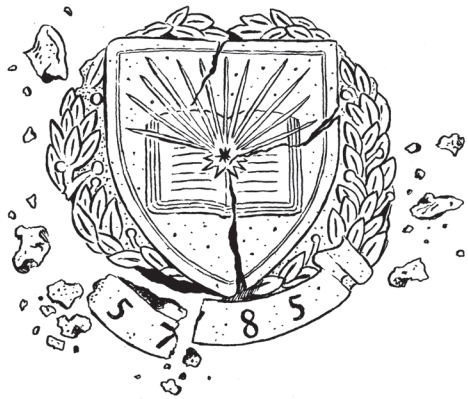
SAPIR

IDEAS FOR A THRIVING JEWISH FUTURE

THE ISSUE ON

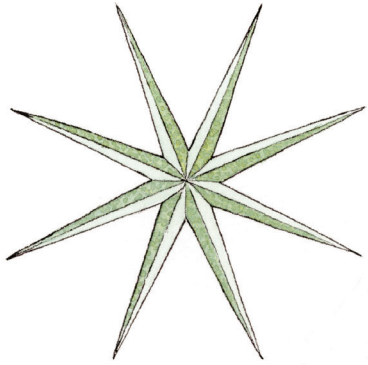
THE UNIVERSITY



Volume Fifteen *Autumn 2024*

And they saw the God of Israel:
Under His feet there was the
likeness of a pavement of
sapphire, like the very sky
for purity.

— Exodus 24: 10



Note on the cover: The cracked coat of arms represents the embattled state of America's universities. But in the immortal words of Leonard Cohen, "There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." The borders of the cover feature oak on one side and laurel on the other—classical symbols of strength and achievement. And in the small borders are books and flowers, to suggest the flourishing of the mind that occurs with education.

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SAPIR

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BRET STEPHENS

Editor's Note

When did the academy become illiberal?

TORPOR, TURPITUDE, tendentiousness: Higher education has been charged with many sins over many years.

In the 1770s, Adam Smith took aim at Oxford, where "the greater part of the publick professors have, for these many years, given up altogether even the pretence of teaching." In the 1950s, William F. Buckley Jr. made his name by denouncing Yale, his alma mater, for propagating atheism and collectivism. In the 1980s, Allan Bloom, a philosophy professor at the University of Chicago, became a household name for decrying the way in which academic fads had contributed to "the closing of the American mind."

Universities have survived these periodic controversies and crises of trust because the public appetite for what they offered far outstripped the distrust and resentments they also generated. And what they offered was a lot: intellectual excellence;

professional credentialization; social mobility; the creation, advancement, and dissemination of advanced and specialized knowledge; independence from external and internal political pressures; idyllic communities.

Visit most any university or college campus today, and the vision of the idyllic community — the stately buildings, well-tended lawns, state-of-the-art athletic facilities, and lively local hangouts — survives. So do broad fields of genuine excellence, particularly in STEM fields such as biomedical research, astrophysics, and computer science. And universities still play a vital role as educators of future doctors, attorneys, nurses, engineers, and other essential professions.

But the broader argument for universities has become harder to make in recent years. Social mobility? A tough nut to swallow for parents who pay exorbitant tuitions, or for students faced with decades of paying off their loans, or for graduates reckoning with the ever-diminishing prestige and purchasing power of most degrees. Intellectual seriousness? Not at universities where grade inflation is rampant, aggressive ideologues (including tenured professors, adjunct lecturers, and graduate students) teach undergraduates, students are afraid to speak their minds, and social life is, by turns, frivolous, libertine, and censorious. Political independence? Administrators have been required to enforce legally dubious "Dear Colleague" letters from the U.S. Department of Education. University presidents live in fear of being called to testify before Congress, and nonprogressive university faculty (usually moderate Democrats) must bite their tongues lest they fall afoul of prevailing campus orthodoxies.

And then there's antisemitism. For years, a handful of worried observers had warned, in newspaper op-eds, magazine essays (including in Sapir), and documentaries such as *Columbia*

Unbecoming that campus life was increasingly hostile to Jewish students, at least those who didn't publicly abjure Zionism. Those activists were treated as semi-hysterics. Then came October 7, and the moral and intellectual rot that it exposed on one campus after another, particularly at the universities that were thought of as elite.

How did universities fall off their pedestals? Many reasons, but one is central: the turn away from liberalism as the dominant mindset of the academy.

By *liberalism* I do not mean the word in the usual ideological or political sense. I mean it as the habit of open-mindedness, a passion for truth, a disdain for dogma, an aloofness from politics, a fondness for skeptics and gadflies and iconoclasts, a belief in the importance of evidence, logic, and reason, a love of argument rooted in intelligent difference. Above all, a curious, probing, independent spirit. These were the virtues that great universities were supposed to prize, cultivate, and pass along to the students who went through them. It was the experience I had as an undergraduate at the University of Chicago 30-plus years ago, and that older readers probably recall of their own college experience in earlier decades.

Except in a few surviving corners, that kind of university is fading, if not altogether gone. In its place is the model of the university as an agent of social change and ostensible betterment. It is the university that encourages students to dwell heavily on their experience of victimization, or their legacy as victimizers, rather than as accountable individuals responsible for their own fate. It is the university that carefully arranges the racial and ethnic composition of its student body in the hopes of shaping a different kind of future elite. It is the university that tries to stamp out ideas or inquiries it considers socially dangerous or morally pernicious, irrespective of considerations of truth. It is the university that ceaselessly valorizes identity, not least when it comes to who does, or doesn't, get to make certain arguments.

How did universities fall off their pedestals? Many reasons, but one is central: the turn away from liberalism as the dominant mindset of the academy.

It is the university that substitutes the classics of philosophy and literature with mandatory reading lists that skew heavily to the contemporary ideological left. It is the university that makes official statements on some current events (but not on others), or tips its hand by prominently affiliating itself with political activism in scholarly garb. It is the university that attempts to rewrite the English language in search of more "inclusive" vocabulary. It is the university that silently selects an ideologically homogeneous faculty, administration, and graduate-student body. It is the university that finds opportunistic ways to penalize or get rid of professors whose views it dislikes. It is the university that has allowed entire fields of inquiry — gender studies, ethnic studies, critical studies, Middle Eastern studies — to become thoroughly dogmatic and politicized.

A charitable term for this kind of institution might be *the relevant university* — relevant in the sense of playing a direct role in shaping public and political life. In fact, there are many less political and more productive ways in which universities can credibly establish their relevance to the world around them: by serving as centers for impartial expertise, making pathbreaking discoveries, and educating students with vital skills, not just academically but also with the skills of good citizenship and leadership.

But the latter kind of relevance does not emerge from a deliberate quest for relevance — that is, for being in tune with contemporary

What does excellence achieve, beyond being a good in itself? Public trust.

fads or beliefs. It emerges from a quest for excellence. And excellence is cultivated, in large part, by a conscious turning away from trying to be relevant, focusing instead on pursuing knowledge for its own sake; upholding high and consistent standards; protecting the integrity of a process irrespective of the result; maintaining a powerful indifference both to the weight of tradition and the pressure exerted by contemporary beliefs. In short, excellence is achieved by dedicating oneself to the ideals and practices of the kind of liberalism that gives free rein to what the educator Abraham Flexner, in the 1930s, called "the roaming and capricious possibilities of the human spirit."

What does excellence achieve, beyond being a good in itself? Public trust. Ordinary people do not need to have a good understanding of, say, virology to trust that universities are doing a good job of it, especially if advances in the field lead to medicines in the cabinet. Nor does the public need to know the exact formulas by which universities choose their freshman class, so long as they have reason to believe that Yale, Harvard, Princeton and their peers admit only the most brilliant and promising.

But trust is squandered when the public learns that at least some virologists have used their academic authority to make deceitful claims about the likely origins of the Covid-19 pandemic. Trust evaporates when the public learns how the admissions process was being gamed for the sake of achieving race-conscious outcomes that disregard considerations of academic merit, to the striking disadvantage of certain groups. And trust is destroyed when the country sees students from elite universities behaving like Maoist

cadres — seizing university property, disrupting campus life, and chanting thought-terminating slogans such as "From the river to the sea." What those protests have mainly achieved, other than to demoralize or terrify Jewish students, is to advertise the moral bankruptcy and intellectual collapse of our "relevant" universities. Illiberalism always ends up finding its way to antisemitism.

There's a straightforward way out of this mess. It's a return to the values of the liberal university.

Already, there are academic leaders willing to go there. In his impressive inaugural speech, Jonathan Levin, Stanford's new president, put the point clearly: "The university's purpose is not political action or social justice," he said. "It is to create an environment in which learning thrives." Sian Leah Beilock, the president of Dartmouth, has been equally clear: "Universities must be places where different ideas and opinions lead to personal growth, scientific breakthroughs, and new knowledge," she recently wrote in *The Atlantic*. "But when a group of students takes over a building or establishes an encampment on shared campus grounds and declares that this shared educational space belongs to only one ideological view, the power and potential of the university die." Daniel Diermeier, the chancellor of Vanderbilt, makes much the same point in this issue of Sapir.

But even if the way out is clear, the obstacles in the way are large. Among them:

- Illiberal faculty, who see political activism as central to their moral and professional duties.

- Indifferent faculty, who may not share the ideological inclinations of their illiberal colleagues but aren't about to speak out for the values of a liberal university.

- Social hostility toward faculty whose research or conclusions are viewed as ideologically suspect.
- A deeply entrenched DEI bureaucracy that seeks to categorize and divide the student body into racial and ethnic groups.
- Students, many from comfortable backgrounds, who have been taught to identify themselves as victims, or as "allies" of victims.
- A political environment that drives conservative-leaning undergraduates from pursuing academic careers.
- A selective adherence to free expression, which demands free speech for some points of view but silence from others.
- A tenure system that is supposed to guarantee academic freedom but often helps entrench an illiberal and self-dealing faculty.

What will turn the system around? Leadership is essential, starting with boards of trustees who must refuse to serve as mere cheerleaders or rubber stamps for university administrators drawn from the usual academic ranks and in tune with their ways of thinking and acting. It's also essential to change the value system on campus, not only by moving away from identity politics but also by finding ways to rekindle the dying art of disagreement. The weight of public disenchantment with higher education (not least in the form of declining enrollments) also needs to be felt on campus, to create a sense of institutional urgency about the need for change. Competition helps, too, especially in the form of new models for post-high-school education, such as corporate apprenticeships.

We have returned to the subject of education, which was the focus of our sixth volume from the summer of 2022, because the aftermath of October 7 has reminded us of how much a thriving

Jewish future depends on reforming our universities. With this volume, we hope to stir conversation, ideas, and passion in the service of rescuing these broken, but still necessary, institutions. ✳

October 13, 2024

Encouraging Debate, Not Settling It

A conversation with Vanderbilt Chancellor DANIEL DIERMEIER

ANDERBILT *University Chancellor Daniel Diermeier has been one of few leaders of elite American universities to demonstrate a consistent commitment to the foundational principles of higher education before and since October 7.* SAPIR *Editor-in-Chief Bret Stephens sat down with Diermeier to learn about his views on how to shape a campus culture based in the spirit of inquiry and a commitment to reason.*

Bret Stephens: Until recently, surveys showed that Americans had high confidence in higher education. It was seen as an essential ticket to success in American life. In the past decade or so, that confidence has plummeted. The last survey I saw, from Gallup, showed a sharp decline, and that came out before October 7 and the protests that followed. What happened in the past 10 years to cause that decline?

Daniel Diermeier: We've seen the same data, and I've been very concerned about the drop in approval and trust in higher

education. The decline has been larger among people on the conservative side of the political spectrum, but it's across the board, from the Left and the Right. My sense is that it comes from two concerns. From the progressive side, the concern is that highly selective universities are perpetuating inequality. And the concern from the Right is that we're woke factories.

Stephens: Both of them can be true.

Diermeier: One hundred percent. My own sense is that the concerns about the propagation of inequality are, on closer inspection, much overblown. I think the concerns on the politicization of higher education and the ideological drift are much more valid.

The question of the politicization of higher education has come into stark relief after what we've seen last year: the conflict in the Middle East and the drama on campus. These developments have elevated into the public consciousness concerns that have been present for years. They now are front and center, much more serious, and they require a course correction by many universities.

Stephens: A historian might say, "Go back to the University of Chicago or Yale in the 1950s and you'll find conservative critics railing against higher education as hotbeds of radicalism." Now we look back on that and sort of chuckle. Is the criticism more valid today? If so, why?

Diermeier: Yes, I think the criticism is more valid today. If you look back, there were three pillars of how a university thought about its role in society. If you look at the University of Chicago, one pillar was this commitment to free speech that goes back to the founding and then through a whole variety of presidents, reaffirmed, most recently, by the 2015 report, often referred to

as the Chicago Principles. Universities need to be places for open debate.

Pillar two is what we call institutional neutrality, which means that the university will not get involved, will not take positions, on controversial political and social issues that bear no direct relevance to the university's mission. The University of Chicago's formulation of this policy was the Kalven Report from 1967, which so eloquently articulates that when the university formulates a party line on any issue, it creates a chilling effect for faculty and students to engage in debate and discourse.

And the third pillar, less appreciated but important, is a commitment to reason, to respect, to using arguments and evidence. Discourse and debate at the university shouldn't be about shouting. That's a more cultural aspect. All three have eroded, and they have eroded over the past 10 years in significant fashion. Now we see the consequences of that.

Stephens: One conservative critique is that students are afraid to speak their mind, that there's a chilling effect on free speech. Yet when protests erupted after October 7, some of these same critics were horrified by the free speech that was being exercised by some of the protesters. That came to a head last December with the questioning of the three university presidents by Representative Elise Stefanik. How should a chancellor navigate what seems to be a paradox: On one hand, you want to encourage free speech; on the other, there are certain kinds of speech that either chill the speech of others or create hostile climates at universities?

Diermeier: The right way to think about this is to be crystal clear about what your principles are, and these principles need to be content-neutral. They need to apply to everybody, and you've got to stick to them. There can be some variations on that. A university that has, for example, a particular faith tradition,

> If you're divesting your endowment in order to make a point on various political or social issues — climate, private prisons, foreign policy — you are not consistent with institutional neutrality.

like Notre Dame, may do something different. Public and private may have some differences.

Let's talk about free speech in the context of outside speakers. Controversial speakers come to campus, some student group is opposed to that, they want to shut them down. On our campus, any faculty member or registered student group can invite any speaker to campus that they see fit. We'll support them organizationally, but we're not going to take a position on the individual speaker or message.

The alternative is no guest speakers on campus. Because, whether inside or outside the classroom, you're always going to have cases where people are controversial. Or the third option is to have a committee that vets each speaker. But you can imagine what that's going to be like — constant lobbying and it takes forever.

The critical thing is, do you want to have a broad variety of voices on campus when it comes to outside speakers? And if so, what's the mechanism to make those decisions? That mechanism needs to be grounded in principles.

Stephens: Let me ask you about the role of university leaders. One thing you sometimes hear from presidents is *I have no power.*

The faculty rule the institution. There's a limit to what I can do in terms of what happens on my own campus. Tell us about governance structures. How can university leadership effectively use its position within those structures to set a tone, create a culture, have a set of rules and expectations for how the student and faculty behave? If you were speaking to first-time university presidents from across the country, what would you advise them?

Diermeier: Universities in the United States have a principle of shared governance, meaning that they have multiple constituencies and a constitutional structure for how decisions are made. Usually, there's the executive, the board, the president, the deans, and so forth. Every one of them has — either by design or by precedent — a certain set of prerogatives.

The analogy here is you're like the United States president. You can be effective or ineffective, and in order to be effective, you have to set the tone and a clear direction. You have to convince people. There's a political economy inside a university, and to throw up your hands and say, "Well, I can't do anything" — that's like saying "I'm the president and I have a Congress, but I don't have a two-thirds majority, so I can't get anything done." You have to think about how to get support. How do you get — maybe not universal consensus — but broad consensus? All of that is hard work, but it needs to be done, because this shared-governance structure is the reality we're operating in.

Stephens: Let me ask about institutional neutrality. It seems to me that neutrality is not just a meta-principle for how the university operates in general, but it should be a micro-principle in terms of how departments and even classrooms operate. And this may be a trickier problem, because you have, at many universities, faculty members who are interested more in ideology than in pedagogy: They're not interested in creating a

sense of neutrality within their classrooms. How can institutional neutrality operate in the inner workings of educational life, as opposed to just the larger question of statements or positions that a university does or does not take?

Diermeier: There are two different dimensions to this. First, institutional neutrality is fundamentally a constraint on leadership. What it says is that the president and the leaders of the university, including deans, for example, should not take positions on controversial issues: social issues, foreign policy, Supreme Court decisions, domestic policies, etc. Our goal is to encourage debates, not to settle them fundamentally as an institution. Until months ago, only a few universities were leading the way on this: the University of Chicago, Vanderbilt, and the University of North Carolina. Many other universities were taking positions on a whole variety of issues very often.

Moreover, and this is important, institutional neutrality is not only about talking. The critical question is, for example, what do you do with your endowment? If you're divesting your endowment in order to make a point on various political or social issues—climate, private prisons, foreign policy—you are not consistent with institutional neutrality. We're now seeing a bunch of universities that said they're not going to take positions anymore. But the second thing you need to say is that you're not going to use your endowment for political purposes either.

Lack of institutional neutrality also undermines a university's very commitment to expertise. We have faculty members in the law school who spend their entire life preparing to think through the *Dobbs* decision on abortion. The idea that a university president then comes in and says, *Well, I've figured all this out over the weekend, and it's appalling that the Supreme Court did this* totally contradicts the very point of universities, their commitment to doing the hard work, to making sure that they go deep on various issues.

How do we think about education — including a liberal arts education — in an age of rapidly advancing technology?

Institutional neutrality does not constrain faculty or students. It does constrain administrators. So the second concern that you pointed out, which I'm going to call the politicization of the classroom, is a separate one. That, to me, is a question of professionalism. If you're using your classroom for indoctrination or propaganda, you're fundamentally not doing your job. You're not creating an effective learning environment for your students. So I think these are two separate issues that should not be commingled, because the point of institutional neutrality is to create freedom for faculty and students. If that freedom and responsibility are abused, that's a different conversation.

Stephens: We're hearing a great deal about the importance of viewpoint diversity. Faculty and administrators — there's a lot of survey data on this — lean very much to one side politically across the board at universities. Should universities make a mindful effort to bring additional conservative or libertarian — or at least politically alternative — voices into the faculty itself? I've seen cases in which it's treated almost as an affirmative-action program. In other cases — at Yale, for instance, there's the Buckley Institute that attracts a coterie of students and faculty — it seems to create ghettos for conservatives.

Diermeier: The first thing I would say is that in our university, 80–90 percent of what's happening in the classroom has nothing

to do with this issue whatsoever. I couldn't care less whom my math professor votes for.

Stephens: Unless the math professor wears a keffiyeh.

Diermeier: That's the point. If they're using their classroom for political propaganda, it's a different conversation. The right way to think about hiring and promotions is that they should be based on expertise and merit. I've cited a couple of these University of Chicago reports before, but there's one called the Shils Report that makes that very clear: We do not want to have political litmus tests for whom we hire and promote.

That said, there is an important role for the university, including its curriculum, in a society that investigates and reflects on itself, its values, its history. A lot of that is in humanities, the social sciences, divinity schools, law schools, and so forth. There are multiple perspectives, and to have them in the classroom is vitally important. If you have a class on ethics, you want the students to deal with virtue ethics, deontological ethics, and consequential ethics. You want these perspectives well represented, so that they are challenged, and then students can make up their own mind about what they think. If that does not happen because of the ideological capture of a department or program, we've got a problem.

I'm very doubtful that the solution is affirmative action for conservatives. I'm also not convinced that these movements to create new centers are the solution, either. I think the challenge goes a little deeper than where people are on political orientation—it has to do with how fields of study are structured and how certain fields have evolved. But we cannot have an ideological monoculture in these types of classes. It's a disservice to our students.

Stephens: My final question is about the way forward. American universities have, broadly speaking, been structured in a

particular way, a four-year curriculum, occasionally a core curriculum, fields divided into humanities, sciences, and so on. For a variety of reasons, both economic as well as academic, my sense is that this model may not serve us particularly well. I'm not sure why college has to be four years as opposed to three years. Britain has graduated perfectly intelligent people in just three years' time. You're thinking of what a Vanderbilt education should look like in 15 years. How should its broad structures remain constant, and, maybe, how should they evolve or even completely transform?

Diermeier: I think we're in a period, right now, when there's tremendous criticism of the university. Some of that is warranted, but what people should not forget is how enormously successful these institutions are. They're successful in delivering on the promise of a transformative education that changes lives for the better, especially for students who come from underprivileged or first-generation backgrounds. That is not the case in Europe, where there is much more inequality and much less social mobility.

On the research side, universities are enormous engines of innovation. There's evidence now that for every dollar invested in basic research, society gets at least $5 back. Every innovation that you can look at, from the iPhone to AI, has origins in the great research universities. So I'm worried that these threats to cut research funding have dramatic consequences for the country. Don't let universities off the hook, but don't go to a point where you're destroying something that is a treasure and the envy of the world.

The question is *How does this need to evolve?* The university system is not necessarily a fast-changer, but it has evolved, and it will do so again. What we have to ask ourselves is more fundamental: How do we think about education — including a liberal arts education — in an age of rapidly advancing

technology? Practically speaking, we see tremendous pressure on liberal arts colleges now. The model where you go to a liberal arts college for four years and then train for a professional career is not the majority model anymore. It was a form that made sense when knowledge changed slowly.

Now, for people who work in AI and computer science or biomedical research, the knowledge base turns over in six months. If you don't have faculty who are at the cutting edge of that, how are you going to learn? The trend that we're seeing, this tremendous increase in applications to research universities, is a reflection of that and some of the struggles that we see with our liberal arts colleges.

So how do we make sure that we keep the reflective dimension of universities alive when the pressure, or the trend, is so focused on technology? I don't think we have a great answer to that at this point, but those, to me, are the important questions. It's less about four years or three. I think the core bones of American undergraduate education are really strong. The only other model that is a competitor is the Oxbridge model of tutors, and that's a hyper-resource-intensive approach.

The American model itself is enormously successful, but it needs to adapt so that it stays relevant and engaged with the important questions of our time. The great books are still the great books, and they're super important. But you have to ask yourself: How do you think about this type of knowledge base in an era of artificial intelligence, biomedical engineering, and biotech? ✳

PART ONE

FIRST PRINCIPLES

RICHARD A. SHWEDER

(Wilhelm von) Humboldt's Gift

An enlightened vision for the modern university

THE IDEA of the modern university is often associated with the name Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Prussian philosopher of education at whose initiative the University of Berlin was founded in 1810. "Humboldt's ideal," as it is reverently known, envisioned the university as a liberal (in the sense of open-minded and free-thinking) community committed to protecting the intellectual autonomy of its faculty in the pursuit of knowledge and the cultivation of rational judgment. He pictured the university as an academic oasis where scholars were free to be intellectually innovative and skeptical of dogma and nonrational claims to authority. There, in a protected self-governing community, faculty and students could challenge and debate popular beliefs and received truths.

