes a trivial detail, like being bald or left-handed, or is to be the central element of personal identity, offering a commu-



nity and heritage that gives life meaning and purpose. The civil rights movement came to that fork in the road and took it. “Most blacks are integrationists and separationists and pluralists—all at the same time,” Lerone Bennett, Jr., executive editor of *Ebony* magazine, wrote there in 1970. Blacks, he declared, were in an “impossible” situation, where “we can neither integrate nor separate.” Earnest white liberals didn’t dare pick a side in this dilemma, for fear of usurping blacks’ rights to determine their own destiny. Their response, then and since, has been to muddle through, endorsing integration when blacks demanded integration, endorsing separation when blacks demanded separation.

It can hardly be a shock that the result is a mess. Tanner Colby, a white liberal writer who frequently examines racial issues, argued in 2014 that no amount of sensitivity, ambivalence, or good will can obviate the fact that “At a certain point, on a policy level, you have to pick a horse and ride it.” It is, for example, possible to believe that racial justice requires aggressive affirmative action programs throughout our academic institutions. It is also possible to believe that it requires strengthening the 105 “Historically Black Colleges and Universities” (HBCUs), the institutions of higher education created for blacks prior to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. But it’s impossible not to see the contradiction between affirmative action and the HBCUs, given that those schools now award nearly one out of every five bachelor’s degrees earned by blacks. Affirmative action means enrolling the students, and hiring the teachers and administrators, without which the HBCUs cannot survive. Fortifying the HBCUs places affirmative action programs’ recruitment and hiring goals even farther out of reach.

Nor is it possible to believe, zero-sum dilemmas aside, that a fair or feasible solution is to create a mini-HBCU within every historically not-so-black college and university across America. Build enough safe spaces at Oberlin College, that is, and black high school students won’t have to choose between Howard University and Oberlin; the experience of attending the former will have been replicated in the latter. Elaborate this dubious project for every other identity group in the coalition of the oppressed, and you have what sociologist Eric Kaufmann calls “asymmetrical multiculturalism”: every grievance group is expected and encouraged to express pride, demand compensatory treatment, and unilaterally decide how, where, and when to self-segregate. All others are expected to express shame and contrition for their unearned privileges, forswear demands for equal treatment, and eagerly ac-

cede to every grievance group’s demand for integration *and* self-segregation, no matter how incoherent or variable. As blogger Steve Sailer explains, the only idea that unites and explains the oppressed coalition’s sprawling, ramshackle agenda is that, whatever the grievance, white people in Peoria must be made to understand that they are responsible for it, and to feel guilt and shame about it.

Democratic politics abhors a protracted asymmetry almost as much as nature abhors a vacuum. A significant part of the explanation for the utterly unforeseen, flabbergasting Donald Trump phenomenon is that white people in Peoria, and their fellow travellers from all locations and demographic categories, are completely fed up. “Driving powerful sentiments underground is not the same as expunging them,” the Brookings Institution’s William Galston told the *Washington Post*. “What we’re learning from Trump is that a lot of people have been biting their lips, but not changing their minds.” Tom Nichols, a faculty member at the U.S. Naval War College, agrees. Trump partisans are responding to “being told by coastal liberals that they’re awful people and that they should just obey and shut up” by issuing “a certain Anglo-Saxon verb and pronoun combination with all the vigor they can muster.” They “are not fighting for any particular political outcome, they are fighting back against a culture they think is trying to smother them into cowed silence.”

Fighting back *is* good, but so are particular political outcomes. Conservatives have been assailing political correctness in higher education for decades, during which every problem they deplored has only gotten worse. All the books, articles, reports, and conferences amount to appeals to the honor, integrity, and courage of educrats devoid of all such qualities.

Shut It Down

AT SOME POINT, EVEN THE STUPID party has to consider the possibility that it might be time to try a different approach. It’s now clear that the thugs and frauds who wield so much power in higher education subordinate intellectual freedom to social justice mostly because they can. None of the conservative screeds about political correctness afflicts them with anything worse than an occasional episode of bad publicity. There are never tangible consequences that give the professoriate a compelling reason to behave one way rather than another.

Since they believe in markets and incentives, conservatives would do well to convey their displeasure with the credentials-industrial complex in a way it can understand. It would

be fitting if the University of Missouri, where the 2015 campus protests began, elicited the first big response to those protests. Dr. Melissa Click called for some muscle to shut down free speech. The Missouri state legislature—where Republicans now hold 72% of the house seats and 74% of those in the senate—should deploy some muscle to defend it.

I urge those legislators to use their power over appropriating the taxpayers’ money to abolish the University of Missouri’s Department of Communications. It’s where Click teaches, where she was, apparently, a colleague in good standing until her YouTube notoriety caused the department to post her statement of apology on its website, along with one from the chairman that did not mention Click but endorsed the First Amendment. But actions speak louder than words. The department’s actions include hiring Click on the basis of her doctoral dissertation—“It’s a ‘Good Thing’: The Commodification of Femininity, Affluence and Whiteness in the Martha Stewart Phenomenon”—and supporting her subsequent scholarship, which includes a co-authored book manuscript, “Let’s Hug It Out, Bitch’: Audience Response to Hegemonic Masculinity in ‘Entourage.’”

It would be difficult, under ordinary circumstances, for a Missouri legislator to convince constituents that state support for the academic unit responsible for such additions to the sum of human understanding is the best and highest use of taxpayers’ dollars. But when the author of these *pensées* also turns out to be ready, at the drop of a bullhorn, to incite violence against journalists in the name of social justice, politicians should imagine how it feels to have a spine, and act accordingly. The Missouri communications faculty members have a right to speak their minds, and pursue their hobbies/careers. They don’t, however, have a right to have anyone else subsidize their activities. Shutting the department down would be a salutary reminder that even in academia, bad decisions can have bad consequences. Absent such a signal, there will never be any reason to expect good decisions.

Conservatives have been firing shots across the bow of higher education for years, but the Ship of Fools has never turned back, or changed course. It’s time either to surrender or to shoot a round into the engine room.

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