Associated with this classical liberal idea of the modern university were certain intellectual values and dispositions. Disciplined

impartiality. A willingness not to rush to judgment. Organized skepticism. A fondness for dialogue and the questioning of assumptions. Respect for critical reasoning informed by relevant and reliable evidence. As Humboldt saw it, a "university" had a distinctive purpose and a core interest, which he associated with knowledge expansion, free thought, and critical reasoning, and which he distinguished from other important social aims such as the vocational and professional training of artisans, soldiers, lawyers, or businessmen. His vision was for a university, not a "multiversity" influenced by a range of outside interests, and it enjoyed the enlightened support of the Prussian king, with no strings attached.

Several of the world's universities have endeavored to embody Humboldt's ideal, and for the past 51 years I have been fortunate to teach at one of them. *Crescat scientia; vita excolatur* ("Let knowledge grow from more to more, and so be human life enriched") is the motto of the University of Chicago. I have long interpreted the saying in Humboldtian terms to express an idea of knowledge as its own reward, and its essence can be seen in the university's statements regarding free speech. "Neither an individual, nor the state, nor the church has the right to interfere with the search for truth, or with its promulgation when found," William Rainey Harper, the university's first president, said in a 1900 convocation address. "Individuals or the state or the church may found schools for propagating certain special kinds of instruction, but such schools are not universities, and may not be so denominated." To make the point even clearer, Harper added, "When an effort is made to dislodge an officer or a professor because the political sentiment or the religious sentiment of the majority has undergone a change, at that moment the institution has ceased to be a university."

You can see the connection: The university's core mission of

pursuing and expanding knowledge is hindered by any constraints on that pursuit or its articulation.

That spirit was certainly present in 1973 when then–President Edward Levi welcomed me (and other new faculty) to the University of Chicago. He assured us that provocation and skepticism in the context of reasoned debate were virtues at the university we had joined, even more so when those debates dared to raise taboo questions, engage dangerous ideas, or lead to upsetting conclusions. He may well have had Socrates in mind as he spoke.

Levi's view of the mission of the modern university is likely to drop the jaw of most contemporary university presidents. Behold what he declared to the members of the Citizen's Board of the University of Chicago in a 1967 address. He told them that the university's goal is not to be popular with the public, or to weigh in directly on political or commercial matters. Nor is it to develop industrial innovations, challenge the injustices of the world, or be a pipeline for the training of professionals. He told them that the university's true mission is not moral, but intellectual: "improving the stock of ordered knowledge and rational judgment."

Harper's position, Levi's position, and Humboldt's ideal were further codified in many of Chicago's statements and statutes over the decades. Here are four:

- From the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and Statutes: "The basic policies of the University of Chicago include complete freedom of research and the unrestricted dissemination of information."

- From the 1967 Kalven Committee Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action: "To perform its mission in the society, a university must sustain an extraordinary environment of freedom of inquiry and maintain an independence from political fashions, passions, and pressures. A university, if it is to be true to its faith in intellectual inquiry, must embrace,

be hospitable to, and encourage the widest diversity of views within its own community."

- From the 1972 Report of the University of Chicago Committee on the Criteria of Academic Appointment (also known as "the Shils Report," after the name of the committee's chairman): "There must be no consideration of sex, ethnic or national characteristics, or political or religious beliefs or affiliations in any decision regarding appointment, promotion, or reappointment at any level of the academic staff."
- From the Preamble to the patent-policy statute (Statute 18) in the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws and Statutes: "Research done primarily in anticipation of profit is incompatible with the aims of the university."

The fate in subsequent decades of these four Humboldtian ideals has not been a happy one.

- The magnificent Humboldtian commitment to "complete freedom of research and the unrestricted dissemination of information" has been replaced with a bureaucratic apparatus of research approval, management, and surveillance.
- The Kalven Report's charge to "embrace, be hospitable to, and encourage the widest diversity of views within its own community" has been severely undermined by the homogeneity of political attitudes among faculty members, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. In some academic disciplines the ratio is more than 30 to 1 liberal to conservative.
- The nondiscrimination hiring policy of 1972 was superseded by five decades of preferential "affirmative action" recruitment.

- The caution against the subordination of academic values to market forces has been deleted from the latest edition of the University of Chicago Statutes.

The University of Chicago is not an outlier in this regard. If anything, it has been slower to surrender the Humboldtian ideal than many others have been.

It is the last of these changes, succumbing to market forces, that might be regarded as both the most alarming and revealing of the bunch. Among those forces are government research funds on which the university has become dependent. Such funding comes with strings attached that politicians and public officials use to shape the character of the academic life, even at so-called private universities.

Why alarming? Because the subjection to market forces undermines the university's Humboldtian ideal of intentional insulation from the market pressures of the outside world. This ideal was once considered so sacrosanct that it was made explicit by Harper and extended even to the philanthropic marketplace. "A donor has the privilege of ceasing to make his gifts to an institution if, in his opinion, for any reason, the work of the institution is not satisfactory; but as donor he has no right to interfere with the administration or the instruction of the university." The philosopher Arthur Lovejoy, who in 1915 was one of the founders of the American Association of University Professors, put the point memorably: "The distinctive social function of the scholar's trade cannot be fulfilled if those who pay the piper are permitted to call the tune."

Why revealing? Because succumbing to market forces demonstrates that the university has become the kind of "multiversity" against which Humboldt distinguished his ideal. The university has opened its gates to a diverse set of interest groups representing a multiplicity of missions — commercial, political, moral — of their own. The traditional mission of the modern university has given way to a postmodern vision, which sees the Humboldtian ideal as unaffordable, impractical, and quaint. The administrators

of the multiversity have hired faculty and created programs with the purpose of patenting inventions for industry. They have hired faculty and created programs with the aim of battling the real and imagined injustices of the world. They have blurred the distinction between the core and peripheral missions of the university. They have tried to balance the missions or calculate tradeoffs between them. They have grown tails (ineffectual and divisive diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, for example) and empowered them. Some of the tails have been wagging the university dog.

If our multiversities, some of which are essentially multibillion-dollar businesses, are to become universities once again, they must recommit to the Humboldtian mission and, like Harper did in 1900, construct a campus speech policy from it.

The wisest proposal I have seen was presented off the heels of a war far more calamitous than our current cultural one. On September 25, 1946, Columbia University President Frank Fackenthal welcomed the incoming postwar college class with the following words.

> You who have reached the age of advanced study will, of course, have opinions, maybe even prejudices; but acceptance in an academic community carries with it the obligation to submit those opinions and those prejudices to examination under the bright light of human thought and experience. If, perchance, your views have been crystallized into slogans held aloft on banners or are subject to control by allegiance to minor or major pressure groups, check your banners and your membership cards at the college gate.… If when you leave the University on Commencement Day, after having submitted yourself to the processes of true academic life, you wish to have back your old banner, claim it, and you can take your place in the body politic with the deep satisfaction of

> tested and confirmed judgment. Equally deep can be your satisfaction should you decide not to claim it, for you will know that you have the ability and the willingness to face and to evaluate ideas.

"Check your banners at the college gate," for short. That is the Humboldtian policy. It does not mean that you — any member of the university, that is — are not to express opinions. Rather it means that nothing you say or do should be in the service of co-opting the university itself to your side or shutting out or insulating yourself from opposing views. For Fackenthal and Humboldt, the university and the free market of ideas that operates within it, governed by the invisible hand of critical reason, must remain eternally vibrant. Campus political rallies and mass demonstrations in which students shout "We don't want no Zionists here" run afoul of the mission because of their exclusionary, non-conversational nature. A campus speech policy rooted in this Humboldtian ideal emboldens freedom of thought and speech while managing and regulating the manner of its expression. It facilitates conversation, cooperative and reasoned exploration, even debate, but not conquest and coercion. It makes the core mission of the university manifest.

Fifty-one years after I arrived at the University of Chicago, senior faculty members who are still Humboldtian liberals retire from academia convinced that the heyday of the modern university is over and happy they had the best of it. Others participate in academic-crisis conferences put on by projects like Stanford's Classical Liberalism Initiative, where they wonder how the elite universities of the United States lost their way. At such gatherings there is a sense of compromised mission and misdirected purpose, but also an interest in finding ways for our universities to go home again.

I would like to believe that Humboldt's ideal for the modern university is still viable. Having that debate might be one way for our universities to begin to find their way home.

In the Windy City, at least, the winds seem to be blowing back in the right direction. Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, dean of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy, wrote recently to this effect in the *Boston Review*: "At their best, universities are intellectual communities whose members collectively reason about, analyze, and debate our most important, vexing, and contentious questions in pursuit of truth. Moreover, an essential part of our teaching mission is to help students learn to better understand one another and the world by civilly engaging in these activities, even when they deeply disagree."

Another president of a university up the road, Northwestern's Michael Schill, has been turning the banners away, too:

> Social beings operate in community with one another. In dialogue, participants listen as well as speak, allow—as far as possible—the good faith of others' arguments, and remain open to the possibility of persuasion. Even if unmoved in their views, they will be better able to defend them after the crucible of debate. It is through inclusive engagement across difference, where arguments encounter counterarguments, that learning happens. Dialogue is not domination or denigration. Shutting down or shouting down a speaker with whom one disagrees not only demonstrates a refusal to listen but also prevents others from doing so. Speech that impedes or is intended to prevent others' participation hinders the vitality of our intellectual community. In this light, free speech is necessary—but not sufficient—to meet the University's core purpose: We must cultivate the modes of speech and listening that promote productive dialogue.

There it is, the university's core purpose, its mission, protected and made possible, by a wise statement about speech and the manner of its expression.

Perhaps such statements are reason enough to look forward with optimism. This essay about the modern university is not meant to be an obituary. ✳

ARI BERMAN

Consumer Culture Has No Place at College

What Jewish tradition gets right about the purpose of the university

A NUMBER of years ago, I attended a conference for new university presidents. Between sessions, several of us discussed the question of what was likely to be the greatest challenge in our upcoming tenures. After a few minutes, a consensus seemed to emerge. When would an offensive gesture by a faculty member or student justify a presidential intervention? What level of indecency would require a reaction by the administration?

This was my first experience with a group of university presidents, and I registered my surprise that the whole conversation was reactionary and negative. "What about the positive kinds of

challenges?" I asked. "What are you, as a university president, trying to accomplish? What is the purpose of your university? Why are you here in the first place?" The group seemed both gripped and confounded by the questions.

Often lost in the post–October 7 conversation about the educational climate at universities is that universities are themselves often lost. In the Western world, the mission of the academy to pursue truth and develop young minds toward a productive and moral citizenry dates back to late antiquity and developed throughout the medieval and modern periods, from Athens to Bologna, Paris to Oxford. But in today's context, so many universities have diluted their mission. What follows is not a historical analysis, but a narrative framework from which to consider the realities of universities today and how Jewish teachings can help us understand what universities should be.

The Jewish model of education is rooted in the concept of covenants — the commitments that underpin our lives. To consider the subject of university missions through the prism of covenants is to see how consumerism has eroded this collective mission.

We live in a consumer society, one in which the acquisition of goods, products, and status is often seen as an end to itself. This has left our society impoverished in fundamental ways. As the great theologian Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks once amusingly put it: "The consumer society was laid down by the late Steve Jobs coming down the mountain with two tablets, iPad 1 and iPad 2. The result is that we now have a culture of iPod, iPhone, iTunes, i, i, i."

The focus on the "I" fosters an individualistic, egocentric culture in which commercialism constantly reminds us of all that we do not have, instead of fostering gratitude for all that we do have. The result? "Through constant creation of dissatisfaction," Sacks observed, "the consumer society is in fact a highly sophisticated

mechanism for the production and distribution of unhappiness."

A consumerist mindset has also deeply influenced higher education, which is, as a result, too often seen as a product for purchase. From this perspective, tuition is a cost incurred for the instrumental purpose of professional credentialing; students are customers, and university administrators and faculty exist to serve them. But there is another model for higher education that engages the whole student in a process of broadening the mind while deepening a sense of purpose. This is the covenantal model found in our Jewish tradition, which is not only instructive and aspirational but also illustrative of the values once held dear by traditional universities.

In the Jewish tradition, education began at Sinai. The Hebrew Bible tells us that the Jewish people stood at the foot of the mountain and proclaimed: *na'aseh v'nishma* (we will do and [then] we will listen). It is a strange expression. How can one "do" without first "listening"?

The sages of the Talmud extol this phrase as "the secret of the angels." Just as the angels are committed to God's words even before understanding them, so too the Jewish people intuited that their growth depended first and primarily on *commitment*.

This commitment was comprehensive, thorough, and forward-looking. As the 12th-century sage Rabbi Samuel ben Meir explained: "'We will do' refers to all of the laws given until this point and 'We will listen' refers to the laws that were still yet to come." This interpretation intimates a profound confidence in the evolution of Jewish knowledge creatively captured in the midrashic tradition. The Talmud, for example, says that at Sinai, Moses witnessed God adorning the letters of the Torah with calligraphic crowns, and he wondered at God's purpose for doing so. Immediately, Moses was transported to the future classroom of Rabbi Akiva who was expounding on each jot and tittle of the biblical text, including its crowns.

Upon hearing Akiva's interpretations, Moses grew despondent; he was finding it challenging to follow the detailed lecture. Then,

‘We will do’ is a commitment to what was;
‘we will listen’ to what will be.

suddenly, Rabbi Akiva responded to a student’s question about the source of the law under discussion: “It is a law that stems from Moses at Sinai.” Moses’s mind was “put at ease.” Rather than being absent from the conversation, he was the source to which all future expounding is tied. The creativity and intellectual output of every successive generation add layers to those that preceded it, engendering a lively dynamic between the inheritance and creation of knowledge.

This model of Jewish knowledge depicts a flow of energy that moves back and forth in time. The great scholar and master teacher of the 20th century, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, once said that each time he cited a Maimonidean text in his Talmudic lectures, he envisioned the author himself entering the classroom and presenting the idea. When the students would question Maimonides about the cogency of his argument, Rabbi Abraham ben David, the famed medieval critic of Maimonides, would nod his head approvingly. Rabbi Soloveitchik would then invite his renowned grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik, into the room to defend the idea. A dialogue between the ages would commence as past and present merged into one intergenerational conversation.

“We will do” is a commitment to what was; “we will listen” to what will be. And committing to them simultaneously forges a covenantal community continuously unfolding and inextricably linked across time.

Long before the Enlightenment and its Republic of Letters, this covenantal community bound the initiated into a mutually respectful conversation. Disagreements between rabbis were legendary

The students who are most successful during their years of study do not come with the sense of entitlement of a consumer but with the humility and thirst of a seeker.

and multiple. The fervent belief in the uprightness of one's position was strong. But nevertheless all those who participated in this living conversation were seen as fellow travelers, each representing the "words of the Living God."

Interestingly, the Talmudic discussion about "we will do" preceding "we will listen" also infuses this covenantal community with nobility. The rabbis teach that two crowns were brought from the heavens and placed on the heads of the Jews at Sinai: one for "we will do," their commitment to act, and the other for "we will listen," their commitment to study. In the Jewish tradition, it is study, rather than consumption, that is a value unto itself.

But study is also seen as a vehicle for the transmission of values and character. A famous rabbinic dispute posed the question about which is greater: study or action? The rabbinic conclusion, revealing the bidirectional nature of the "we will do and we will listen" formula, said study, because it leads to action. The most heralded form of intellectual endeavor is one that also refines one's personality, generates compassion toward others, and leaves a positive impact on the world. The sages of the Talmud are described as not only wise but also righteous. Study not only educates; it also ennobles.

Perhaps counterintuitively, in the Jewish tradition it is by binding oneself to a covenantal community that nobility is discovered and human potential realized. For it is this life of commitment

that provides the deep roots that nourish a lifetime of learning, growth, generosity, creativity, and self-discovery. The energy of the study hall charges each of its participants to add their imprint to the enduring historical conversation. A covenantal community binds its members in an intergenerational dialogue that prizes faith, empathy, curiosity, resilience, brilliance, and humility. It fills one's life with meaning and purpose. This is the secret of the angels.

While there is no doubt that some of these elements are unique to the Jewish tradition, they also form the basis of the intellectual tradition of the great universities of the past. This includes the essential commitments to seek truth, develop the character of students as productive citizens of society, assemble great minds who create new knowledge with their research, and foster a community of letters with deep respect for the past and a sense of responsibility for the future.

Universities used to offer this profound sense of purpose and commitment. A letter of admission was an invitation for students to enter the great exchange of ideas that extended from the beginnings of time into the wondrous possibilities of the future. Students were not simply purchasing a degree but were part of a historical community that challenged and expanded their imaginations.

In this model of a university, every enrolling student is welcomed into a community of exploration built on a canon of texts that have stood the test of time. As time moves forward, the aperture is widened and more texts incorporated. The intellectual exchange of ideas is not unyielding, but it is unfolding. Texts do not live in isolation but in conversation with one another. The students who are most successful during their years of study do not come with the sense of entitlement of a consumer but with the humility and thirst of a seeker. Perhaps the greatest tool they discover is to

recognize, as Rilke notes in his *Letters to a Young Poet*, that questions are better than their answers. Our job is to teach them to love the questions.

In the imagery of the modern university, questions are the ivy-strewn building blocks of the ivory tower. What happens inside is an ever-expanding conversation of inquiry. In the Jewish tradition, the cultivation of questions is the process in which one stretches oneself and grows, which ultimately is the purpose of education. As Kalonymus Shapira, the famed 20th-century rabbi of Piasetzna who secretly kept Jewish education alive in the Warsaw Ghetto, observed, the word for education in the Jewish tradition is *chinukh*, which means to bring into the open the potential that rests within. Each child is born in God's image and carries a distinct way of expressing that godliness. Whether one is a healer, an artist, a leader, or a scientist, a great university education introduces the mysteries of the world to enable students to develop and discover the greatness within themselves.

This type of education is saturated with covenants and commitments: to one's fellow students as companions on the path to wisdom, to one's professors as guides who escort them on their journey, to the brilliant thinkers and writers who laid the path long ago, and to their future selves who will emerge from a lifetime of exploration. The institution and its professors in turn make a commitment to the students to be present with them during these formative years, creating enduring attachments and profound feelings of gratitude that last a lifetime.

This is the kind of covenantal community that leads to a campus culture devoted to human flourishing. The university both sets the standard for academic excellence and infuses its campus with core values. It inspires students to think critically, pursue truth, and live lives of service, compassion, and contribution. It stresses that

knowledge and character are integrated, not separated. Such an education prepares them for both personal and professional success, empowering them with the skills and networks to succeed in their vocations — and the values and aspiration to succeed meaningfully in their lives as contributors rather than simply as consumers.

There are many reasons that institutions of higher education failed their Jewish students, faculty, and alumni after October 7. One of the primary ones is the lost sense of purpose. Not long ago, the great universities in this country considered themselves stewards of a noble tradition. Today higher education has become big business. Sadly, for many, this has also brought a diminishment of their historical mission. University administrators busy formulating their responses to the pressures of the moment have too often ignored their institutions' foundational core values, managing fallout rather than rededicating themselves, as the Hebrew word for education could also be translated, to their first principles. No wonder they so often come across more like corporate managers and marketers than educational leaders. As the House Committee on Education and the Workforce concluded in its recent report, "While university leaders publicly projected a commitment toward combating antisemitism and respect for congressional efforts on the subject, in their private communications they viewed antisemitism as a PR issue rather than a campus problem."

In today's climate, it is essential to identify and strengthen the institutions that uphold the covenants and commitments on which higher education has long been built. Based on a vision of education that is transformational rather than transactional, we can integrate the wellsprings of our past into a model of constructive and redemptive learning for all. ✳

ROGER A. PIELKE JR.

The Roots of Public Mistrust: Science, Policy & Academic Integrity

Without self-correction, science looks more like politics

STRONOMER Carl Sagan observed in his popular 1980 television show *Cosmos*, "There are many hypotheses in science that are wrong. That's perfectly all right; it's the aperture to finding out what's right. Science is a self-correcting process. To be accepted, new ideas must survive the most rigorous standards of evidence and scrutiny."

The scientific community's historical willingness to change course when evidence suggests that a course correction is warranted — no matter who happens to benefit — may help explain why science enjoyed high levels of public trust for many decades. The Pew Research Center reported in 2020 that "public confidence in the scientific community stands out as among the most

stable of about a dozen institutions rated in the [General Social Survey] since the mid-1970s."

That's changing.

In data collected at the end of 2021, Pew found that among the public, "the share with a great deal of confidence in scientists to act in the public's best interests is down by 10 percentage points." The trend can partly be explained by a general decline of trust in institutions, partly by a growing partisan (and educational) divide in trust in scientists, and partly by perceptions of the management of the Covid pandemic.

In my areas of expertise—the intersection of science with contested political issues such as climate change—self-correction in science is facing some serious challenges. Those challenges may further erode trust to the extent that the public cannot reliably evaluate scientific claims (and nonsensical claims) independent of who might benefit or suffer the consequences of setting the record straight.

One important mechanism of self-correction in science is the formal retraction of peer-reviewed scientific publications found to have used flawed or fictional data or employed other questionable practices. The Committee on Publication Ethics explains why this matters: "Retraction is a mechanism for correcting the literature and alerting readers to articles that contain such seriously flawed or erroneous content or data that their findings and conclusions cannot be relied upon."

Scientific papers with obviously erroneous data would seem to make easy cases for retraction. That hasn't been my experience.

In 2019, a group of Danish scientists published a paper on historical hurricane damage using a fatally flawed "dataset" in the prestigious journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, or PNAS. Though the authors published a spreadsheet along with their paper, the dataset simply does not exist outside of their

paper. It did not reflect observations from the real world. I know this because my colleagues and I developed the dataset that was the original basis for theirs, which metastasized into something unrecognizable and decidedly unscientific.

The details are amazing. The paper—known as Grinsted et al. 2019, or G19—built on our work starting in the 1990s, which sought to assess the economic impacts that past U.S. hurricanes would have had if they had made landfall with today's levels of inflation, population, and development. We developed a methodology called *normalization*. For instance, the Great Miami Hurricane of 1926 resulted in less than $100 million in damage when it occurred. We estimated that the same storm would cause more than $300 *billion* in losses in 2024, owing to Miami's massive increase in building and wealth over many decades and the changing value of the dollar due to inflation.

In their paper, G19 sought to apply a new normalization methodology, contributing to a growing literature on the subject. Their fatal mistake was to (inexplicably) use a dataset of historical hurricane losses that they found online on the website of a (now defunct) insurance company. After I carefully examined G19 and discovered its flaws, which I detailed on my Substack in February 2024, I contacted PNAS and the editor of the paper, Kerry Emanuel of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and requested that the paper be retracted.

You won't ever find a more obvious case for retraction, so I thought the response would be quick and straightforward. Five months later, in July 2024, I heard back from PNAS: "The final decision is that no public action is warranted, be it retraction or correction."

PNAS apparently did not even look at the dataset or consider the evidence I provided them. Instead, they relied on a review of a letter to PNAS about G19 I had submitted (but they did not publish) back in 2019, which discussed different issues with their paper, well before I was aware of the depth of the problems with the dataset. They sent me a review of that five-year-old letter to justify their inaction.

Some studies that are fatally flawed but politically important are surrounded by a sort of anti-correction Teflon force field that prevents retraction or even acknowledgment of flaws. They are apparently too big to fail.

One additional detail must be mentioned: Of the 70 or so normalization studies around the world for various weather phenomena that have been published over the past 25 years, G19 is the only one that claims to have detected an increasing trend in losses after normalization and that attributed this trend to human-caused climate change. Perhaps as a result, it has been singled out and highlighted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the U.S. National Climate Assessment. That makes it politically important. Its retraction would have resulted in a long series of falling dominoes and embarrassment for those official bodies that jumped to promote its findings while ignoring many dozens of others that make for a compelling scientific consensus. We can only speculate whether that inconvenient fact played any role in the PNAS decision to endorse the fake dataset.

I had a similar experience in 2019 when several colleagues and I discovered that data used in a paper by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF, since renamed World Athletics, which oversees international track-and-field competition) was riddled with errors. The paper, published in the *British Journal for Sports Medicine* (BJSM), was crucially important because it was the sole peer-reviewed basis for the IAAF's regulations governing the eligibility of certain women with high testosterone.

We provided the editor of BJSM with incontrovertible evidence

In an era when science is used tactically to buttress political stances, there can be incentives to plant politically convenient research in the scientific literature even if that research is flawed.

of the data errors, which were confirmed by the authors of the paper, and we requested that the paper be retracted. The BJSM editor refused — again, inexplicably. We then wrote up our findings and submitted them for publication in BJSM, and our paper was rejected — we were told that our paper was rejected because we were being critical of the journal. We published elsewhere, and our findings were featured in the *New York Times*.

A few years later, when the editorship of BJSM turned over, we approached the new editor and asked him to take another look at the flawed paper. He agreed, and the result was a correction published in 2020. Despite that, the original BJSM paper continued to be used by the IAAF to justify its gender regulations until they were superseded. World Athletics no longer mentions its fatally flawed 2017 paper.

I've seen these dynamics occur many times whenever science meets policy and politics. Some studies that are fatally flawed but politically important are surrounded by a sort of anti-correction Teflon force field that prevents retraction or even acknowledgment of flaws. They are apparently too big to fail.

There is no more prominent example of these dynamics than with the so-called Proximal Origins paper published by *Nature Medicine* in 2020, which said of Covid-19's origins: "We do not believe that any type of laboratory-based scenario is plausible."

Dogged work by investigative journalists and congressional committees revealed that the paper was motivated by U.S. government officials, included an unacknowledged ghost author, and reflected views at odds with those its authors expressed to one another in private. After the paper was published, those same officials and the article's editor at *Nature Medicine* pointed to the paper, apparently to quash discussion of the possibility that the pandemic may have resulted from a research-related incident.

When the congressional oversight committee investigating Covid-19 origins held a hearing earlier this year to explore the publication of the Proximal Origins paper and the broader relationship between scientific journals and the government, two of the three editors of leading journals declined invitations to testify, and the third did not discuss the paper. Such a refusal to publicly defend editorial decisions is difficult to understand.

A wide range of experts (including me) have publicly called for Proximal Origins to be retracted as more evidence emerged that the paper did not accurately reflect the views of its authors but instead was part of an orchestrated effort to shape discussion of the possibility of a lab leak. That effort succeeded until the case for the possibility of a lab leak became much more widely accepted. The paper was hugely influential in creating a misleading narrative. In an era when science is used tactically to buttress political stances, there can be incentives to plant politically convenient research in the scientific literature even if that research is flawed.

The opposite sometimes occurs as well. A recent paper by a group of Italian researchers on extreme weather argued that there is no climate emergency based on their review of the most recent conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. That paper was criticized by the *Guardian* and AFP, which quoted several climate scientists demanding that the paper be retracted. Remarkably, the journal obliged and retracted the paper.

A whistleblower shared with me the reviews and emails associated with the entire process. One reviewer explained that the

authors' claims were "correct" but that the "editors should seriously consider the implications" of publication. The paper was retracted not because of any error in the paper but out of apparent concern for its possible political implications.

Science — the systematic pursuit of knowledge — works because the community adheres to a shared set of norms. One widely discussed formulation, articulated by sociologist Robert K. Merton in the 1930s, holds that, for science to work, four key things have to happen: 1) Scientists must collaborate; 2) recognize that scientific findings are not based on who is making a claim; 3) insist that scientific institutions (such as journals) should be disinterested rather than advocates for a cause; and 4) express skepticism of claims and always subject them to scrutiny.

In the examples I recounted above, each of these norms was violated as journal editors seemingly sought to protect or even weaponize scientific publishing to protect or advance a perspective deemed to be important beyond science. But when self-correction in science is short-circuited, science fails to work. That, in turn, threatens public trust and effective decision-making.

The larger context here reveals a sort of scientific omertà among experts and journalists. Although many scientists have spoken out on Covid-19 origins, many have also faced personal attacks and threats to their careers from both their peers and journalists at major outlets. Climate research may be even worse. My own experiences are well known: I've been attacked by the White House, investigated by Congress, and hounded out of a writing gig at Nate Silver's *538* by efforts with support from a shadowy billionaire — all for the sin of publishing a summary of accurate but unwelcome peer-reviewed research. The social and professional pressures in climate research are immense.

The only way that science in these areas gets back on track is

with stronger leadership recommitted to scientific norms. That means calling things straight, even — and maybe especially — when that might mean retraction of a paper with political significance. Journal editors who do this and find themselves in the proverbial crosshairs will need to be supported by editorial boards and publishers who also have the backbone to respect scientific norms.

Ensuring scientific integrity in published research is a choice. This choice is consequential and goes well beyond the short-term benefits and detriment that result from a particular retraction decision. It's on such choices that enduring public trust in science ultimately rests. ✳

CHARLES LIPSON

The Rise and Fall of Jews on Campus

How the revolution that brought Jews to elite campuses turned against them

THE OPEN, virulent, and sometimes violent eruption of antisemitism at elite universities may be the most daunting social challenge faced by American Jews since the Ku Klux Klan's antisemitic campaign in the 1960s. The Klan had always hated Jews, but its threats—and actions—intensified after Jews emerged as a force in the civil rights movement. Three students, two of them Jewish, were murdered in Philadelphia, Mississippi, during the Freedom Summer in 1964. In 1967, Temple Beth Israel in Jackson, Mississippi, was bombed, along with the home of its rabbi.

American Jews would overcome the intimidation of the Klan. And the civil rights movement would succeed in drawing the United States closer to its founding promise of equality. But today's surge of antisemitism at universities is an outgrowth of a related set of changes that began during the same period in American life.

In the 1960s, elite universities were pressured to do away with long-standing discrimination in admissions and hiring. To diversify their student bodies and faculties, they opened their gates widely to those from different backgrounds. Initially, this opening stressed merit and equal standards, without invidious discrimination. This transformation helped make American universities the best in the world, and it helped make our nation more perfect.

But on its coattails came pockets of far-Left radicalism. The strength of this movement of campus radicals grew over decades as it infiltrated and overhauled university administrations and power centers, emerging as the dominant social force on elite campuses. Today, many universities have morphed into hotbeds of illiberalism and antisemitism.

The latest attacks are dramatically different from those of the Klan, which were confined to the South, led by lower-class whites, and universally condemned by the country's leaders and its major organs of opinion. Today's campaign may be more perilous because it is more pervasive and has considerable support from legacy media outlets and the country's opinion leaders.

Antisemitic attacks at elite universities, mostly in the Northeast and on the West Coast, are cloaked in the language of social justice and led by a coalition of extreme left-wing students, Muslim students, faculty, and outside agitators. They meet with equivocation by most college leaders, who refuse to mete out serious punishment for harassment, intimidation, and open violations of the university's basic rules. The administrators, in their weakness (and, at times, complicity), betray basic academic values and fail to deter future violations.

How can Jews be hated and harassed in the name of social justice? It's a perplexing and disturbing question, one that should challenge the very concept of social justice as the Left conceives it.

Ironically, it is southern universities that have emerged as the positive counterweight in this onslaught against Jews. Many public universities in southern states have been much more active in shutting down violent protests and unauthorized encampments, defending freedom of speech, and protecting Jewish students. Not so at Berkeley, Columbia, Harvard, and their ilk.

It is crucial to distinguish elite universities' pathetic support for today's Jewish students from earlier antisemitism. The old discrimination, which lasted through the mid-1960s, was genteel, a soft glove over an iron fist. It consisted mainly of unstated quotas on Jewish enrollment and stringent limits on faculty recruitment, enforced by university leaders. Those practices matched similar exclusionary policies at WASP country clubs, neighborhoods, and many corporations.

This exclusion was essentially an effort to preserve the power, resources, and social exclusivity of an old ruling class, threatened by a rising meritocratic elite. For Jews, the most prominent symbols of that exclusion were quotas for Jewish students at Ivy League schools and their outright prohibition from restricted clubs, apartment buildings, and neighborhoods. Whole industries, such as commercial banks, insurance, and automobile companies, had no Jewish executives. White-shoe law firms had no Jewish partners. Jews responded by setting up their own small businesses and law firms, which generally grew and prospered.

The Protestant elite's exclusionary efforts collapsed in the mid-1960s for multiple reasons. The most obvious was the passage of major civil rights acts, which prohibited a wide range of discriminatory practices (though not in private clubs and universities). Important as these laws were, the wall of exclusion had begun to cave in earlier. One reason is that, by the 1960s, Jews were increasingly prosperous and well-socialized Americans, not immigrants

Instead of opposition to discrimination, many now favor discrimination — as long as it benefits the right people.

from the shtetls of Eastern Europe or their children raised in urban poverty. The Nazi genocide tainted any open expression of antisemitism and perhaps limited its private expression. Finally, the gatekeepers of upward mobility — top universities — made a fundamental decision to shift toward recruiting and educating the most promising leaders of the next generation, whatever their race, ethnicity, or religion, not simply the children of the current elite.

One mark of this shift was the changing demography of Ivy League universities. Instead of classes dominated by graduates of Andover, Exeter, and Choate, with Roman numerals after their names, the enrollment was now split between top students from prep schools and students from Bronx Science, Shaker Heights, and New Trier. This rising commitment to meritocratic standards paved the way for accepting top students with XX chromosomes at formerly all-male schools.

For Jews at elite universities, those were the golden years. How did it all go downhill?

One reason was the rise of a specific style of identity politics, led by the black-power movement. The emphasis was different from earlier efforts to mobilize groups based on their religion and countries of origin. While those groups were often antagonistic toward one another, they conceived of themselves first and foremost as Americans, bound together by shared patriotism.

The new politics of identity were different. They emphasized victimhood and the demand that others view themselves as oppressors simply because of their identity. They demanded far-reaching compensation for historical wrongs, including positive discrimination and reparations from groups that played no part in that oppression. The shared value of American citizenship was deemphasized along with the goal of equal treatment, regardless of race, creed, or color. They were replaced by demands for race-based privileges and compensatory treatment.

Many universities endorsed the new demands and the sweeping ideology of perpetual guilt. They shifted, subtly, from seeking classes with the highest-achieving students, identified by their SAT scores and GPAs, to seeking classes that, as the argument goes, "looked more like America," identified by percentages that matched those of the overall population. Since that goal could not be achieved by race-blind admissions, institutions such as the University of California began using positive quotas to give a leg up to underrepresented groups.

These compensatory policies were understandable in the aftermath of Jim Crow laws and widespread discrimination, but they lost public support over time. When these forms of positive racial discrimination, including quotas, were outlawed by a 1978 Supreme Court decision, admissions offices switched their method, often away from public view. Many began using racial preferences that amounted to a boost of several hundred SAT points, primarily for African Americans. Graduate and professional schools made similar changes.

Affirmative action was initially accepted by the public because Americans believed, rightly, that the long, sordid legacy of slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow laws meant it was unfair to ask black students in 1970 to compete on identical terms with white students from better schools and more-educated families.

But Americans also believed, wrongly, that these preferences would — as they should — recede as the legacy of legal discrimination itself receded into history. The liberal goal was to restore

a merit-based, race-blind society, including for college admissions and employment, in keeping with America's commitment to equal treatment.

In fact, those racial preferences did not recede. The beneficiaries clung to them, with support from social justice advocates. Sources of that support included universities, which continued to give substantial preferences to underrepresented racial groups, devising admissions tactics to preserve the practice, often secretly, and battling hard against legal challenges. They resisted calls to share data about the scale of their preferences and whether they actually benefited the recipients in the long run. Did more students fail to graduate, for instance, or drop out of their preferred pre-med majors?

The economist Thomas Sowell argued that these racial preferences had those negative effects and actually harmed the putative beneficiaries. His point was proven empirically by the economist Richard Sander and journalist Stuart Taylor in their book *Mismatch*. Students admitted with subpar grades and test scores were more likely to switch to easier majors and either take longer to finish or drop out. Students who expected to become doctors disproportionately switched out of science majors and forfeited their preferred careers.

This regime of "positive" discrimination ended only because of a 2023 Supreme Court decision, *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*. But resistance at universities continues. Progressivism has become entrenched in many humanities divisions — especially those majors with "studies" in their name.

A reflexively anti-Israel attitude is embedded in today's leftist ideology. Among academic believers, that attitude quickly translates to open support for demonstrations that spill over from targeting Israel to smearing and harassing all Jews, who are depicted as "oppressors." Campus bureaucrats who share that ideology find it consistent with their politics to minimally punish demonstrators

and seek work-arounds to avoid the Supreme Court decision mandating nondiscriminatory admissions. They view that evasion of the law as a noble undertaking.

Behind this fight to preserve racial preferences lurks a significant shift in the values of American elites. The liberal ideas on free expression, race, economic systems, and even the nature of America that enabled Jews and other Americans to flourish have been swept away and replaced with a more regressive set of beliefs. Instead of opposition to discrimination, the force that animated the opening of universities in the 1960s, many now favor discrimination—as long as it benefits the right people. They alone will decide who the "right people" are.

Many on the Left no longer believe in the liberal idea of free speech or a racially integrated society where a fundamentally decent America seeks to remedy its historic wrongs and where, to quote Martin Luther King Jr., "my four little children…will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." The Left's rejection of that benign, liberal vision is captured in this progressive response: "Co-opting 'content of character' has become a conservative bludgeon."

How has this shift from liberal values to progressive ones affected Jewish students and faculty? Badly. That's true even though many, perhaps most, American Jews think of themselves as progressive. First, virulent opposition to Israel is a staple of left-wing ideology. That frequently leads to attacks on all Jews and, out of fear, suppresses pro-Israel expression by all students. Second, Jewish admissions to elite universities have been systematically reduced by diminishing the role of high-school grades and standardized test scores in admissions decisions. The same is true, of course, for Asian Americans, who led the successful suit against Harvard and a companion case against the University of North Carolina. Third, on many campuses, administrators have failed to protect students' free-speech rights and Jewish students' rights to safety. To quote an old legal maxim, "Where there is no remedy, there is no right."

On these campuses, there are no rights to safety and free speech because there are no remedies — not even for intimidation, harassment, and threats against Jewish students.

This ideological bias stretches to faculty hiring, where it can be pervasive in the humanities and social sciences. A young Ph.D., known for being pro-Israel can be blackballed the same way Jews were excluded from "restricted" country clubs and co-op apartments, perhaps through the imposition of mandatory diversity statements during hiring.

Finally, Jewish students are harmed by a campus environment that progressives divide into "oppressed" and "oppressors" on the basis of racial identity. That view is a transformed form of Marxism in which racial identities are substituted for "working class" and "capitalist." The "oppressors" are then blamed for the bad outcomes of (specified) minorities. No one bothers to identify the causal link, much less one that current students or their families are responsible for. The only way to lessen the imputed guilt is to adhere to the progressive ideological catechism and make common cause with the leftist coalition on campus. The second-best way is to shut up and keep your head down. That fearful silence is widespread among Jewish students on campus.

There is a third option, however, and more Jews are availing themselves of it. They are avoiding schools with the worst records of antisemitism. Alumni donors, many of them Jewish, are closing their wallets unless universities defend all students' safety and their right to speak freely. Students who have been harassed and intimidated are bringing lawsuits.

This peaceful pushback is badly needed to pressure universities to return to values for which they once strove. Continuing their present course doesn't just harm Jewish students and their rights. It damages the integrity of higher education itself. ✳

SHAUL KELNER

Turning Critical Theory on Its Head

Academia's Palestine exception

CAN WE BLAME the 19-year-olds pitching tents on campus quads for imagining that, as student protesters, they are on the "right side of history?" The phrase became a mantra of spring 2024. Columbia historian Rashid Khalidi took a megaphone to his lips to proclaim it. Faculty at other universities parroted the cliché. Opinion pieces in *Jacobin*, *The Guardian*, and *Chicago Tribune* invoked it. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei posted it on X.

Although Iran's supreme leader is under no obligation to complicate students' understandings of history and their own place in it, university faculty are. We might have taken this opportunity to teach students about the brutalities of the Iranian student revolution in 1979 that put the first ayatollah in power. Closer to home, we could have introduced undergraduates to their forebears at the University of Alabama, where in 1956 white students (with faculty support)

fought racial integration by burning desegregation literature, raising Confederate flags, and preventing fellow students such as Autherine Lucy from entering class, pelting her with eggs and pebbles in protest of her matriculation. Behaviors like this presage the kind that courts today say plausibly constitute "severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive…harassment" of Jews on campus. Free-speech experts can argue whether the behavior of a Columbia student holding a sign identifying her fellow students as "Al-Qassam's next targets" would fall under the same description.

Regardless, our failure as faculty to challenge our protesting students, opting instead to shrink the complicated history of youth activism to a single, unrepresentative (but well-soundtracked) moment of it several decades ago, is symptomatic of a profound *intellectual* failure on our part. Put in academic terms, we, faculty particularly in the humanities and social sciences, have failed to apply critical theory, the predominant method of analysis in our fields, to our present situation and our own participation in it.

Consider the letter of "gratitude and solidarity" that faculty at UC San Diego presented to student protesters. The letter was signed by more than 50 humanities and social science professors, along with two oceanographers, hardly a random distribution of departments. The disciplines that make up the humanities and social sciences are largely if not entirely animated by the Frankfurt School of analysis known as critical theory. Developed in the early-20th century by (mostly Jewish) philosophers and sociologists such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Wilhelm Reich, and Herbert Marcuse at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, critical theory is, according to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "defined by its aim of contributing to the emancipatory transformation of society by critically reflecting on the ways in which thinking itself can be distorted by structures

of domination." This is an admittedly jargon-heavy way of saying that critical theorists try to figure out how oppression gets produced and reproduced within and across societies.

Critical theorists look for patterns of oppression and the power dynamics that perpetuate those patterns. The now-household terms of *structural* and *systemic* oppression are native to this method of analysis, which is why scholars who think about racism or sexism as structural or systemic are called, respectively, critical race theorists or critical gender theorists. In their analysis, discriminatory practices grow out of power inequities, reflect them, reinforce them, and reproduce them. These power relationships also shape the way people think. Inequitable systems produce ideologies that justify the inequities. The vicious cycle sustains itself. This is how fascism and other totalitarian systems perpetuate themselves—by redeveloping theories that justify their existence.

Such notions arouse controversy more outside the academy than in it. Intellectual currents change and this one might too, but at present, this is standard fare in graduate programs and academic journals. If you want to read about systemic or structural racism, for instance, open the *American Journal of Public Health*, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Annual Review of Criminology*, *Annual Review of Psychology*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, *Gender and Society*, *Journal of Victorian Studies*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, or any number of other publications up to and past the *Yale Law Journal*.

In almost every academic department at almost every research university in the country, you can find scholars investigating or engaging the world, or adjusting graduate training and undergraduate instruction, based on the premise that we have to reckon with past systems of inequality in order both to *understand* and *improve* the present. Critical theory is at once a method of analysis and a strategy for social change.

And here is the root of the intellectual failure in the humanities and social sciences today. Regardless of whether one thinks critical

> In my discipline, if researchers were to notice the same discriminatory patterns on so many different campuses and at so many different levels within each university system, their starting premise would be that the problem is systemic.

theory is a good or bad approach to analyzing oppression, the critical theorists' failure to apply it to the study of Jewish oppression means that they end up reproducing this oppression rather than challenging it. This is why they fail to see Zionism for what it is: critical antisemitism theory.

Given that Jews have been subjected to more than their share of inequities in the past, one would expect that scholars would apply this same approach when studying the status and treatment of Jews. If only the critical theorist faculty who study race knew that, back around the same time that W.E.B. Du Bois was offering a socio-philosophical account of the American Negro's struggle to break out of the system of racial oppression, a cadre of Jews, mostly socialists and disaffected liberals in Europe, were analyzing their own oppression in terms of systemic inequities. Like Du Bois they were frustrated that step-by-step reform and supposed emancipation hadn't brought the social, economic, and political equality that they had hoped for.

After decades of their governments going back and forth

debating whether to grant Jews full citizenship rights, some of the more sociologically minded started pointing out that the very notion that Gentiles arrogated to themselves the right to decide whether Jews could or should be equal suggested the problem's systemic or structural nature. It was a fundamentally inequitable power dynamic that would never end as long as Jews lived under Christian or Muslim authorities. In their view, when approaching governments that have crosses or crescents emblazoned on their flags, Jews should not come as supplicants begging for rights. They should enter as equals. Create a country and then meet ambassador to ambassador. Leon Pinsker called it "self-emancipation." Later it was called Zionism.

Different thinkers analyzed the structural dimensions differently. Ber Borochov, in his Marxism, placed greater weight on socioeconomic factors. Nachman Syrkin, likewise. Ze'ev Jabotinsky attributed it to the inherent dynamics of majority-minority relations: "the bedrock fact that we are everywhere a minority." In this, they presage today's critical race theorists more than either CRT's advocates or opponents would care to admit. Neither camp wants to speak of the position of Jews today as still constrained by ongoing legacies of systemic oppression. But is this a tenable position?

For most of the past millennium and a half, two religious civilizational empires divided the Western world among themselves. Christendom and Islam each shared the unquestioned assumption that theirs was the right to rule. Each birthed academies and intellectual traditions that reflected and reinforced these assumptions. Under neither order was the religious, political, social, economic, moral, or human equality of Jews assumed. Rather, even as Christian and Muslim empires raised armies to establish their superiority over the other, they both subscribed to supersessionist theologies vis-à-vis Judaism. They took it for granted that Jews were — and were supposed to be — subordinate. They should not wield power over Muslims or Christians. Terms such as *dhimmi* (under Muslim rule) and *servi camerae regis* (under Christian rule) tried to codify the natural order in law.

And when Jews did manage to rise above their station, how was this challenge to the proper way of the world explained? Consider the system of anti-Jewish polemics that these cultures produced in response.

If Jews gain wealth, it is not deserved, but ill-gotten. Greed. Usury. Miserliness. Shystering. Shylocking. Controlling the banks.

If Jews become empowered politically, it is because they don't play by the rules. Conspiracy. Cabal. Puppet-mastering. Serving other masters. Dual loyalties. Controlling the press. Controlling the government.

There is a common thread: the illegitimacy of Jewish equality. An illegitimacy so dangerous to the natural order that it's repugnant. The theme persists into the secular-not-secular Christian and Islamic worlds of our own day.

Zionism names this power dynamic and rejects it. It is the revolutionary praxis emerging from a critical antisemitism theory. When humanities and social science faculty ignore this, and instead frame Zionism as the exemplar of systemic colonialism, imperialism, and genocide rather than as a response to these evils, they are themselves reinforcing and reproducing the systemic power dynamic that has for centuries kept Jews in their subordinated place.

Critical theory starts from the premise that systems of power do not simply disappear or dismantle themselves. They operate in and through societal institutions. Universities do not stand outside this dynamic. They are part of it. They are not immune from power relations. They are thoroughly implicated in them, by virtue of their own practices of knowledge production and the ideas that they create and spread.

Our contemporary intellectual failure to analyze Jewish oppression and Zionism by these same standards is a function of how steeped our universities are in the shared Christian, Islamic, and even Greco-Roman Western civilizational context that has never

been able to extricate Jewish subordination from its own structure. Living in this culture makes it difficult for us as faculty to recognize, much less critique, how this civilizational inheritance shapes our own assumptions about Jews' proper place.

Not convinced? Just listen to the faculty assurances that students in the pro-Palestine encampments stand on "the right side of history." Where does this odd phrase come from? It has an intellectual history, after all. The phrase derives from Marx's notion (adapted from Hegel) that history is governed by objective laws and progresses toward an ultimate universalistic liberation. Only because history is teleological — because it is heading toward a known destination — can it have a "right" and "wrong" side. But neither Hegel nor Marx had any place for Jews at their historical culminations. For Hegel, Judaism was just one flawed step in the evolution toward an Absolute Spirit. Marx, who identified Judaism with "huckstering," envisioned "abolishing the empirical essence of Judaism," thereby making the Jew "impossible." He called this the "emancipation of society from Judaism."

The very language of "right side of history" is drawn from the ideas of Western philosophers who envisioned glorious futures untainted by Jews or Judaism. It is not a far leap from these 19th-century Marxist and Hegelian utopias to today's 21st-century visions of setting history right by "decolonizing" Palestine "from the river to the sea."

Our great universities are heirs to a civilizational legacy and reproduce its anti-Jewish pathologies unconsciously. What is the pattern playing out before our very eyes? Columbia University deans responsible for creating inclusive communities text each other to mock Jewish students' concerns about discrimination. Advocates of speech codes discover the virtues of free speech specifically for Arabic words and English phrases that get shouted even louder after Jewish students say they hear them as code for killing Jews. And when universities do try to discipline students who have harassed Jewish classmates, occupied buildings, and vandalized property, members of the faculty contest the penalties and call for amnesty.

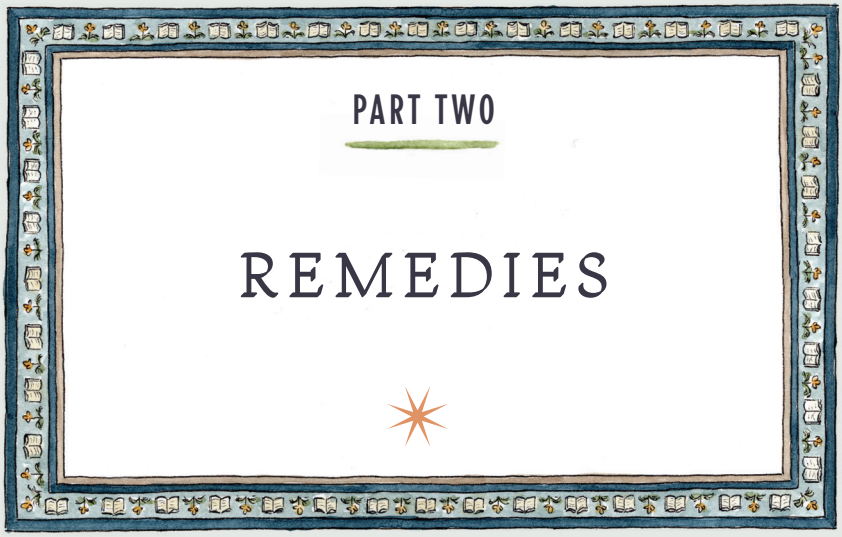
Can anyone make the case that these behaviors are disconnected?

That we are seeing coincidence and not pattern? Or that this is the result of a few "bad apples"? No sociologist worthy of the name would offer such an individualistic account. In my discipline, if researchers were to notice the same discriminatory patterns on so many different campuses and at so many different levels within each university system, their starting premise would be that the problem is systemic.

Or at least researchers would do this if the systemic problem did not implicate scholarship at its roots.

Rehearse the litany of abuses and double standards against Jewish and Israeli students and faculty in campuses this past year. These are all examples of structural inequity, where the ruling regime seeks to justify and maintain its power dynamic. How else to explain the exclusion of Jews from the category of "the historically oppressed" in which all other, younger minorities have an undisputed space? Those parts of the academy that have most embraced critical theory have failed to critique the ways in which their own discourse participates in historically rooted, socially entrenched power dynamics that subordinate and marginalize Jews.

It all is a rather ironic circle, and universities have historically provided the centrifugal force. In the 1880s, students mobilized (with faculty support) to create Germany's first Christian nationalist student associations. Building off their success in rallying for a petition campaign demanding that Kaiser Wilhelm roll back Jewish political rights, young scholars created the Association of German Students in 1881, which led to the proliferation of similar associations and the strengthening of nationalist student fraternities across the German-speaking countries. At the University of Vienna in that year, a photo was taken of a fraternity initiation. One of the students can be seen with a bandage on his cheek. Two years later, he would leave the fraternity because of its entrenched and persistent antisemitism. His name was Theodor Herzl. ✳



PART TWO

REMEDIES

Campuses Need Viewpoint Diversity. How Can They Foster It?

A conversation with

CAROLINE MEHL

APIR *Associate Publisher Ariella Saperstein sat down with Constructive Dialogue Institute (CDI) co-founder and executive director Caroline Mehl to learn about the nonprofit's leadership amid evolving campus-speech challenges.*

Ariella Saperstein: Hi, Caroline! Tell us what led you to co-found the Constructive Dialogue Institute.

Caroline Mehl: I'm the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors. In my mid-20s, I became deeply curious about the psychology that underlies how human beings and societies can get to a point where they are willing to commit acts of genocide. I found a large body of research demonstrating a clear path that people follow, from demonizing others to dehumanizing them to being willing to commit violence against them—and convincing themselves that doing so is morally justified. I was becoming

interested in this research around 2014–2015, just as versions of these trends were gaining momentum in the United States and other Western democracies.

After watching the 2016 election, the divisions it revealed about our society, and the threat these divisions posed to our democracy, psychologist Jonathan Haidt and I founded the Constructive Dialogue Institute. We are working to equip Americans with the skills to bridge divides, primarily by helping colleges and universities transform their campus climates into pluralistic learning environments that support dialogue across lines of difference. Since launching in 2017, we've worked with more than 600 campuses in all 50 states, serving university presidents, administrators, staff, faculty, and more than 100,000 students. This fall, approximately 25 campuses are rolling out our programming to all incoming students.

Saperstein: A lot of the work in viewpoint diversity seems to focus on encouraging people simply to listen more to others' stories and experiences. And while it's true that there are people who are unwilling to engage in conversations with those who disagree with them, the more widespread problem is that people listen to other views but then demonize those who hold them. How do we address that?

Mehl: Listening is indeed important, but it only works if certain preconditions are in place. There are three I'd recommend.

First, you need intellectual humility: the willingness to acknowledge the limits of your knowledge and that you might actually be wrong. You have to be willing to question your assumptions and revise your beliefs in the face of new evidence. Otherwise, it isn't really a conversation. You're not really listening; you're just waiting for the chance to state your own views.

The second is metacognition, in particular, reflecting on how your views have been formed. Our life experiences and the narra-

tives we consume throughout our lives shape our beliefs and our interpretations of the world. These are reinforced by our social communities, which typically share our views. People need to reflect on where their views and values have come from so they can recognize how subjective they are — how much we are all the products of circumstances. This realization then helps people to recognize that having a different set of life experiences can lead others to develop perspectives that differ from their own.

Finally, once you recognize that people with profoundly different views are often shaped by their life experiences, empathy can allow you to place yourself in those circumstances to better understand where these people are coming from.

So yes, we all need to listen more — but with open minds, open hearts, and a willingness to question our own assumptions.

Saperstein: How does all of this relate to the way that campuses have erupted since October 7, including the struggles that many university administrators have in being able to distinguish between constructive disagreement and free speech, on one hand, and, on the other, genuinely antisemitic speech and protests that foment hatred of Israel and Jews?

Mehl: There are three key factors that contributed to these challenges.

The first is legal ambiguity. Universities must uphold their commitment to free speech while ensuring compliance with Title VI, which requires them to address discrimination based on race, color, or national origin, particularly when such discrimination creates a hostile environment that interferes with students' access to educational opportunities. But from a legal perspective, it can be challenging to determine the boundaries between free speech and Title VI violations. One person might find certain speech antisemitic, while another person views it as reasonable political speech. For example, there were Jewish students chanting "From

Let's not forget the real purpose of the university, which is education. Protecting the free expression of odious views isn't the real objective of a university.

the river to the sea." Different people have very different associations with the term *intifada*. Being able to determine the exact line between anti-discrimination law and free-speech law is tricky.

The second is that the protests themselves were diverse in nature and effect. I've heard stories about antisemitic incidents as well as completely peaceful protesters at schools where there were large-scale encampments. It's difficult to disentangle these different pieces and actors.

Last, a lot of universities didn't have appropriate policies in place to handle these types of incidents. Many campuses were trying to navigate a complex, dynamic situation in real time.

Saperstein: But even if speech might be protected, a university can still criticize it, right?

Mehl: Absolutely. You can allow speech and also make clear that you find it reprehensible. The rules are also different at most private universities, since most aren't legally bound to follow the First Amendment.

Saperstein: How can institutions demonstrate a commitment to diverse perspectives, which might even include odious views, while also drawing clear red lines around what kind of behavior reflects their values as institutions, and what doesn't?

Mehl: Schools need to create and enforce policies that affirm their institution's commitment to free speech and the open exchange of ideas, while making it clear that a wide range of views, even offensive ones, will be tolerated and protected. They also need to define their anti-discrimination policies and which speech and behavior cross the line. Everyone on campus needs to be aware of these policies, and schools need to enforce them in a content-neutral way. They can't be inconsistent or hypocritical, depending on the topic.

But let's not forget the real purpose of the university, which is education. Protecting the free expression of odious views isn't the real objective of a university. The real objective is creating academic learning environments where people are encouraged to engage in rigorous intellectual debate, where students are able to discuss complex questions and learn from one another. Conversations on campus should be driven by high-quality evidence and argumentation, as opposed to intentionally provocative or hateful speech. Universities can model that type of rigorous debate by bringing in people who have very different views from one another, showing students what it looks like to have serious disagreements while treating one another with respect, and maintaining relationships despite those differences.

Saperstein: A growing number of universities have decided to no longer put out statements on political issues. This change can feel simultaneously gratifying and maddening to the Jewish community and to anyone who has watched university statements proliferate over the years. The frustration is that universities have seemed very comfortable making statements — until Israel was involved. Should colleges commit to institutional neutrality, as argued in the University of Chicago's "Kalven Report"?

Mehl: While I understand the frustration about the hypocrisy of deciding to now stop making statements, I do think that

institutional neutrality is the best policy, especially for universities. Again: The purpose of the university is to create the conditions and space for intellectual debate, discovery, and exploration. Once a university puts its thumb on the scale on an issue, it stifles debate.

Saperstein: How do diversity efforts fit into this? Critics argue that although it may be well-intentioned, the contemporary formulation of DEI actually makes institutions worse by selecting only for certain kinds of diversity and ignoring others, such as political or religious diversity. What can scientific research into diversity tell us about this work?

Mehl: First, DEI is a very large and diverse field itself, and it's hard to generalize about it. That being said, a specific strain of DEI that's gained popularity on campuses in recent years tends to go against the research on intergroup conflict. This particular approach to DEI tends to rely on a simplistic set of ideas that divide people into different groups of victims and oppressors, which can reinforce divisiveness rather than resolve it. Human beings are naturally, evolutionarily tribalistic: We are the descendants of ancestors who were able to survive by banding together with our own group to defeat the opposition. But we're not tribalistic all the time. Circumstances matter. Our tribalistic impulses can be triggered when group differences are emphasized, or when there's a sense that different groups are competing for scarce resources. As a result, this kind of work needs to be done very carefully.

Unfortunately, the research shows that many DEI trainings are either ineffective or even backfire, because they trigger tribalism and make people feel they're being coerced into beliefs or behaviors that they resist.

Saperstein: This confusion over whether DEI programs help or hinder intergroup relations—whether they actually strengthen

Universities need to promote relationships among different identity groups, for students and for faculty.

inclusion efforts or further divide people—is precisely why Jewish groups are split over whether the solution is simply to add Jews and antisemitism training to DEI programs. Some of these programs are contributing to a climate that is antagonistic toward Jews and Zionism; would adding Jews as a group category just give cover to programs that are, ultimately, destructive?

Mehl: The Jewish people defy the simplistic models that show up in a lot of DEI trainings. We're racially and ethnically diverse, and we've been oppressed both when we've been perceived as powerless and when people think we have too much power. These categories just don't make sense with respect to Jews. Including Jews would necessitate asking fundamental questions about the model and assumptions some of these programs rest on. So, in some cases, where DEI programming is stronger, it could fit in naturally. And in other places, integrating antisemitism education into DEI could force institutions to confront the limitations of more simplistic diversity models and cause them to rethink their approach.

Saperstein: So what's the alternative? How can we include marginalized voices while avoiding the divisiveness that DEI programs often succumb to?

Mehl: Let's begin by acknowledging that this work is really difficult. But the research points us toward some universal principles for

how to build pluralistic environments where people with meaningfully different backgrounds, beliefs, and values can live, learn, and work together.

First, focus on what's shared. Help people find what they have in common. For example: Intentionally housing together first-year students who have very different backgrounds provides them with opportunities to build meaningful relationships by recognizing what they have in common, not just what differentiates them. So does creating an overarching shared identity associated with the university, like learning school songs or cheers, wearing school colors or clothes, feeling connected to alumni — these make other differences feel less salient. Cooperating over a shared purpose — for example, through acts of serving in the local community or on campus — can also build these kinds of connections.

Second, support cross-cutting relationships. There has been a recent emphasis on things like affinity groups, identity-based housing and clubs, even separate graduation ceremonies. It is important to give people space to feel comfortable with others in their own identity group — I wouldn't suggest eliminating Hillels, for example. But universities also need to promote relationships among different identity groups, for students and for faculty. Schools can encourage people from different groups to work together, whether it's through co-teaching courses across departments, convening diverse groups of student leaders to engage in service or travel together — anything that gives people the opportunity to build authentic relationships outside of the issues that divide them.

Finally, offer opportunities to learn about one another, and teach people how to navigate their differences. This includes educational programming about different traditions and cultures to foster respect and understanding. But on top of that, people need to learn the basic practices of how they can navigate their differences and engage in difficult conversations more effectively. This

is exactly what we do at the Constructive Dialogue Institute—we provide scalable educational programming to equip students with the skills to engage in dialogue across their differences.

Saperstein: What role do you think Jewish funders, leaders, and organizations should be playing on or off campus to elevate new approaches and to model viewpoint diversity and constructive disagreement?

Mehl: Jewish organizations are well positioned to lead on these issues. There's a long history of rigorous intellectual debate within Jewish culture. At the same time, the Jewish people have historically been the quintessential other. We're able to understand the intellectual value of viewpoint diversity and open inquiry, while also recognizing the moral importance of treating others with dignity and respect.

Saperstein: What has been most surprising to you in your work and your research into diversity?

Mehl: Two things have surprised me, and they're somewhat related. The first is that many of us have an impression that the United States is deeply divided and that campuses are in crisis. There is, of course, truth to that—otherwise I wouldn't be dedicating my life to working on these issues. But that narrative also obscures the reality of how many Americans are actually moderate and reasonable, how many want to move past this divisiveness, are willing to compromise, and are willing to work with people across the aisle. In general, people are actually more polarized in terms of what they think the other side believes—on average, our opinions on particular issues are not as far apart as most people think. This offers us a real opportunity to move past the toxic, divisive, political moment.

The second thing I've learned, which is fascinating, is that

even extremists can dramatically change their positions on issues. There's a famous example of a black civil rights activist and musician named Daryl Davis who has single-handedly convinced more than 200 members of the KKK to leave the Klan. He did so by having deep conversations and building personal relationships with them. This highlights that even people who seem the most far gone have the possibility of coming back, if you treat them with dignity and respect. I encourage people to remember that as they navigate this challenging election season.

Saperstein: A perfect, hopeful note to end on. ✳

BRENT GOLDFARB & DAVID A. KIRSCH

Arguments for the Sake of Collegiate Heaven

New centers of inquiry are the first step to restoring campus ideals

MONG THE MANY ethical precepts coined by the Jewish sages, one of the most revolutionary and instructive was "argument for the sake of heaven." For the sages, the greatest example of such an argument was that between the study halls of Hillel and the study halls of Shammai. Two academies, each steeped in erudition, engaged in debates over matters great and small, but in pursuit of a shared goal: to serve God. By praising, as they do, the nature of the debate between the schools of Hillel and Shammai, the sages exalt the process of learning above truth itself. It is the *spirit of inquiry*, rather than the passage of judgment, that makes a place of learning heavenly.

Anyone who has engaged in the act of teaching knows this to be true, though the labor of inquiry is often imperfect and unassured. This is why leaders of any education system find it challenging to foster environments of productive and respectful disagreement. The sages sanctified this cultivation, and we in the academy would do well to follow in their footsteps.

Universities are meant to treasure reason, dialogue, and open-mindedness, to embrace argument over proclamation. At their best, they are halls of intellectual engagement built on reason and warmth. No wonder Jews have thrived at universities.

But lately this spirit has slipped. An ideological shift has reduced universities from havens of inquiry to places increasingly characterized by incivility and rancor. It happens that many of those harmed by this shift are Jews.

Last spring, the University of Maryland announced a set of guest speakers for its annual Social Justice Alliance Symposium. The event, held in collaboration with Bowie State University, is an effort to memorialize 1st Lt. Richard W. Collins III, a black Bowie State student who was murdered in a racist attack on Maryland's campus in 2017.

The murder of Collins appalled our community because it was not only a hate crime (the murder led to strengthened hate-crime legislation in the State of Maryland), but a crime against the university. Physical peril on a college campus is a grave institutional failure — especially if it's rooted in one's identity.

Reform was needed, and the university took measures to broaden the range of perspectives in our classrooms and lecture halls, especially those perspectives that may have been historically underrepresented. We supported these efforts. But one aspect of the university's response, however well-intentioned, has led it to interfere with its own mission.

The joint symposium was founded as part of "an unprecedented alliance to promote social justice." One reason it is "unprecedented": It exceeds the role of the institutions that house it. Universities have little business weighing in on public opinion and policy.

This year, our university threw its weight behind Amanda Seales, giving her a platform at the symposium as part of its effort to advance social justice. Seales is an actress who last fall doubled downs on her claims that Israel is a white-supremacist state and on her unwillingness to condemn Hamas. Among other things, she claimed, "They're trying to say that Hamas, as a culture, is of terrorism, it is of bad apples. And I think that from what we're seeing, that simply is just not a fair assessment. And even if there were a Hamasian that were a bad apple, that doesn't speak to the whole organization. . . . Ultimately, Hamas has been presented as like 'big, bad wolf.'"

In a letter we wrote to the administration, we questioned their decision to invite her on the university's platform. We were invited to meet with university leaders, including President Darryll Pines, Chancellor Jay Perman, and the university's general counsel. In our conversation, they expressed confidence in the direction of the symposium.

The same day as that meeting, Representative Jamie Raskin, a Maryland Democrat who is Jewish, visited campus to deliver an annual endowed lecture within the physics department. His remarks were titled "Democracy, Autocracy, and the Threat to Reason in the 21st Century." He would not deliver them. Shortly after he began to speak, anti-Zionist student protesters shouted him down, chanting that he was "complicit in genocide."

Raskin attempted to reason with the protesters. He tried to engage them in dialogue. But they were uninterested in an exchange of ideas; they wanted only to drown out his voice. Pines eventually stepped in to end the event. He observed afterward: "What you saw play out actually was democracy and free speech

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and academic freedom. From our perspective as a university, these are the difficult conversations that we should be having."

But what happened cannot be called a conversation. As leading free-speech organizations have clarified, a "heckler's veto" is not free speech; it's a violation of it. Worse, Raskin was not shouted down because of what the hecklers feared he might say, but because of who he is: like almost all Jews, a Zionist. His identity disqualified him from delivering any message.

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The pursuit of truth demands more than just the inclusion of diverse perspectives, though that is an essential ingredient. It requires an environment in which those perspectives can engage in good faith and on equal footing. If the university begins to exclude voices based on identity, it strays from its essential mission. So, too, if the university grants a featured platform to a certain ideology at the expense of others. When it does so, the university distances itself from its foundation as a place of inquiry. Some facts will remain uncovered, some interpretations will not be considered. Only by embracing multiple perspectives fairly can the university uphold its role as a space where ideas are tested, challenged, refined, and proven — not merely proclaimed or silenced.

Business schools, which prepare future leaders with the tools of reasoned and pragmatic decision-making in competitive environments, are natural footholds for evidence-based inquiry on campus.

Two weeks after Raskin's lecture and our meeting with administration leadership, we sat in the audience at the Social Justice Alliance Symposium. As we listened to Amanda Seales, we were struck by an irony: We were there listening to the voice of someone who likely would not tolerate our own. It is not necessarily a sin of the university for Seales and her beliefs to be granted stage time on our campus. But it is wrong for her voice to be legitimized by the official endorsement of its "justice," especially when her statements are demonstrably intolerant and untrue. Far from a heavenly argument, hers is the kind that needs to be brought down to earth and rooted in facts.

We are fortunate that our department within the business school is a living exercise in the spirit of inquiry. We had taken these values for granted, but now we see that we need to assert them. Our group is ideologically and religiously diverse, but we agree on the importance of rigorous empirical methods. Our disagreements are spirited but bound by friendship and our scholarly ideals.

Together with several faculty members from our school, we are working to help our university broadly refocus on scholarship, inquiry, and liberal democratic values through the establishment of a new home for them: Programs of Excellence for Fact-Based Open Debate and Inquiry. Our goals are expansive. For the university to

fulfill its role in society, every member of its community (faculty, student, and staff) must understand the foundational values of inquiry: reason, dialogue, and open-mindedness. We believe that refocusing the university on its core mission will require rolling up our sleeves to work within our community. Business schools, which prepare future leaders with the tools of reasoned and pragmatic decision-making in competitive environments, are natural footholds for evidence-based inquiry on campus.

Our strategy has two pillars. It draws from successful programs to establish centers of inquiry on campuses around the country, including those led by the Foundation for Excellence in Higher Education and similar initiatives at public universities, such as Arizona State, UT Austin, and others. Through course offerings, fellowships, lectures, and other programming, centers like these nurture campus communities rooted in the values, habits, and practices of scholarship that used to define the university. At their best, they offer an ideal image against which the broader university can be redrawn.

The first pillar of our strategy is to broaden our coalition, which starts in the business school. Our tactics include courses, colloquia, conferences, and pedagogical training. We are engaged in a series of efforts to identify like-minded scholars on campus, including by founding a Heterodox Academy chapter at the University of Maryland and organizing lunches and other gatherings for interested faculty and staff on campus. Ultimately, we will support faculty committed to these fundamental values through grants for course development and relevant research. In addition, we are planning a conference to generate dialogue on the grounding principles of open debate and inquiry in the coming year. To build support in the broader Maryland community, we are organizing a series of salon dinners and webinars, as the university must hear from its donors and alumni on the necessity of this work.

The second pillar is to lead through example by instilling

these values in the next generation of business leaders. Our classroom role as faculty members is to teach students to practice, hone, and master critical inquiry.

Another member of our coalition is teaching a course to help students learn to engage in rational and respectful discourse. The course combines the basics of social psychology with practical guidance on fact-based open discourse. Sessions are structured around a debate; students prepare for both sides and are randomly assigned a position just prior to the debate itself. In this way, we compel the students to understand each side. The class then debriefs together, with a focus on elements of critical thinking, challenging assumptions, and future solutions. The class does not shy from emotionally charged issues. The class met on October 7, 2024, and the session began by providing background on the conflict, emphasizing the contradiction between, on the one hand, the foundational university principles of reason, dialogue, and open-mindedness and, on the other, the silencing of voices through slaughter. The students were then tasked with generating new recommendations to combat hate on campus, specifically how to approach this problem from different positions. Half were to take the perspective of university administration, and half the perspective of students.

We've organized a series of other events to reach a broader range of students, including the screening of a film that spotlights efforts to bring together in conversation people who disagree on flashpoint issues, a conversation about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and a panel examining the impact of social media on the promotion of extremism and zero-sum mindsets.

Our efforts are a model for faculty at other universities to refocus on fact-based discourse. We believe there is a silent majority of scholars that wants to return to debate on the facts that a speaker presents, not the identity of the speaker. Standing up, speaking out, and arguing for the sake of heaven, these are the values we seek to instill in the university and the young leaders who will represent them beyond our walls.

By upholding the principles of academic freedom and diversity of thought, we can ensure that the university remains a trusted institution that serves the public interest. ✳

DANA W. WHITE

Why HBCUs Are Key to Fighting Antisemitism

Mending the friendship between black and Jewish Americans

I AM GOING to be like a pit bull. That is the way I am going to be against the Jews. I am going to bite the tail of the honkies." So spoke Khalid Abdul Muhammad of the Nation of Islam to a crowd of nearly 2,000 at Howard University in the spring of 1994. It wasn't the first time Muhammad had been invited to speak on Howard's campus. As the *Washington Post* reported at the time, "In the last few weeks, Howard has drawn national media attention as a series of visiting speakers and a few students made antisemitic and racist remarks." Howard's president, Franklyn G. Jenifer, resigned three days later amid the controversy, leading at least one student to worry, "We probably will get an Uncle Tom now who will stymie free speech on campus."

But free speech had already been stymied on campus several weeks earlier. A lecture by Yale historian David Brion Davis had been canceled for fear it would cause unrest. Davis, the Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *The Problem of Slavery* trilogy, had arguably done more than any other historian of his generation to inspire the cultural reckoning over America's slave-centric past. What made Davis, the great scholar-champion of abolition, persona non grata on campus? As the *New York Times* reported, university administrators feared that he "would be subjected to heckling and harassment because he is Jewish."

There is something telling in the fact that the pathology of contemporary campus antisemitism we are now seeing was foreshadowed at Howard 30 years ago. Whether it is the drug epidemic, hip-hop culture, or antisemitism, black culture—the positive, the negative, and the neutral—forecasts the future of American culture. The sad truth is that anti-Israel and anti-Jewish sentiment infiltrated certain HBCU campuses long ago, and black–Jewish relations have not recovered. Writers such as David Christopher Kaufman and Al-Tony Gilmore have suggested that it is the absence of Jewish students at HBCUs that explains why there have only been protests rather than encampments on these campuses. Howard students, for instance, joined the encampment at nearby George Washington University, known for its large Jewish population.

I witnessed the change in campus attitudes toward Jews in my own family. My parents, who had attended Howard in the 1960s, had very warm and positive feelings for the Jewish community. My brother attended an HBCU in the late '80s and graduated with a very different view. So what happened in the 25 years between my parents' experience at Howard University and my brother's experience at an HBCU?

My parents arrived at Howard with different backgrounds. My father grew up in Charlottesville, Virginia, under the South's Jim Crow laws. My mother grew up in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood

in Philadelphia. While their experiences with Jews differed, they shared a genuine affection and admiration for the Jewish community and Israel.

My father heard stories about William Goodwin, a Jewish doctor and the former head of the University of Virginia Hospital. In the 1930s, Dr. Goodwin promoted my grandfather from a janitor to a manager, making him the first black man to hold a leadership position at the hospital. As a result, my grandfather was responsible for hiring many local black people, making him one of the most powerful black men in Charlottesville. My grandfather was grateful to Dr. Goodwin and admired his commitment to challenging discrimination.

Born in 1896, my grandfather became a faithful patron of Sears, Roebuck and Co. Its owner, Julius Rosenwald, was a Jewish philanthropist who had been persuaded by his two friends, Marcus Goldman and Samuel Sachs, to endow the Tuskegee Institute, the first institution of higher learning for African Americans. Together, Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington built more than 5,000 schools for black children throughout the rural South. Notable graduates of Rosenwald schools include Maya Angelou, John Lewis, and Medgar Evers (all of whom today have schools named after them). My father arrived at Howard University knowing that Jews were partners in the struggle against Jim Crow and that they had invested not only in his family but in black communities throughout the South.

My mother's church was in an old synagogue building. Every day before class, she and her classmates recited scriptures from the Old Testament. After school, she enjoyed jaunts to Mrs. Fisher's deli for a beloved kosher pickle. More than 70 years later, my mother still fondly recounts the kindness of her neighbors, the Freedman brothers. These five bachelors owned various local businesses and doted on my mother. They paid her to run errands and surprised her with saltwater taffy when they returned from Atlantic City. She had close and personal relationships with Jewish people who were part of her daily life.

In the 1980s, HBCUs were havens for black excellence, but they became breeding grounds for revenge history or alternative narratives.

Arriving at Howard University during the height of the civil rights movement, my parents had professors who were Jewish — many of whom had fled the Nazis in the 1930s and '40s and continued their scholarship at Howard and other HBCUs. They even had Jewish classmates who were kept out of predominantly white colleges and universities because of discriminatory quotas. My parents felt a sense of shared purpose with their Jewish peers, and it was on HBCU campuses that blacks and Jews worked together to dismantle Jim Crow and all forms of racial discrimination. My parents observed and benefited from the Jewish ethos of continually striving to improve the world, even at their peril.

Following the civil rights movement, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, and the 1968 riots, middle-class and professional blacks started moving away from cities and into predominantly white suburbs. By the early 1980s, the offshoring of manufacturing jobs had a devastating effect on black men who had only completed high school or vocational education. Additionally, the crack-cocaine epidemic and the accompanying rise in crime affected most black families and ravaged our communities. By the 1990s, the results of President Lyndon B. Johnson's failed War on Poverty had devastated the black family. In 1950, the percentages of white and black women who were married were roughly the same, 67 percent and 64 percent, respectively. By 1998, the percentage of married white women had dropped by 13 percent to 58 percent while the marriage rate among black women had dropped by more than three times that rate, to 36 percent. The declines for males

were parallel: 12 percent for white men and 36 percent for black men. The growth of the welfare state under President Johnson crippled black families. Housing programs and food assistance were designed to support a mother and a child, replacing a black husband and father with a government-issued check. These policies made it more economically advantageous to be a single mother than a wife and mother.

Owing to the exodus of the black professional class and the broken promises of LBJ's Great Society, the most vulnerable black Americans were susceptible to radicalization by militant groups such as the Black Liberation Army (BLA), a faction of the Black Panthers. The BLA promoted killing police officers and confiscating funds from capitalists and imperialists to support their revolution. This rhetoric formed the basis for Louis Farrakhan's anti-Israel, antisemitic, Jew-hating platform. He fed the black community antisemitic tropes: Jews were responsible for the transatlantic slave trade; Jews controlled the economy, the government, and the press; Jews pulled the strings on black leaders. While it was often laced with antisemitic venom, the rebellious, empowering message that Farrakhan delivered captivated students who were the beneficiaries of the civil rights movement.

However, Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam did not confine their message to the cities or its prison ministry; he delivered it to elite black students at the nation's most prestigious HBCUs, including Howard, Hampton, Morehouse, and Spelman. His rhetoric found disciples among black America's best and brightest. Before an earlier Khalid Muhammad speech, a Howard Law School student named Malik Zulu Shabazz, led the audience in a call and response:

"Who caught and killed Nat Turner?" he shouted.

"Jews," some in the crowd responded.

"Who was it that controls the Federal Reserve? Who?"

"Jews."

In the 1980s, HBCUs were havens for black excellence, but they became breeding grounds for revenge history or alternative narratives. Inside the classroom, students learned about the outstanding achievements of blacks across multiple disciplines: the sciences, medicine, politics, and economics—accomplishments that had been left out of their public-school textbooks. During school breaks, my brother would tell me about black pioneers like Marcus Garvey, an early black nationalist and Pan-Africanist, Madam C.J. Walker, the first self-made female millionaire in America, and others not included in my public-school curriculum, even during Black History Month. As a result of these new facts and perspectives, my brother and other HBCU students were more open to messages casting Jews as the oppressor rather than the oppressed.

Outside the classroom, young men from the Nation of Islam sold *Final Call*, the Nation of Islam's official newspaper. They distributed pamphlets criticizing the white man's capitalist system—a system responsible for slavery, destroying black communities with drugs, and denying black men the educational and financial means to support their families. They maligned Jews as capitalist overlords who denied black men the ability to thrive in their communities. Before today's progressives arrived on Ivy League campuses, Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, preaching at HBCUs, had already sown the seeds of discord and hatred for America, capitalism, and Jews.

Donning their signature bow ties, Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam activists proselytized at HBCUs. Their message was provocative and compelling. Unlike the civil rights leaders, Farrakhan did not appeal to white men's better angels or threaten their economic interests. He spoke directly to black people, black men in particular. He preached the importance of self-reliance, self-discipline, and self-respect as necessary for black men to liberate themselves from a system largely controlled by Jews. The

message appealed to several black audiences. It encouraged incarcerated black men and offered hope to black Americans who had the least education, skills, and resources, those who had been forgotten in the promise of integration. Farrakhan's message of black empowerment was also embraced on the campuses of black America's most elite universities.

Farrakhan inspired a new generation of educated and even affluent black students who had become disaffected, disillusioned, and critical of integration. These new black elites grew up in the suburbs and attended predominantly white schools. Many of them chose to attend HBCUs specifically to escape white people for four years.

My older brother was one of those disaffected students. He began elementary school in a predominantly white private school. When he transferred to public school, he was regularly harassed and bullied by white students. His neighborhood nemesis vandalized his prized moped. I remember my father taking him to the front yard to teach him how to box to defend himself. By the time my brother graduated from high school, he considered attending an HBCU as a refuge from the disrespect he had encountered while growing up around primarily white people.

During his school breaks, I noticed that he had become militant and hostile toward the fundamentals of America's strength: capitalism, the military, and the justice system. He was distrustful of American power and the people who wielded it. He had a palpable suspicion of Jews, even though he could count on one hand the number of Jews he knew personally. He suggested that Jews had too much wealth and influence in the world and that Israel had undue influence over America's foreign policy. His perspective had shifted away from our Christian upbringing, which taught that "all things are possible with God," and he became suspicious of people at all levels of power and influence. He embraced a fatalistic view that "the system" only strengthened the powerful and oppressed the weak. He had become sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and suspicious of Zionism.

However, it wasn't just Farrakhan or the Nation of Islam that

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brought about this change. There was social and cultural drift that happened between blacks and Jews. Without quotas that once barred Jews from predominantly white colleges and universities, Jews no longer had to attend black colleges or graduate programs. With desegregation and the elimination of restrictive covenants that barred blacks and Jews alike from buying homes in certain neighborhoods, our communities drifted apart. To my brother, Jews became indistinguishable from whites. In the absence of social, academic, and personal familiarity and knowledge, my brother and his cohort were primed for Farrakhan's empowerment message and his antisemitic venom.

My family initially dismissed my brother's opinions as the typically provocative views of a newly educated college student. Admittedly, at the time, it was cool to be defiant, countercultural, pro-black, and even anti-white, which rapidly became synonymous with anti-Jewish. In college, his education and experience shifted from one about names and dates to concepts, in particular the concept of power—who has it and who doesn't. As a result, he perceived blacks as powerless and whites and Jews as powerful. We have seen the same shift in mindset at our most elite universities. I realized that my brother's ideas were not the temporary musings of a college student; they were the early signs of an antisemitism that went unchecked and unchallenged for more than 25 years at HBCUs. Now these ideas have spread to America's top colleges and universities. As a result, antisemitism and anti-Israel propaganda have been normalized on predominantly black as well as white campuses across America.

So how can HBCUs contribute to the fight against antisemitism? How can our communities reinvigorate the long-neglected black and Jewish alliance, address misunderstandings, and rebuild trust? How do we celebrate our past accomplishments and pursue future objectives together?

First, it is necessary to realize that most people under the age of 70, whether black or Jewish, have little or no knowledge of our respective communities' long history of fighting racism and discrimination together. They certainly didn't live it as my parents did. Some HBCUs including Dillard University in Louisiana, Voorhees University, and South Carolina State University offer classes on how HBCUs helped support Zionism and how Jews helped support the NAACP and other black civil rights organizations and efforts. While students may be familiar with specific historical events, such as the tragic murders of Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner, as depicted in the movie *Mississippi Burning*, we need a concerted effort to resurrect this history and build on it for the sake of both communities. Many people know that the abolition of slavery and the civil rights movement were Christian-led efforts, but their inspiration was as Jewish as a Passover seder. Both movements drew on the stories and principles of the Hebrew scriptures. Jewish principles of justice, equality, and humanity have been infused into every social movement in this country. It is time to celebrate and remember more of these unsung heroes.

Education is the key. It is vital to establish chairs, fellowships, and scholarships in the name of Jewish civil rights pioneers such as Julius Rosenwald, Andrew Goodman, and Elie Wiesel at HBCUs. We should have libraries and buildings on campuses named in honor of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, a close friend and ally of Martin Luther King Jr., to commemorate their bond and friendship in the struggle for human dignity in America. Yale's Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, for example,

was founded by a Jewish scholar (the aforementioned David Brion Davis) and bears the name of two Jewish philanthropists. There's no reason why such a center shouldn't be at an HBCU, and every reason that it should be. Additionally, we need an integrated civil rights curriculum that showcases black leaders and highlights their allies and friends, such as Jack Greenberg, who represented Martin Luther King Jr. and second-chaired Thurgood Marshall in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Books like Kenneth Chelst's *Exodus and Emancipation* should be required reading.

From the abolition of slavery through the civil rights movement to today, the Jewish community has remained committed to eliminating the scourge of discrimination wherever it appears. In America's long struggle to achieve its highest ambition—equal justice under the law—whether it was abolishing slavery, rescinding Jim Crow laws, championing gay rights, or fighting anti-Asian hate, Jews have always been there, fighting for the rights of others.

We can honor the enduring partnership between the black and Jewish communities by establishing lasting endowments to celebrate our accomplishments in pursuing freedom, opportunity, and equality for all Americans.

Second, Jews need to help black people understand Jewish life and how being Jewish is different from being white. My grandfather understood the Jewish character. He understood their fears and their motivations. He knew Dr. Goodwin shared his values—to be recognized and valued for the sake of basic human dignity. My parents had personal experiences with Jews, interacting with them as professors, fellow students, neighbors, and friends. After the 1968 riots, it was not just middle-class blacks who left the cities. Jews left, too; maybe they kept their businesses, but they left the community and created a wider chasm between the two communities. Jews moved from their traditional neighborhoods in the cities to white suburbs or created new communities outside the cities. Blacks and Jews lost their shared sense of community. We can get it back now, and HBCUs are a great place to start. We need more Jewish

professors teaching at HBCUs. We need to create opportunities for black and Jewish students to interact and socialize with one another. There are many untapped opportunities for this. Washington, D.C., is home to not only two HBCUs but several universities with very sizeable Jewish populations. What about metro-area Shabbat dinners and barbeques hosted at different campuses? These events could be themed or otherwise designed to be both educational and social.

Today, the average HBCU student would probably not distinguish whites from Jews, except to note that Jews tend to have more wealth and influence than white people. Some would even consider Jews a greater threat to them based solely on that idea. This is troubling because it is unfounded, yet many HBCU students believe it to be true. Over the past 30 years, there has been no credible opposing narrative to counter many of these stereotypes or the prevalent pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel, antisemitic rhetoric on HBCU campuses. Students for Justice in Palestine, which boasts some 200 chapters, is active on the campuses of Howard University, Hampton University, and the Atlanta University Center, which includes Clark Atlanta, Spelman College, Morehouse College, and the Morehouse School of Medicine. It's also important to recognize the increased number of Arab and Muslim students, some born in the United States, others from abroad, who now attend these colleges and universities. Their experience and perspective also influence the culture and mindset of these universities and their students. It is crucial to educate black students about our true shared history. Let's create space for these students to ask difficult and uncomfortable questions and understand challenging truths about Israel. Let's provide these students with knowledge and firsthand experiences in Israel, including interactions with Jewish, Christian, and Arab Israelis, as well as Jewish Americans residing in Israel. Such opportunities could be formalized as fellowship programs.

Third, HBCUs need consistent and equitable public funding. In September 2023, the U.S. secretaries of education and agriculture jointly sent letters to the governors of 16 states: Alabama,

Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. They urged the governors to provide equal funding for the HBCU land-grant institutions in their states. Between 1987 and 2020, these HBCUs received about $13 billion less than their non-HBCU counterparts, despite states' legal requirements to provide equitable funding to all land-grant universities. For example, the HBCUs Tennessee State, North Carolina A&T, and Florida A&M had each received about $2 billion less in state appropriations than their traditionally white counterparts: the University of Tennessee–Knoxville, North Carolina State, and the University of Florida.

The value of HBCUs would increase exponentially if they had more resources to implement the initiatives outlined above, perhaps more than we can even possibly predict. To end with an illustrative anecdote, John Biggers, whom Maya Angelou called "one of America's most important artists," famous for his powerful mural depictions of African-American and African life, entered the historically black Hampton Institute in 1941 with the goal of becoming a plumber, a reliable profession that would help support his family and widowed mother. He registered for an evening art class taught by Viktor Lowenfeld, a Jewish refugee artist and teacher who impressed upon his mostly black students the beauty in their heritage, and the importance of taking pride in it. Lowenfeld's mentorship changed the course not only of Biggers's life but of African-American art. He encouraged Biggers to become an art major and, ultimately, a great artist and art educator himself. The two maintained a lifelong friendship, and Angelou marveled at how Biggers "leads us through his expressions into the discovery of ourselves at our most intimate level." Imagine the loss for human, and specifically black, creativity had Lowenfeld and Biggers not found themselves and each other on an HBCU campus as the war raged in Europe.

How many such consequential encounters are failing to happen as we wait? ✳

ELISHA BAKER

Columbia Needs Countercultural Leadership

Bad governance leads to moral paralysis

VERYONE ASKS ME: What is it like to be a Jewish student at Columbia? My friends and I have answered this question in just about every conceivable forum, from television interviews to op-eds to informal Shabbat-meal conversations to closed-door meetings with community and university leaders.

It's in the last of these forums, those closed-door meetings with university leaders, that I have learned the most about why we find ourselves at the present impasse, where marching mobs continue to intimidate and harass Jewish students while disrupting the broader learning environment with near impunity. It's not merely, or even primarily, about antisemitism. The central problem is a

dysfunctional governance structure that disempowers top administrators and awards faculty members undue control.

It's long been debated whether people or political systems matter more. Many notable donors and elected officials who point to problems on campus seem to believe that we simply have the wrong people leading our institutions. Their solution is to replace top administrators — such as Harvard's Claudine Gay and Penn's Liz Magill — with leaders they expect will change the reality on campus and answer more satisfactorily before Congress. There might be some truth to this: Stronger leaders might direct our universities back to their core values. But look at Columbia: new president, same problems.

The people are not the root of the problem. The root is a dysfunctional political system. Specifically, it's a system that is both *structurally* and *culturally* broken. The *structure* of democratized university governance, as opposed to strong executive governance, breeds a *culture* of disempowered leadership and minimal accountability.

At Columbia, shared governance began in the wake of protests in 1968, when the campus was overrun by a group of activists pushing, not unlike today's protesters, an anti-authority agenda. The group famously broke into Hamilton Hall and other campus buildings, barricading themselves inside until the Columbia administration called in the NYPD to arrest the burglars on April 30 of that year. Sound familiar?

In response to an out-of-control campus, Columbia extended new rights and powers to students and faculty, most notably through the creation of a University Senate. Today, Columbia's bloated University Senate consists of 111 members (larger by 11 than the U.S. Senate): 65 faculty, 25 students, nine administrators, two administrative staff members, six research officers, two

library staff members, and two alumni. Among the University Senate's enumerated powers outlined in the Rules of University Conduct is the responsibility to "promulgate a code of conduct for faculty, students, and staff and provide for its enforcement." The Senate Committee on the Rules of University Conduct, which at the moment I write includes two professors who appeared to participate in the rule-violating Columbia encampment, is responsible for proposing policies and passing them by a majority vote. The Senate Executive Committee is responsible for filling staggered vacancies on the University Judicial Board, a five-person panel that hears all cases on charges of policy violations, as well as an appellate body.

But embedded in the Rules of University Conduct are checks on the University Senate's power. The president retains "emergency authority to protect persons or property." Additionally, the president, upon consultation with a Senate panel, can decide whether "a demonstration poses a clear and present danger to persons, property, or the substantial functioning of any division of the University" and "take all necessary steps to secure the cooperation of external authorities to bring about the end of the disruption." And Columbia's Board of Trustees retains the ultimate control over the university.

Faced with a situation that the Senate was not working to remedy, where disruptive protests raged on campus every week and protesters repeatedly defied university policies, the administration stepped in, only to be rebuked by the faculty. This ongoing conflict amounts to a protracted power struggle that impairs not only the fulfillment of the university's mission but its ability to function at all.

The first major eruption along these lines began with the suspensions of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) in November 2023. After the two groups repeatedly refused to follow the university's time, place, and manner regulations on protests, the administration's Special Committee on Campus

This ongoing conflict amounts to a protracted power struggle that impairs not only the fulfillment of the university's mission but its ability to function at all.

Safety, which does not include students or faculty, handed down unilateral suspensions to the two student groups.

In response, about 100 faculty members and graduate students, some of whom walked out of their own classes, gathered to protest what they viewed as a violation of free speech. Weeks later, Gerald Rosberg, chairman of the Special Committee, spoke before the University Senate after senators criticized him for violating the Rules Committee's conception of the disciplinary process. Under intense scrutiny from senators, he conceded that the university may have gotten it wrong.

In spite of the suspensions, the situation on campus did not improve. Leaders of both organizations continued to orchestrate protests under the aegis of a large coalition of student groups called Columbia University Apartheid Divest. On February 19, 2024, the administration under former President Minouche Shafik issued an Interim Policy for Safe Demonstrations that modified the previous time, place, and manner guidelines and shortened the process for protest approval from 15 to two days. In theory, this interim policy was more favorable to demonstrators than what had previously existed. The demonstrators' defiance of the university's attempt to enforce time, place, and manner regulations effectively led the administration to reward them with looser regulations.

But the protesters did not respect the new rules. They would

When the former president did the one thing that most builds confidence in leaders — she took action to remedy a problem — the faculty swiftly responded by voting to express no confidence in her.

set up an encampment and blast amplified sound overnight next to first-year student housing. After the congressional hearing on campus antisemitism and accountability, Shafik made an executive decision to call in the police to arrest these protesters and clear the encampment. Yet, the same day, students who were not arrested set up another encampment on the opposite lawn, only yards from the first. The University Senate responded to the arrests by passing a resolution that called for an investigation into Columbia's leadership.

The new encampment lasted two weeks, until April 30, 2024, when a mob left their tents and illegally occupied Hamilton Hall. Shafik, with the support of the trustees, called in the NYPD again. The arrests made national news, but fewer people noticed what happened next. Just two and a half weeks after the arrests, the Columbia Arts and Sciences faculty passed a vote of no confidence in President Shafik with a 65 percent majority. She would step down in the summer.

In August, the University Senate approved a revision to the Guidelines to the Rules of University Conduct that softened time, place, and manner regulations. Instead of having to apply for approval, they wrote, student protesters, only "should provide notice" to the university of a planned demonstration by sending

an email stating their intent to protest. One member of the Rules Committee identified its effort as a turn away from the enforcement measures used by the administration during the previous academic year.

Until recently, this language remained ambiguous and untested. But in the run-up to October 7, 2024, after a "Free Palestine" walkout commemorating the "Al-Aqsa Flood" was announced on social media, Interim President Katrina Armstrong wrote in a public message to the community that "this walkout was not registered through the process established by the Guidelines to the Rules of University Conduct and thus is not sanctioned by the University Senate or the University administration." Her message underscored that Columbia retained the power to regulate the time, place, and manner of demonstrations.

But it wasn't 12 hours before pressure from the Senate appeared to force her to modify her statement and curb the administration's powers. Shortly after midnight, the language about the university's role in sanctioning demonstrations was removed from Armstrong's message. In an email sent an hour later to the Columbia community, the co-chair of the Senate's Rules Committee reiterated the reduced role of the university in managing the time, place, and manner of protests. "We want to confirm that the University does not sanction or unsanction protests," he wrote. "Furthermore, the University Senate does not review, approve or sanction events or demonstrations."

The next day, when the protesting mob ended up knocking over the barriers of their original protest pen and marching around campus, intimidating panicked Jewish students and disrupting classes with their noise, the university was not equipped to respond. This long-running battle over policymaking jurisdiction continues to embolden disruptors and result in chaos. It has made leadership at Columbia impossible.

This broken leadership culture has become clear to me in my conversations with university leaders. One member of the Columbia administration told me that the biggest mistake the administration made throughout the 2023–2024 school year was to act, through the Special Committee on Campus Safety, to suspend SJP and JVP after they repeatedly violated campus demonstration policies. Student and faculty backlash stemmed, in part, from the belief that the Special Committee violated the principle of shared governance by arrogating power reserved for faculty- and student-controlled bodies. That backlash led the administrator with whom I spoke to believe that it would have been better to allow the groups to continue defying university policies than to take necessary action. Another high-ranking administrator involved in faculty affairs asserted to me, erroneously, that the University Senate and the Office of the President have equal power in Columbia's governance hierarchy. This is simply untrue given the president's powers to act unilaterally in an emergency situation.

The inaccuracy notwithstanding, the fact that leaders in our administration *believe* in this equal power dynamic displays just how deeply a culture of disempowered leadership has penetrated Columbia. A disempowered administration leaves Jewish and pro-Israel students and professors — and other ethnic or ideological minorities — vulnerable to being tyrannized by some of Columbia's most radical faculty members.

There could be no better illustration of the problem than the repeated faculty response to Shafik's actions: When the former president did the one thing that most builds confidence in leaders — she took action to remedy a problem — the faculty swiftly responded by voting to express no confidence in her. It is as if the faculty were to say outright to the administration, "If you lead, we will reject you."

In lieu of such leadership, it often sounds like our administrators are saying to students: "We cannot protect you, but you should still come here to learn." This is an untenable status quo. The deal

University enforcement of student-conduct regulations do not stifle free speech; rather, they support the creation of an environment where free speech can be exercised in good faith.

should be that students come to learn and the university protects their ability to do so, not their ability to disrupt others' learning.

Where do we go from here?

The first step is to define what a university is, the parties that make it up, and the responsibilities each of those parties has in serving the institution's purpose.

Universities are homes for the study of the essential liberal values and ideas of our society. But they are not democracies. University presidents and high-ranking administrators hold their roles to develop and safeguard a flourishing community of teaching, learning, and research. When leaders prove consistently incapable of ensuring a satisfactory learning environment — even after changes in personnel — it's clear that deep, structural flaws are working against them. These flaws must be corrected. High-level university stakeholders, including Columbia's trustees — the ultimate keepers of our university — should seriously consider campus-governance reform with the objective of empowering strong executive leadership.

An initial step would be the formation of an independent committee to investigate the structural failures that have left Columbia students vulnerable, and the Columbia administration stuck in the mud, over the greater part of the past two years. This committee

could include campus leaders from other universities that have been able to effectively ensure safe and productive campus learning environments, to share what they have learned. Once this committee publicly presents a report and recommendations, reform can begin, with the end goal of a community in which the character of our leaders matter as much as the title of their positions, and they can shape and suffuse our campus with their values.

Once university leaders are positioned to act on their values, rather than as figureheads, they should use their power to create a new covenant for their communities of learning. A university administration has a sacred responsibility to guarantee a physically safe and intellectually rigorous learning environment, in which students may not harass one another or otherwise shirk the civility appropriate to this community. Campus protests that violate the university's time, place, and manner regulations are not a free-speech issue; they violate content-neutral conduct policies. The language of the covenant must clearly distinguish when and where free speech crosses over into harassment and policy violations, and the administration must be prepared to enforce those lines by which all parties have agreed to abide.

This must apply to faculty and staff as well: Voluntarily entering this community means accepting its terms of discourse. The covenantal commitments should be written into contracts, and consequences for violating them should be applied swiftly, neutrally, and universally. There should be a price for engaging in behavior that stifles free speech, the free exchange of ideas, and the kinds of curiosity and critical thinking that are meant to be the hallmarks of our education. University enforcement of student-conduct regulations do not stifle free speech; rather, they support the creation of an environment where free speech can be exercised in good faith.

Students need to fulfill our side of this covenant by committing to civil learning relationships with our teachers and peers. As a condition of entry into the university, we too must commit

to engaging in good faith in our community of learning and to not disrupting its operation. Ensuring that everyone — administrators, faculty, staff, and students — lives up to this covenant is precisely what leaders should be able to use their power to accomplish. To get there, we need our executive leadership to have the power to move for positive, durable change in the first place. ✳

SAMUEL J. ABRAMS

Religious Diversity Can Reform Our Campuses

Campus protests are fueled by a spiritual crisis

IGHER EDUCATION is in trouble. More than 800 colleges and 9,000 campuses have closed since 2004. The cost of attending a four-year college has increased by 180 percent between 1980 and 2020, forcing many students to consider alternatives to college. Schools are also facing what's called a demographic cliff (a decline in the number of college-age students due to decreased fertility). Add to the mix an intense culture of cancellation that has persisted on campus and limited open inquiry and authentic questioning for years, a culture that engenders student self-censorship in the exact spaces where many young people have, in previous generations, first found their voice. We

are presiding over the decline of one of our civilization's most historic innovations: open and accessible higher education. No wonder only 28 percent of Americans today have confidence in colleges and universities.

It is not a coincidence that these grim developments coincided with the academy's attempt to foster more diverse environments on campus. These efforts at repairing our social fabric may have been inspired by good intentions. But their impact on higher education has been, on the whole, negative. What was intended to bring students together in a close community and promote upward social mobility, empathy, and understanding has managed to silo students into echo chambers and create mistrust, misunderstanding, and division. It has racially balkanized our institutions and politicized every facet of the collegiate experience, even the disciplines one would think are naturally immune: science, math, and engineering. No less a scientific powerhouse than MIT was among the most enthusiastic about instituting changes along DEI lines, releasing a strategic action plan for DEI in 2021 and hiring "six new assistant deans, one in each school and in the MIT Stephen A. Schwarzman College of Computing, to serve as DEI professionals."

The results have been so counterproductive that they prompted a dramatic reversal. In May 2024, MIT, followed quickly by Harvard, ended the requirement for faculty to include "diversity statements" in their self-assessments and hiring applications. Why? As MIT President Sally Kornbluth said, "My goals are to tap into the full scope of human talent, to bring the very best to MIT and to make sure they thrive once here. . . . We can build an inclusive environment in many ways, but compelled statements impinge on freedom of expression, and they don't work."

Notice in Kornbluth's words acknowledgment of both an ethical problem ("compelled statements impinge on freedom of expression") and an empirical one ("they don't work"). The question is, what does work? If universities want to promote diversity

on campus, how can they do so in an ethically responsible and effective way that neither impinges nor silos?

Fortunately, another form of diversity is thriving on campus and tends to bring students of varied socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds together: religious diversity.

The diversity of religious faith (and non-faith) on American campuses today not only offers an opportunity for our universities to live up to their goals of social repair; it also provides a window into understanding why some students have been drawn to the silos — including unhinged protests and encampments — in the first place.

In their book *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education*, Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen and Douglas Jacobsen chart the history of religion in American higher education, identifying three periods: "Protestant," "Privatized," and "Pluriform." "We are now living in a new Pluriform era in which various types of religion are prominent in cultural discourse," they write. "The increasing religious diversity of the nation has also been a factor in making religion more visible on college and university campuses."

The Jacobsens are right. The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (HERI), which has been tracking the religious affiliation of incoming students since the 1960s, found that in 1966, more than half (55 percent) of all first-time, full-time college students described themselves as Protestant, and more than one-quarter (28 percent) identified as Catholic. Only 7 percent of incoming students in 1966 reported having no affiliation with a religion.

In 2015, HERI found that less than a quarter (24 percent) of students identified as Catholic while the number of Protestants dropped to 38 percent. 2023 data from a Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression study of more than 55,000 undergraduates from over 250 schools show that students identify across a host of

> What we are witnessing in the protests is as much the result of a spiritual crisis as a political one.

faiths: 10 percent as Protestant, 18 percent as Catholic, 17 percent as "Just Christian," 3 percent as Jewish, 2 percent each for Muslim and Mormon, 1 percent each as Buddhist and Hindu.

I experienced the results of this change as soon as I arrived on campus as an undergraduate. My Hindu hallmates invited me to join them for their Diwali celebration, an experience entirely foreign to me, a young Modern Orthodox Jew. Over the course of the evening, I learned a great deal about my fellow dormmates, not to mention the spiritual victory of dharma (crudely translated as virtue) over adharma (non-virtue) as well as their views about promoting light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance — all very similar themes to what I see in Judaism and many of its core values. The evening brought us into closer friendship, as did the Hanukkah celebration they attended with me not long after. These exchanges started a conversation about spirituality, community, and purpose that continues to this day. As a professor, I have witnessed this same kind of phenomenon among my students.

But I have also witnessed something else. Even more dramatic than the increased diversity of religions represented on campus is the growing number of students with no religious affiliation at all. As of 2023, that group makes up 36 percent of college students. If it were a religious denomination, it would be the largest one on campus.

What does this mean, and what impact has this form of diversity had on university culture?

To answer this question, we need to recognize two features that distinguish this religiously unaffiliated group from their religiously affiliated classmates. The first is their mental health. According to numerous studies, religiously unaffiliated students report higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression than do their religious peers. And data have shown that being part of a religious community can combat the nation's loneliness epidemic by decreasing feelings of isolation.

College can be a psychologically challenging time for young people, and it is not uncommon for students to experience mental health difficulties at higher rates than the general population. But whereas 60 percent of Protestant students report feeling anxious half of the time or more often, the students with the highest percentage of such feelings are the religiously unaffiliated, at a whopping 72 percent. Similarly, 48 percent of agnostics state that they feel depressed half of the time or more frequently, in contrast to 35 percent of Catholics and Jews and 32 percent of Protestants. About 51 percent of atheists state they are regularly lonely, to 43 percent of Catholics, 41 percent of Jews, and 40 percent of Protestants. (Aren't Jews supposed to be the neurotic ones?)

The second feature is their relative support for stifling campus speech. We all might be concerned to learn that 59 percent of religious college students believe that there are times when shouting down a speaker could be acceptable. But the fact that 71 percent of *nonreligious* students feel that way might seem counterintuitive. Censoring other people's speech has historically been a tactic and impulse more common to religious authorities and reactionaries than secularists. When it comes to self-censorship, a prevalent practice in religiously dogmatic societies, the percentage of religious students who engage in it is the same: 59 percent. But for students of no faith, the number goes in the

other direction, 48 percent, less than half. In other words, students who do not identify with a faith are more willing to express themselves than are their religiously identifying counterparts, but at the same time they are more open to silencing dissent and ideas that they find objectionable.

Considering that the growing population of religiously unaffiliated students hold these two propensities (toward mental health challenges on the one hand and censorship behavior on the other), a certain image comes into view: the replacement religion of anti-Zionist protest.

In a June 2020 article entitled "Kneeling in the Church of Social Justice," Columbia professor John McWhorter observed that the third-wave antiracism (TWA) movement begun in the 2010s "is not a philosophy but a religion." He said that this became particularly clear during the Covid lockdowns. "In the wake of the murder of George Floyd," he wrote, "this vision has increasingly been expressed through procedures, routines, and phraseology directly patterned on Abrahamic religion." Focusing on the choreography of ritual, McWhorter described demonstrations

> where protesters kneeled on the pavement in droves, chanting allegiance with upraised hands to a series of anti-white privilege tenets incanted by what a naïve anthropologist would recognize as a flock's pastor. On a similar occasion, white protesters bowed down in front of black people standing in attendance. In Cary, North Carolina, whites washed black protesters' feet as a symbol of subservience and sympathy. Elsewhere, when a group of white activists painted whip scars upon themselves in sympathy with black America's past, many black protesters found it a bit much.
>
> Such rituals of subservience and self-mortification parallel

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devout Christianity in an especially graphic way, but other episodes tell the same story. Many conventional religious institutions are now rejecting actual Christianity where it conflicts with TWA teachings.

These congregations arose during the lonely months of the pandemic. Its lingering effects may be driving a lonely generation of college students, who spent a considerable amount of high school undersocialized at home because of Covid restrictions, to campus encampments.

The rites of ritualized protest and righteously indignant censorship have taken the place of religious commitment for nonreligious students. Taking on a distinctly religious character, they fill a spiritual void. Censorship is a communal response to loneliness, a performance of spiritual insecurity disguised as certainty—a form of hostile reaction to new or uncomfortable ideas common to the history of religion. This tendency for controlling discourse and behavior on campus offers the assurances of a religiosity of the nonreligious, an orthodoxy for the spiritually undernourished. Into the spiritual power vacuum has stepped the religion of anti-Zionist protest.

Despite the media's fixation on some of the Jewish and Muslim participants, the protests are likely attended by many religiously unaffiliated students. After all, the pro-Palestinian position is

more popular among progressives and the political Left, where levels of religiosity in all its forms tend to be the lowest, as we know from numerous surveys. Anecdotally, many of my own students who have participated in the protests have told me that they feel far more focused than they were before joining, far less lost, isolated, and lonely.

Like religious communities, the encampments and protest groups see themselves as a confessional collective, morally driven to achieve a higher purpose and make the world a better place. They borrow and decontextualize religious concepts such as *tikkun olam*, which are often invoked by Jewish members of the protest movement, many of whom are atheistic or agnostic. And they remake religious practices by holding services like "Seder in the Streets to Stop Arming Israel," presided over by atheists such as Naomi Klein.

The crowds articulate their protest liturgy by chanting in unison and are scrupulous about the specific words. When Norman Finkelstein suggested at the Columbia encampment that the protesters "amend" the potentially threatening "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" to the potentially less-triggering "From the river to the sea, Palestinians will be free," the chant leader who followed him stuck to the authentic original.

Residents of the encampments even exhibit distinctive dress — the keffiyeh, in its Jordanian (red and white) or Palestinian (black and white) variety — as a way of marking their confessional identity distinct from the sinful larger society outside. In their evangelizing, student protesters call on their universities to repent and convert to BDS.

What are we to make of this replacement religion?

One inference is that it is an expression of spiritual or religious yearning. What we are witnessing in the protests is as much the result of a spiritual crisis as a political one. The move away from conventional religiosity has expanded and deepened the craving for spiritual and moral connection traditionally

provided by religion. Whether conventionally religious or not, these protesters have religious needs and sensibilities. They are passionate about coming together to form, express, and experience community; they derive meaning and purpose from acting to advance what they see as important moral causes; they have a sense of differentiation, if not embattlement, with the larger sinful society; they chant a liturgy under leaders with powerful (or mechanically magnified) voices; their liturgical elements and congregational style are replicated elsewhere, albeit with local variations; and they adopt distinctive elements of dress.

When we see smart and presumably ethically minded students harass their fellow students, accuse them of sin, prevent their freedom of movement in their shared home, and confidently call for their execution by the al-Qassam Brigades, we might remember what the physicist Steven Weinberg once said: "With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil — that takes religion."

Although the situation appears bleak, the HERI data give us cause for optimism.

When asked to identify their major strengths, 88 percent of students who are now upper-level undergraduates included the "ability to work cooperatively with diverse people," 77 percent included the "ability to see the world from someone else's perspective," and over two-thirds included an "openness to having [their] own views challenged." Eighty-one percent consider themselves tolerant "of others with different beliefs," and a similar number took pride in their ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues.

We might be rightly skeptical about the veracity of this self-reporting. Are these students truly in a position to assess accurately their strengths in these matters? But what is more important in

Like religious communities, the encampments and protest groups see themselves as a confessional collective, morally driven to achieve a higher purpose and make the world a better place.

these data is that they reflect the students' values. Whether or not their self-assessments are accurate, these students profess being drawn to a multiplicity of ideas and experiences and take pride in their ability to absorb, confront, engage, and react to these varied views. They want to empathize and understand. This is true of students of all faiths, including the new protest religion. In that sense, the new protest religion can be seen as more of an extremist fringe.

If the analysis above leads us to see campus strife as a version of religious conflict, then what we need is a version of reform. What we are seeing on campus is not as much an explicit clash over underlying values as it may seem. On the contrary, there is widespread alignment among students when it comes to what they say they value, which is like saying they know what they *should* value. The goal of the moment must be to drive the student body as a whole, including those at risk of joining the fringe, back toward these stated values, rather than to uproot them altogether. There is a religious term for this: *reformation*. Religious reformations occur when communities realize they have deviated from their values and convictions, failing to live up to them. Religious reformations are far more historically common than mass conversions, which require the complete upending of values.

Knowing this, as well as the fact that students crave connection and meaning, college and university leaders can leverage the unprecedented religious diversity on campus to enact the principles of what Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks called "the dignity of difference." They should invest, proactively, in increasing religious diversity on campus, empowering those communities to promote and foster the values that the majority of students (presumably including those susceptible to protest doctrines) hold, and facilitating *reformative* interreligious encounters.

With the combination of so many different religious and spiritual traditions represented on campus, the potential for reformative interreligious encounters is greater than it has ever been, including when I arrived on campus nearly 30 years ago.

Simply put, our schools must rise to the challenge and create the proper environments for these connections. Ironically, the commitment to create "safe spaces" on campus has made so many campuses unsafe. The universities should be creating "brave spaces," to use a term coined by Shahar Sadeh, former director of strategic affairs and faculty engagement at New York's Jewish Community Relations Council. Students desperately need such spaces where critical discussions and dialogues occur. In their absence, the spiritual power vacuums are filled by replacement religion movements that are, practically speaking, religiously extremist.

Fortunately, with 30 states having introduced or passed bills in the current legislative session to either restrict or regulate diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, it is clear that the nation is ripe for an alternative vision of diversity rooted in "the dignity of difference" rather than the divisiveness of difference. Now is the time for higher education to replace its diversity, equity, and inclusion regime with a diversity of faiths (and non-faiths) regime. They should celebrate the religious diversity across campuses nationwide and recognize that the many nonreligious students are searching for community and connection even more than

religious students are. By doing so, they may come to embody the words of Thomas Jefferson, to protect "the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan, the Hindoo and infidel of every denomination." ✳

PART THREE

ACADEMIC BOYCOTTS

NETTA BARAK-CORREN

The Legal Remedy

Rising threats to Israeli academia demand a new approach

SENIOR BIOLOGIST is abruptly informed by her European partner that their research collaboration must end immediately due to his university's decision to boycott all Israeli universities. The two, who are part of an EU-funded consortium, co-supervise students, share a patent, and are in the process of writing a joint article. Neither scientist wants to sever ties, but they are bound by the directive from above.

A feminist scholar has been working for months on organizing a set of panels for an international conference. Then comes a boycott decision by AtGender, the organization behind the conference. The scholar is excluded from the conference she helped to design, her work and ideas are appropriated, and her carefully curated multinational discussion of the impact of war on women,

with Palestinian, Israeli, and other conflict-zone speakers, will take place without its sole Israeli voice. (The Palestinian scholar has been retained, of course.)

A delegation of Israeli high-school students, after having spent months training for the International Olympiad in Informatics (a major scientific competition) amid wartime challenges, is barred from physically attending the competition because Egypt, the host country, boycotts Israel. A few days before the event, several Arab delegations demand the complete ousting of the Israeli delegation. The circa 100-country body votes to erase Israel from the global map, days after the Israeli youth win three gold medals, placing them second among all competing nations. From now on, Israelis will no longer be allowed to compete under the Israeli flag, only as stateless individuals. The chairperson of the assembly, an Australian scientist, thanks his peers for doing "the right thing for Gaza."

According to an April report from the Israeli Ministry of Intelligence, these acts and the broader academic boycott "pose risks to Israel's scientific-technological position in the world, and in the long run could lead to damage to national security and the strength of Israel's economy." When Prime Minister Netanyahu declared in June that Israel is now fighting a "seven-front war" (meaning Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, the West Bank, and Iran), he could well have added an eighth: academia.

It is hard to overstate the stakes of this front not only for Israel, but for countries all over the world who benefit from Israel's scholarly contributions to many fields. The boycott has already scotched research collaborations in medicine, computational biology, chemistry, informatics, political science, child welfare, and more. While it is impossible to measure the full extent of a movement that tries — and succeeds — to frighten academics from collaborating with Israeli colleagues, it is already clear that the boycott has disturbed and derailed many innovations that benefit humanity.

All the more frustrating is the boycott's advancement despite Israel's academic culture of inclusivity, diversity, and peace-building. For example, about 16 percent of the Hebrew University's 24,000 students are ethnically Arab, roughly the share of the Arab population among Israel's citizens. (About half of our Arab students are Palestinians from East Jerusalem.) This figure has grown steadily over the years as the university has poured effort and resources into recruiting Arabs and Palestinians for all of its ranks. A recent example of that commitment is a notice sent to the entire faculty a few weeks ago from my university's vice president for strategy and diversity seeking to recruit "postdoctoral researchers from Arab society" for academic positions, and asking to raise faculty awareness and involvement in such hiring. As customary for the Hebrew University, the email came out in all three languages — Hebrew, Arabic, and English. Participating in such initiatives is so commonplace in Israeli academia that had I not been writing this article, I would have entirely missed the irony. Arab feminist administrators such as Hebrew University's Mona Khoury or Ben-Gurion University's Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder, both vice presidents of their respective universities, or Mouna Maroun, the freshly minted provost of Haifa University, are all celebrated in Israeli academia for their leadership and academic achievements. Institutions such as Hebrew University's Harry Truman Center for Peace Studies devote themselves to advancing knowledge on peace-building, and legal clinics at each law school promote equality and diversity in Israeli society. All of this is normal academic business in Israel, which is lost on the academics in other countries who seek to boycott Israeli institutions.

What European universities like those in Ghent, Granada, and Barcelona leading the boycott may fail to recognize is that in addition to being counterproductive, immoral, and completely at odds with the ethos of intellectual inquiry, the boycotts may in fact be illegal.

Through the EU-Israel Association Agreement, Israeli researchers

> These acts and the broader academic boycott 'pose risks to Israel's scientific-technological position in the world, and in the long run could lead to damage to national security and the strength of Israel's economy.'

and institutions have access to EU grants, which constitute some of the largest sources of research funding in the world. The regulations for such funding include nondiscrimination rules as a condition for eligibility. EU Research and Innovation Commissioner Iliana Ivanova stated unequivocally in June 2024, when asked about the Israeli boycott initiatives, "Termination solely on the basis of nationality would be improper and would amount to discrimination prohibited under the Association Agreement," meaning that universities or researchers who terminate collaborations with Israeli collaborators will violate their contractual commitments and risk their eligibility for funding.

The situation in the United States is similar. Major funding bodies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense, and others have nondiscrimination rules as well. In 2019, the NIH sent a letter to Harvard expressing concern about allegations of discrimination against Asian-American applicants in undergraduate admissions. In 2020, the NIH intervened at USC's Keck School of Medicine after multiple complaints of gender discrimination. Investigations have been opened into other universities as well. Participation in a boycott of Israeli researchers as such would constitute a violation of Title VI's prohibition of "discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs

It is an attack on one of our most fundamental reasons for existing as a nation: to contribute to *all* human flourishing.

or activities that receive federal funds." This rule also applies to the many European universities that regularly enjoy NSF and NIH funding through collaboration with American institutions.

The battlefields of Israel's eighth front extend from the halls and yards of universities to regulatory commissions and courts charged with enforcing these laws. The soldiers we need to fight this battle are lawyers with this specific area of expertise, and the weapons come at the cost of their time. We need them to compose and file motions to get the various regulatory bodies to enforce their nondiscrimination policies, neutralizing the boycott's destructive ambitions.

There is also a legislative front to this war. Although there are laws in the United States that prohibit government contracts with entities that participate in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, these laws mainly apply to commercial activity. Back in 2014, then-Representative Alan Grayson, a Democrat from Florida, introduced a bill to prohibit the grant of federal funds to higher-education institutions that participate in BDS. It is perhaps more timely than ever to push similar legislation through Congress. We need lobbyists and Washington insiders to persuade members of Congress to take the lead on getting this legislation through.

It is easy to forget that before this war began, the divisions within Israel that brought us to the streets were also real, legitimate, and

existential. Those divisions continue to play out — in disagreements over strategies, priorities, and objectives — as we navigate our way to the war's end on all fronts. Unlike the other seven, the eighth front is one over which there should be little debate. It is an attack on one of our most fundamental reasons for existing as a nation: to contribute to *all* human flourishing. We fight for our place in the global discourse and dissemination of knowledge, both for our own sake and for the world. While we may agree or disagree with the government, it is our society and its potential that are always worth protecting. While some of us fight on the land, others fight in the air and on the sea. Still others fight in the classrooms, the conference rooms, the courts, and the halls of government. We fight for knowledge, for truth, and for our part in creating a better world. If that is you, consider yourself called up. ✳

RONALD R. KREBS & CARY NELSON

The Threat to Academic Freedom

The AAUP about-face on boycotts contravenes its founding ideals

THE AMERICAN Association of University Professors does not often issue pronouncements that cause a firestorm. But the AAUP did exactly that on a quiet Monday last summer. For nearly 20 years, this once-august institution had opposed boycotts of academic institutions as incompatible with its founding raison d'être: academic freedom. Then it reversed course. Academic boycotts, it declared, were "legitimate tactical responses to conditions that are fundamentally incompatible with the mission of higher education." In fact, the AAUP argued, its new stance was *more* consistent with academic freedom because it would allow "individual faculty members and students…to weigh, assess, and debate the specific circumstances giving rise to calls for systematic academic

boycotts and to make their own choices regarding their participation in them. To do otherwise contravenes academic freedom."

The AAUP's embrace of academic boycotts as an acceptable way of producing political change is dangerous. It threatens to transform, for the worse, a system of higher education that has rightly long been credited with serving the public good. The new statement does not speak for us, and we hope it does not speak for our colleagues across the world. We were heartened that our counter-statement — opposing academic boycotts and articulating the traditional, shared foundational values of the scholarly community, and backed by no organization or authority and possessing no mailing list of tens of thousands — accumulated more than 3,000 signatures from fellow scholars in its first week. We suspect that it speaks for the silent majority.

To those outside the academy, this might seem like an obscure and minor quarrel. It isn't. The future of the university, and therefore the state of academic freedom, is of immense significance to all human beings, Jews not least. The pursuit of knowledge is a profoundly Jewish value, and it is no accident that Jews have disproportionately scaled the heights of the academy across the West. Universities once were, and often still are, sites of tremendous intellectual ferment and creativity, and they have been remarkable engines of economic growth and socioeconomic mobility. While the AAUP cannot undo all that by a mere pronouncement or shift in policy, we must all do our part to ensure that this perversion of academic freedom does not take root.

Academic Freedom: An Origin Story

The idea of academic freedom took shape gradually through the 18th and 19th centuries. Before then, institutions of higher education were largely religious seminaries, and faculty who expressed or taught ideas contrary to Christian belief could be punished with death, not simply dismissal.

As universities freed themselves from religious authority, they discovered that the secular state could prove an equally repressive overseer. Only in the 19th century, with the birth of the modern research university, did faculty begin to firmly and collectively press for freedom in conducting their research and in teaching. At the end of that century, faculty members in the United States learned that such freedoms were fragile even when state control was relatively weak. The robber barons of corporate America could be equally impatient with faculty views. There was growing awareness that faculty needed a national organization to define, promote, and defend their autonomy in research, teaching, and extramural expression.

The result: the establishment in 1915 of the AAUP. Its founding declaration remains a forceful statement of what academic freedom is and why it is in the public interest. "Genuine boldness and thoroughness of inquiry, and freedom of speech, are scarcely reconcilable with the prescribed inculcation of a particular opinion upon a controverted question," it announced. Academic freedom means that neither politicians nor trustees nor civil society groups have the "moral right to bind the reason or the conscience of any professor." What's more, academic freedom is very much in the interest of society.

> To the degree that professional scholars, in the formation and promulgation of their opinions, are, or by the character of their tenure appear to be, subject to any motive other than their own scientific conscience and a desire for the respect of their fellow experts, to that degree the university teaching profession is corrupted; its proper influence upon public opinion is diminished and vitiated; and society at large fails to get from its scholars, in an unadulterated form, the peculiar and necessary service which it is the office of the professional scholar to furnish.

The AAUP's assertion that individual faculty members had the right to academic freedom did not automatically make it so.

American universities have historically been the envy of the world, partly because scholars have been free to pursue their passions and take intellectual chances, and partly because the substantive promise and merit of one's scholarship have long outweighed considerations of politics and identity.

Repression of leftist political opinion in the American academy remained prevalent from the First World War to the early Cold War. Academic freedom remained fragile and uneven. On two significant occasions, under intense political pressure, the AAUP itself failed to live up to its principles. In 1917, amid national war fervor, the AAUP warned against anti-war sentiment and, when faculty members were fired, announced that academic freedom should give way to patriotism. A quarter-century later, when at least a hundred faculty members were dismissed in the 1950s for their suspected leftist political leanings, the AAUP was too afraid of itself becoming the target of the anti-Communist witch hunt to defend their rights. It admitted its failure only when the worst of the Red Scare was over.

Nevertheless, academic freedom slowly and unevenly became an established norm after the Second World War. It liberated faculty members to demand that their universities eliminate racial and religious quotas and stamp out outright prejudice toward minorities. A more racially, ethnically, and ideologically diverse student body defended their professors' right to join them in protesting Jim Crow

Numerous bills under consideration in Republican-controlled state legislatures put universities and academic freedom in their crosshairs.

and the Vietnam War. The depoliticized ideal of academic freedom and a more inclusive and vibrant university mutually reinforced each other. Moreover, academic freedom inexorably spread. Individual faculty members' right to choose what they would research helped lead, however slowly, to the idea that students had the right to choose for themselves what they would study—rather than faculty and administrators making choices for them based on discriminatory assumptions about race, gender, and cultural background. Academic freedom thus operated in tandem with other democratizing forces, including the GI Bill, to broaden access to higher education, facilitate socioeconomic mobility, and make possible many of the great achievements of postwar America.

The strength of the American university system and, until recently, its growing inclusiveness underpin America's postwar success story. American universities have historically been the envy of the world, partly because scholars have been free to pursue their passions and take intellectual chances, and partly because the substantive promise and merit of one's scholarship have long outweighed considerations of politics and identity. This is the legacy of academic freedom. Take it away, and university professors are in danger of becoming mere apparatchiks whose research devolves into proving presumed truths rather than exposing those alleged truths to harsh analytical and empirical light.

The flip side of academic freedom is academic responsibility.

From the start, the AAUP made brief forays into establishing standards for responsible faculty conduct, largely revolving around the guarantee of a minimum standard of civility in faculty affairs. Although these standards were advisory, not regulative, and although they were more vague than the AAUP's guidelines for academic freedom, they nonetheless helped integrate a more diverse community of faculty members into the academy half a century later.

By the end of the 20th century, however, those standards showed signs of erosion, as the faculty began to reflect the political polarization of the rest of American society. Two and a half decades later, the AAUP's implicit code of conduct has little sway. In some quarters, *civility* is thought primarily to be a code word for repressing faculty speech rather than a valued means of facilitating productive dialogue among colleagues and scholars. When in 2023 the newly founded Faculty for Justice in Palestine urged its members to abstain from engaging with Zionist colleagues, it became clear that the very concept of a "faculty"—a single collective body bound together by a common mission, ethic, and identity—had become outmoded.

Under Assault from Left and Right

Academic freedom reached an apex in the United States in the last quarter of the 20th century. But it has been under assault in the 21st—from Right and Left alike. In Texas and Utah, the Right is forging ahead with the great, redemptive project of banning books. In Florida, it has decided to mount what is sure to be a thoroughly incompetent and destructive project of monitoring college syllabi about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Numerous bills under consideration in Republican-controlled state legislatures put universities and academic freedom in their crosshairs. Right-wing attacks on academic freedom will surely be taken up with new fervor after Donald Trump's triumphant return to the Oval Office and the broad consolidation of Republican power at the federal level.

The Left displays equally little respect for academic freedom and intellectual heterodoxy. Its attacks on academic freedom started with mandated trigger warnings on syllabi and in classrooms, the identification of supposed microaggressions in everyday discourse, and a vast project to reshape ordinary language. As faculty eventually began to rebel against the over-policing of speech, the Left replaced it with another, more expressly political project: declaring Zionism and the State of Israel beyond the pale. Campus groups devoted to a diverse array of projects ranging from climate change to reproductive rights to gender equality reject student allies and partners who have the temerity to acknowledge that they are also Zionists. Liberal arts departments across the country issue official statements not only condemning Israeli military operations in Gaza, but declaring Israel itself a "settler-colonial project"—and silencing potential dissidents. Some fields see the boycott of Israeli universities as essential to their identity as scholar-activists, even though such a boycott will surely undermine the free exchange of ideas and research across international borders.

In this time of political polarization, academic freedom has become an opportune target for activists from opposite ends of the spectrum. It is an unwieldy inconvenience standing in the way of unquestionable political convictions. One would be hard-pressed to think of an earlier moment in American history when competing political movements reached such consensus. The McCarthyite witch hunt in the early 1950s cost some faculty members their jobs and silenced many others, in part because those in the center kept silent, hoping to weather the storm. If the center remains silent once again, academic freedom as a universal principle may not survive. It will be invoked and contested as the occasion and political interest seem to demand.

The AAUP's new policy on boycotts is a strange response to the challenges of the moment. Yet it is as expected as it is dismaying. In response to this renewed assault on academic freedom, the AAUP has not donned its familiar armor and launched itself into

> Normalizing academic boycotts is not 'measured.' It is a radical revolution that would, if successful, fundamentally reshape the academy.

battle in defense of the principle. Rather than resist the politicization of the academy, it has capitulated. Rather than refuse to play politics with academic freedom, it has leapt into the fray. The new policy implicitly concedes that academic freedom is a political bludgeon to be wielded when helpful and abandoned when inconvenient. It is what happens in an age when partisan politics is everything.

Why the AAUP Matters — and Why Resistance Is Critical

We must not dismiss the AAUP's new policy on academic boycotts as the disturbing declaration of an irrelevant organization. True, the national AAUP is not nearly as large as it once was. In its heyday, in 1969, it had at least 90,000 members, compared with just 44,000 today — under 3 percent of instructional faculty in U.S. institutions of higher education.

Still, the AAUP is the closest thing higher-education faculty have to a national organization. When people want to know what college and university faculty think, they turn to it because there is no alternative with comparable reach. And while Heterodox Academy and the Academic Freedom Alliance are growing, they cannot boast anything close to the AAUP's more than 500 campus chapters nationwide, the largest and most influential of

In embracing academic boycotts, our colleagues at the AAUP forget the most consequential way they can effect change: through the power of their research.

which are faculty unions. The leaders of those chapters believe, or at least profess, themselves to represent faculty on their campuses, whether those faculty are AAUP members or not. It is still — or rather, until now it has been — the leading arbiter of professional professorial norms.

The new AAUP position on academic boycotts aims to reconfigure these norms. When scholars after 2006 occasionally pressed for a boycott of their fellow academics, they were compelled to explain why they urged an exception to the AAUP rule in this particular case. Critics could then take the norm-breakers to task for the logic of the exception they sought to carve out.

Now, however, the AAUP sees academic boycotts as "legitimate tactical responses" to produce the political change necessary for "the freedom to produce and exchange knowledge." The AAUP claims to be agnostic about the wisdom of pressing for an academic boycott in any given case, but its defenders are wrong to depict the new stance as neutral. By legitimizing and normalizing boycotts, the AAUP is paving the way for *more* systematic boycotts of institutions of higher education, not fewer. The AAUP cannot be neutral with respect to academic boycotts if its policy is now effectively: *Boycott fellow scholars as you see fit, as your conscience dictates, and as your political acumen advises.*

Some colleagues have told us that they don't understand the fuss, that they find the new stance "measured." They agree with

the AAUP that members of the faculty have the right to participate in boycotts of any kind if they so choose and that faculty should not be disciplined for supporting or opposing academic boycotts. So do we. But this misses the point. If the AAUP carries the day, systematic and collective academic boycotts would become the new normal. They would not be exceptions to a normative proscription that had to be explained according to some publicly acceptable rationale. At most, to persuade colleagues to participate, the boycotters might wish to explain why they thought the timing propitious or the boycott likely to be effective. But the new AAUP stance does not declare boycotts ethically problematic in the slightest. They are merely at times tactically inadvisable.

Normalizing academic boycotts is not "measured." It is a radical revolution that would, if successful, fundamentally reshape the academy. No one can compel faculty to work with colleagues whose behavior they find objectionable and, at the extreme, whose views they find offensive. But that is a boycott of an academic, not an academic boycott. If systematic academic boycotts of countries' faculty and institutions of higher education — either because those institutions' policies are objectionable or because the nation's policies are objectionable — become frequent, the core values and practices underpinning the world of scholarship will have been eviscerated. This would be a disaster for the American academy and — because of the AAUP's historical standing as a global norm-setter — for scholarly exchange worldwide.

The AAUP's previous governing view that academic boycotts are fundamentally at odds with the basic values of the academy was the correct one. The advance of scholarship depends on the free and unfettered exchange of ideas. Conference presentations must be invited, speaking invitations extended, and articles published because of the substantive contribution of the scholarship, not the extramural views of the scholar, not her race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or gender, not the place where she resides, or

the location of her employment. Limits on scholarly exchange for any of these reasons — and many more — harm scholarship.

Saving Academic Freedom — for Us All

The AAUP taught us all how essential academic freedom is to producing, disseminating, and teaching knowledge. How ironic that in 2024 it has endorsed the legitimacy of academic boycotts, which curb research collaboration across borders, shutter study-abroad programs, and circumscribe the exchange of ideas — tactics that it once rightly understood to be a menace to the scholarly enterprise. How paradoxical that the exercise of academic freedom, according to its once staunchest defender, now includes erasing the academic freedom of others. How absurd that the AAUP's vision of academic freedom now embraces an ethic that ascribes value to scholarship in significant measure based on the identity, and perhaps the presumed opinions, of the scholar themselves.

We understand why colleagues at the AAUP would be tempted to boycott fellow academics. They wish to advance their preferred vision of a good society, and they want to use whatever means they have at their disposal to the ends they deem virtuous. Academics usually have limited concrete means at their disposal to shape politics. One important exception: They can exercise power over fellow academics through their everyday scholarly activities, and their departmental and professional associations and collaborations.

In embracing academic boycotts, our colleagues at the AAUP forget the most consequential way they can effect change: through the power of their research. Scholarship normally and properly involves *persuading* (fellow scholarly) audiences that one's claims or findings are, for some reason, superior. We are not naïve. We know that coercion exists in the world of scholarship. But scholars rightly deride coercive scholarly actors as "gatekeepers" who use

their position and prestige to prevent others from securing needed grants and publishing contracts. Coercion is what scholars, like other people, do when persuasion fails, when they are not able to win an argument fair and square.

The AAUP has lost sight of the academy's purpose. Boycotts threaten its very foundation. They cannot be normalized. The AAUP's new stance is not just wrong-headed. It is an outrage. ✳

RON LIEBOWITZ &
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The Case for Raising Our Voices

Why academia is the epicenter of BDS

GIVEN ITS GOAL of punishing the Israeli economy, the movement known as Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) has been an abject failure. During 19 years of BDS activism, foreign direct investment to Israel has more than quadrupled, increasing by 411 percent, according to the World Bank. BDS's strong suit has not been economic impact. The one sector in which it has achieved spectacular success is in higher education, where there is a growing conviction, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, that discriminating against Israeli researchers, scholars, students, and universities aligns somehow with the pursuit of justice.

This is no surprise. As Hebrew University's Netta Barak-Corren, chairwoman of its Initiative Against Academic Boycott,

has observed, academia is where the foundations of BDS were first laid, where the slanderous retelling of the social, economic, political, and religious history of the modern state of Israel was given intellectual legitimacy. All of it — the settler-colonialist state, the genocidal state, the apartheid state — has been long established in higher-ed circles. With BDS's arrival, faculty sympathetic to the post-colonialist, Soviet-style skewing of humanities and social sciences now had the opportunity to feel righteous by voting in favor of boycotts. Even better, BDS provided additional cover for disregarding academic rigor, which long ago allowed propaganda against the State of Israel to go unchallenged.

Some recent examples: From 2005 until October 2023, Israel had ceased all military and civilian presence in Gaza. Israel's withdrawal from Gaza 19 years ago entailed forcibly removing Israeli settlers and razing their communities. Gazans soon voted Hamas into power, and Hamas has not held elections since. Yet the Middle East Studies Association, the main scholarly society devoted to study of the region, has continued to refer to "the occupied Gaza strip," a convenient falsehood for increasing support for BDS.

Another example of useful disregard for the academic enterprise: Some faculty have canceled class so their students could attend anti-Israel campus demonstrations. Such faculty exhibit neither intellectual curiosity — which would lead them to explore with their students why Israel might be in conflict with its neighbors — nor professorial responsibility toward students who might oppose these rallies. This willingness to poison their own classroom learning environments by trumpeting their ideological biases is tolerated or even encouraged by school officials.

Most telling of all, perhaps, is that the Dreyfus Affair can be taught at Harvard these days without mentioning antisemitism or even that Dreyfus was Jewish, as author Dara Horn recently reported in the *Wall Street Journal*. Students studying modern European history can no longer be expected to learn about the origins of modern Zionism.

It is precisely in BDS's intellectual shamelessness, in fact, that we see reason for optimism and a path forward. We know from personal experience that many academics — including those who are not Jewish or Zionist or who have little to do with either — feel discomfort and disdain for the violation of fundamental academic standards associated with BDS. Last summer, when the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) reversed its long-held position opposing academic boycotts, political scientist Ronald Krebs, literature scholar and former president of the AAUP Cary Nelson, and Ron Hassner, faculty director of Berkeley's Israel studies program, authored a counterstatement that quickly received more than 3,000 signatures. It clearly hit a nerve. As Krebs later elaborated, the AAUP reversal represents "nothing less than a profound and dangerous (attempted) normative shift in how the profession should think about academic freedom." At least to some subset of academics, universities are supposed to be places of learning, characterized by rigor in the pursuit of knowledge. The objectives of BDS clash directly with an aspect of university culture that remains definitional to the research enterprise.

It is instructive that the Association of American Universities (AAU), composed of North America's leading 71 research universities, came out strongly against BDS ten days after the AAUP's reversal. In contrast to the AAUP, "the king of membership-based faculty organizations," as Krebs describes it, the AAU, whose members are universities rather than individual faculty, understands itself to represent the highest standard of academic research. To do otherwise than object to academic boycotts would violate the AAU's own raison d'être. Herein lie the headwinds facing BDS: Excellence in the academic enterprise will always, somewhere, somehow, resist capitulation to ideology and instead seek rigor in the pursuit of knowledge.

The AAU statement was unequivocal, stating that it

> continues to oppose boycotts of academic institutions based upon disagreement with policies of their governments. Scholarly exchange with institutions and scholars around the globe promotes the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Universities aiming to live up to this goal cannot deny engagement with academic colleagues "solely on the basis of whether one likes or dislikes the policies of the government where an academic institution is located. It is this scholarly engagement which underpins academic freedom, a fundamental principle of AAU universities and of American higher education in general."

The more egregiously BDS persists, the more a community of scholars who feel affronted by its assault on core academic values will grow. The opportunity now is to lower the social and professional cost to those who would otherwise encourage colleagues to collaborate with Israeli academics and universities in shared intellectual inquiry. Our optimism stems from awareness of such a community, broad though disparate, within the American professoriate. The key will lie in building an effective infrastructure of support for this contingent of faculty and administrators.

When it comes to expertise in creating effective academic communities, no one has more of a track record of success than professionals in alumni affairs, donor relations, and student affairs. Let's turn to these professionals for guidance in creating programs with a new type of focus: bolstering the connectedness and mutual reinforcement among faculty and administrators, as well as students, staff, alumni, and donors who value academic excellence over academic bigotry.

The logic of such a project is like the flywheel — slow-moving and small-scale at first, but with a momentum that will increasingly give voice, energy, and opportunity to those who hold dear the most fundamental values of academic inquiry. We know it's a risky landscape. We also know those voices — and the human and capital resources to back them — are out there. Now's the time to bring them together. ✳


JEWISH
MASTERPIECE

ADAM BELLOW

His Barbed Behind: *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and Its Critics

What my father's 1970 novel tells us about today

> "I am not a revolutionary. I have little respect for American revolutionaries as I know them, and I have known them quite well."
> — *Saul Bellow: Letters*, p. 290

IN 1970 my father, Saul Bellow, published *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. His seventh novel, it came on the heels of major works that had long since established him as the preeminent American writer of his generation.

The book was immediately hailed as a triumph, reviewed and praised in every significant outlet. Here again, readers were told, were the signature marks of his method — gritty urban realism, a flawed and introspective intellectual protagonist, a gallery of eccentric characters based on real people in his life, a no-holds-barred exposure of Jewish family comedy, and (for the first time) direct

engagement with the Holocaust, a theme he had previously treated only glancingly.

But it was also controversial — intensely so, and clearly by design. A direct intervention in the social and political debates of the time, it was seen as taking up conservative themes, particularly the bad effects of the sexual revolution and "black power" protest on American society and culture. Consequently, it was called "the first neoconservative novel" and lamented in liberal circles as a sign of the author's deplorable "turn to the right."

"Nowadays we tend to forget what a bombshell it was," wrote the neoconservative art critic Hilton Kramer 25 years later. "In its refusal to conform to the left-wing pieties that had already swamped the academy, the media, and the whole cultural scene, it mocked what had swiftly become the conventional wisdom. Which, of course, was why the Left decried it."

And decry it they did. Consider some of the adjectives applied to it: "harsh," "aloof," "judgmental," "cold," "contemptuous," "didactic to a fault," "rank and embittered," "an austere, dismissive jeremiad," "a howl of rage." Saul's ex-friend Alfred Kazin, once a major booster of his work, panned it as an expression of "punitive moral outrage."

In short, the reaction was seismic, challenging readers on a deep level — especially members of the New York cultural elite who saw themselves reflected in its scathing critique of liberal hypocrisy. The critic Joseph Epstein was on to something when he remarked that the book seemed calculated "to offend whole categories of the reading public as well as most of the people who write about books."

Why would the author's son enter this literary minefield more than 50 years after the fact? Certainly it is daunting for one who is neither a writer or a critic, but a publisher, which is a very different animal. That said, I have a distinct advantage in being intimately acquainted with my father's private thoughts. As much as anyone alive, I knew his mind. I have also in my career as an editor published many polarizing books — books that liberals considered "bad" and "dangerous."

You can tell a lot about the state of ideological flux in this country from how people react to such a book, and *Sammler*, while not a political treatise, does make a political argument. To reappraise it today is therefore necessarily to ask, in a way we do not ask of other novels, not just whether it holds up as a work of fiction (which it obviously does), but whether its argument was right.

Artur Sammler is an elderly Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor whose nephew, a wealthy physician, has rescued him and his daughter from a DP camp and generously pays for their upkeep. A highly cultured intellectual and journalist, Sammler spent the interwar years in London, where he became acquainted with the bohemian Bloomsbury set. Caught in Poland during the war, he was blinded in one eye by a Nazi rifle butt before being stripped bare, shot, and buried along with his wife in a mass grave, from which he alone escaped.

When Sammler crawled out of the pit, he was no longer a man but a consciousness stripped of illusions, including the illusion of personality, or of mattering as an individual. Now as he awakes in the gloom of his Upper West Side bedroom he feels himself to be scarcely alive. A spectral presence — tall and thin, with his hat and threadbare overcoat, smoked glasses that conceal his ruined eye, and a rolled-up umbrella — he spends his days riding buses to and from the public library or walking around the city minutely observing, cataloguing his impressions, and reducing his thoughts to hard, gemlike insights that he will never share with anyone. What he seeks is to penetrate to the essence of things, to see things as they are without emotional or value-based distractions.

Sammler is not an easy read. Page for page it is extremely dense, with an overabundance of images, thoughts, and impressions piling in from every side. This gives the book a claustrophobic feel. It also eschews straightforward narrative in favor of a stream

of consciousness approach that may be called modernist in the vein of Woolf or Joyce. Events are not related sequentially or even in one place. Sammler's own story has to be teased out of the book and is told in brief flashes of memory, accompanied by gusts of emotion erupting like steam from a manhole. Falling into a mass grave under the weight of dead bodies. Shooting a German soldier whom he has forced to disarm and undress in the snow of a Polish forest. Hiding in an empty marble crypt under the care of a non-Jewish groundskeeper.

These experiences are not worn on Sammler's sleeve or even visible to anyone he meets. Nor does he sentimentalize them. Instead he views them as impersonal encounters with history and the innate human capacity for evil. The few dramatic scenes are hardly given room to breathe, and much of the inherent comedy of the book is underplayed. It also means that there is no authorial voice to indicate the line between the author and his character. This has left readers free to conclude that there isn't one.

One man went into the pit, another came out. This one has only one eye. The question critics wrestle with is whether he sees more or less with his one eye than others see with two. Is he a blind seer like the mythical Tiresias? The proverbial one-eyed man in a kingdom of the blind? Or a mutilated victim who can see only the ugly parts of life?

As much as anything, *Sammler* is a book about New York, and what he sees through his bushy single eye is filth, corruption, and decay, both physical and moral. The city is a wreck, and no one seems to care or even notice. Trash is everywhere. The payphones are smashed and looted, used as urinals. Crime is rampant, and the cops shrug and do nothing. Driving up the West Side highway in his nephew's chauffeured silver Rolls with the Hudson on his left, he thinks: "There was the water—how beautiful, unclean, insidious! and there were the bushes and the trees, cover for sexual violence, knifepoint robberies, sluggings, and murders."

The degeneration and perversity extend even to his own family.

His nephew and benefactor, Elya Gruner, a wealthy gynecologist and sometime Mafia abortionist, lies dying in the hospital, estranged from his two children. His daughter Angela, a sexpot past her freshness date, flesh straining against skimpy too-tight clothes, indulges her louche appetites while sending money to "defense funds for black murderers and rapists." Her brother Wallace, "a high-IQ moron," pursues a series of wacky money-losing business schemes and literally tears his father's house apart looking for hidden Mafia loot.

Sammler's niece Margotte, a middle-aged widow with whom he shares an apartment and who seeks to engage him in high-flown conversations about the banality of evil, is another well-meaning liberal, "boundlessly, achingly, hopelessly on the right side, the best side, of every big human question." Meanwhile Shula, Sammler's daughter, touchingly unbalanced and confused, drives the plot by stealing a scientific manuscript on the future of lunar exploration that she thinks her father needs for a planned memoir of H.G. Wells. Each of these characters in some way represents a disordered zeitgeist that has no moral center.

Sammler's status as a survivor gives him a numinous authority in the eyes of those who know him and for whom he plays the role of confessor and therapist. But it is an authority that is passive, weak — "respected but not obeyed," as the critic Ruth Wisse puts it — and that mainly serves to highlight the moral confusion of the others. Sammler's is an outsider's perspective, like Gulliver's in Lilliput, and he delivers a number of erudite rants on the theme of modern civilizational decline. The prognosis isn't good:

> Like many people who had seen the world collapse once, Mr. Sammler entertained the possibility it might collapse twice. He did not agree with refugee friends that this doom was inevitable, but liberal beliefs did not seem capable of self-defense, and you could smell decay.

> Sammler's own story has to be teased out of the book and is told in brief flashes of memory, accompanied by gusts of emotion erupting like steam from a manhole.

Sammler is tired and merely wishes to observe, but the world will not let him alone. Chapter 1 presents a series of affronts to Sammler's dignity, first in the form of his relatives, who try his patience with their personal oddities and unwanted confessions; then at Columbia University, where he gives a talk on Britain in the '30s that is rudely interrupted by an angry student radical — an episode based in real life; then on the bus home, where he observes a well-dressed black thief picking the pockets of elderly Jews.

Each of these plot elements has been used to make the case that Sammler — and by extension his creator — is a misanthrope, racist, sexist, and reactionary. Let's briefly review the content of these charges.

A common theme in critical assessments of the book has been that Sammler is contemptuously dismissive of his relatives, especially the women. Alfred Kazin's takedown in what Saul liked to call "The New York Review of One Another's Books" provides a useful text.

For Kazin, Sammler's thoughts are so severe and disapproving that they cannot even be expressed. And it is true that Sammler views his people with a clinical detachment that would seem unduly harsh if he said what he thought. But he does not. In

fact, he is altogether nonjudgmental, listening impassively but not without compassion to their sordid, sad confessions. He sees them not as disappointing human failures (though they are) but as overgrown children, wayward and confused. Wallace in his thirties is described as giving off a "fecal" odor, like an infant with soiled diapers. Angela always smells like she has just had sex. But Sammler is not misanthropic. He is just clear-eyed. He does not think himself any better than them. He has done worse things than they could ever dream of.

The charge of sexism is more fraught, and Kazin again provides the warrant, citing what he calls Saul's "open contempt" for the women in the book as "crazy fantasists, improvident, gross, careless sexpots, 'birds of prey.'" Here Kazin seems on firmer ground. It's hard to believe this passage about hippie college girls was written without a deliberate intent to offend:

> Some of the poor girls had a bad smell. Bohemian protest did them the most harm. Females were naturally more prone to grossness, had more smells, needed more washing, clipping, binding, pruning, grooming, perfuming, and training. These poor kids may have resolved to stink together in defiance of a corrupt tradition built on neurosis and falsehood, but Mr. Sammler thought that an unforeseen result of their way of life was loss of femininity, of self-esteem. In their revulsion from authority they would respect no persons. Not even their own persons.

This sounds like textbook misogyny. On the other hand, consider Sammler's description a few pages on of Margotte as he watches her from the window, all dressed up to meet the Indian scientist Dr. Lal, author of the stolen manuscript, to whom she has taken a fancy:

> Touching the frieze curtain, he watched her going toward West End Avenue, up the pale width of the sidewalk, alert for a

> taxi. She was small, she was strong, and had a sort of compact female pride. Somewhat shaking, as women do when they hurry. Gotten up strangely. And altogether odd. Females! The drafts must blow between their legs. Such observations originated mainly in kindly detachment, in farewell-detachment, in earth-departure-objectivity.

This is clearly an expression of deep fondness for Margotte and of sympathy for women in general. If this is a form of misogyny, it would take a Harvard academic to spot it. Moreover he is equally put off by unwashed young men with pimples "springing to their cheeks" from gushing unkempt beards. This sort of equal-opportunity revulsion bespeaks an attitude that has more to do with the loss of civilized manners than with female sexuality per se. We might add that a man who has lain next to his wife's decomposing corpse for hours on end may have lost the capacity to view female bodies in a sexual way.

The charge of reactionary politics requires a bit more context. I like to say that neoconservatives (many of whom became my teachers, friends, and authors) were basically middle-aged Jewish men who took the '60s very badly, and Saul was a fairly typical example. Like other young immigrant Jews, he started out as an enthusiastic Trotskyist deeply versed in Marxist texts. But subsequent events, including sectarian squabbles over the Spanish Civil War, Trotsky's exile and murder, and Stalin's crimes, especially the show trials and the purge of Jews from Soviet arts and culture, led Saul and some of his friends to rethink their youthful commitment to revolutionary ideals. Still, he remained a mainstream liberal, appalled by McCarthy, firmly committed to civil rights, and publicly opposed to the Vietnam War — even as he accepted an invitation from LBJ to attend a dinner at the White House for "leaders in the arts," a choice for which he was severely criticized by literary friends such as Robert Lowell. At the same time he was uncomfortable with the more extreme

antinomian aspects of the student revolt against the so-called white power structure and bourgeois morality.

Critics who prefer not to address the substantive reasons for this movement away from the Left tend to fall back on psychoanalysis. The argument here is that Saul became more "patriarchal" as he aged, shifting from the archetype of the son to that of the father who seeks, as his virility declines, to assert his authority in the face of a noisy, disrespectful challenge from the young. In this connection, much is made of an episode that occurred in May 1968 at San Francisco State, where Saul's speech on the place of writers in the university was disrupted by an angry young man who called him an "effete old shit" with "dried up balls." This incident, incorporated practically verbatim into *Sammler*, is cited in various biographies and memoirs to suggest that *Sammler* is "an old man's book" and that Saul and his hero are one and the same. The scene takes up less than a page:

> "Hey!"…A man in Levi's, thick-bearded but possibly young, a figure of compact distortion, was standing shouting at him.
>
> "Hey! Old Man!"

There is a brief exchange about something George Orwell had said:

> "Orwell was a fink. He was a sick counterrevolutionary. It's good that he died when he did. And what you are saying is shit."

A commotion breaks out and Sammler is helped to withdraw by a sympathetic female student. Out on the street, the narration resumes:

> [But] he was not so much personally offended by the event as struck by the will to offend. What a passion to be *real*. But *real* was also brutal. And the acceptance of excrement as a standard?

> How extraordinary! Youth? Together with the idea of sexual potency? All this confused sex-excrement-militancy, explosiveness, abusiveness, tooth-showing, Barbary-ape howling.

Saul was undoubtedly upset by this experience. But he had already voiced his jaundiced view of the student movement in the *New York Times*, writing that he was "wholly opposed to civil disobedience" and disliked "unreasonable rebelliousness and pointless defiance of authority." Jews of his generation remembered how German universities in the '30s had collapsed into fascism and plausibly feared it could happen again, here in the tolerant USA, amid the violent rejection of all civilized tradition and restraint. So there was clearly more involved for him than personal affront.

But the real hot-button issue here is race, and it is the scene where Sammler witnesses a well-dressed black man picking people's pockets on the bus that forms Exhibit A in the indictment of the book as (in the assessment of biographer James Atlas) "an outburst of racism, misogyny, and puritanical intolerance" signaling his transformation into "a full-blown reactionary."

Sammler has seen the man plying his trade several times — "a powerful Negro in a camel's-hair coat, dressed with extraordinary elegance" — and become fascinated with his "princely" bearing and predatory grace. This time, however, Sammler is caught watching him operate, and this leads to a frightening confrontation after the man follows Sammler off the bus and into the vestibule of his building, where he presses him into a corner and silently exposes his penis. The description borders on the pornographic:

> It was displayed to Sammler with great oval testicles, a large tan-and-purple uncircumcised thing — a tube, a snake; metallic hairs bristled at the thick base and the tip curled beyond the supporting, demonstrating hand, suggesting the fleshly mobility of an elephant's trunk.

When people ask me to explain my father's politics, I say they were not partisan but literary.

There is no way a black reader or even a white liberal could fail to see this passage, with its animalistic metaphors, as expressing an ugly kind of racial prejudice rooted in fear of black sexual potency. Many reviewers were stunned, and the debate about this scene went on for decades. Years later, the journalist Brent Staples devoted a section of his memoir to describing his creepy obsession with Saul while a student at Chicago, stalking him through the crepuscular streets of Hyde Park, hoping to corner him in a vestibule. ("I wanted to trophy his fear.")

You can say what you like about the wisdom of putting this passage into the book or even writing it in the first place. But it was not some kind of accidental slip that betrayed the author's "actual" racist attitudes. Far from being inadvertent, the thing was done with great precision and an obvious authorial intention. Nor can one believe that an acclaimed Jewish author and public liberal who counted Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Richard Wright among his friends didn't know that he was evoking a highly charged stereotype. He knew what kind of reaction he would get, and he was willing to pay the price. The question is why he would do so.

These kinds of critical responses strike me as ironic, given that the book's famous opening paragraph explicitly warns against interpreting human phenomena in the light of abstract theories invented by the flawed and limited beings known as intellectu-

als. Looking around at the books and papers in his bedroom, Sammler expresses Ecclesiastes-level disenchantment and skepticism about their actual utility. "Intellectual man had become an explaining creature," Sammler thinks. "Fathers to children, wives to husbands, lecturers to listeners, experts to laymen, colleagues to colleagues, doctors to patients, man to his own soul, explained. The roots of this, the causes of the other, the source of events, the history, the structure, the reasons why. For the most part, in one ear and out the other."

Sammler's suspicion of these explanatory "superstructures" is ultimately rooted in their failure to account for his experience at Nazi hands — specifically, their inability to explain the existence of evil. This is the gravamen of Sammler's attack on Hannah Arendt's theory of the bureaucratic roots of the Nazi Holocaust. As he explains to Margotte: "The idea of making the century's great crime look dull is not banal. Politically, psychologically, the Germans had an idea of genius. The banality was only camouflage… the adopted disguise of a very powerful will to abolish conscience."

Given the author's clear warning not to succumb to this temptation, it's astonishing how many eminent critics have fallen prey to it, seeking to explain his literary motives in sociological, political, or psychological terms. One Bellow "expert" describes his turn against the Left as "a reaction against his guilt and shame over his revolutionism in the 1930s." Guilt and shame? Well, maybe. But maybe the events of the 20th century also had something to do with it.

The kindest thing that can be said about such critics is that they are more in love with their own ideological fixations than with the difficult task of reading. For the book is not (at least in the opinion of this neoconservative editor) a neoconservative screed at all but a subtle critique of the neoconservative mind — detached, explaining, analytical.

This makes perfect sense if we recall that Artur Sammler is based to some extent on the sociologist Edward Shils, Saul's colleague and

close friend who is often said to be one of his "intellectual mentors." A rather caustic and acerbic individual known for his research on the public role of intellectuals, Shils read the book in manuscript and marked it up extensively in his signature green ink. In the view of David Mikics, one of our more astute contemporary critics, the book is an extended argument with Shils, with whom Saul agreed about the problems in modern society, but not the solution.

So yes, Sammler's outlook is classically neoconservative. But it is a one-eyed vision, deeply penetrating but lacking stereoscopic perspective. We have two eyes for a reason, one to show us human frailty and fallibility up close, the other to provide cosmic perspective on the broader human comedy, to see ourselves as God might see us. Sammler's one good eye appears to toggle back and forth, struggling to integrate these perspectives until at the end he finally succeeds.

My own reading is as follows. Sammler is not personally racist and neither was his creator, and if readers get past the first chapter, this eventually becomes clear — at least to those not blinded by ideological prejudice, personal grievance, or (in certain cases) both. Far from a neoconservative screed, it is a book about the recovery of Sammler's humanity and his sense of connection with others. When we meet him, he is on the verge of reawakening from his trauma-induced detachment and once again becoming fully human. The real arc of the story is therefore not political but spiritual.

It is important to recall that Sammler has been maimed, both physically and emotionally. He sees what is ugly in the world because of the ugly things that he himself has suffered, seen, and done. It is not easy to preserve hope while staring naked into the abyss. Yet throughout the book his thoughts return to Elya Gruner, a flawed human specimen who has nonetheless chosen to be good — to honor the terms of his contract — his agreement with God. This choice of goodness makes no sense. It is arbitrary and confers no material benefits. It therefore resists explanation.

But Sammler knows that he owes Elya a debt. It is also why he often thinks of the Polish groundskeeper who hid him in a marble crypt for no good reason other than the recognition of their shared humanity.

The basis for this kind of deep connection is what Sammler thinks of as "the old system"—a major theme in Saul's work and the title of a short story written around the same time. "The old system" is his term for the complex substrate of intimate bonds that make us all a human family. Sammler owes his rescue to Elya's "Old World family feelings," but these are the very sentiments that are being extinguished in the brave new world of liberated appetite and excess. The result is the confusion and disorder that he now sees all around him.

The old system had to be destroyed because it has to do with deep attachments that people now think they have to be free of. Why? Because sophisticated modern explanations have told them that they are oppressed by racist, capitalist, and patriarchal systems that inhibit their authentic self-expression. But this revolt against inherited structures and forms—against civilization itself—in the name of a false liberation is destroying their ability to make sense of things, and to be good and happy people.

Sammler at the outset seems ready to give up on humanity altogether. But in his 30-page discussion with Dr. Lal, the Indian scientist who advocates leaving Earth behind and starting over on the moon, Sammler finds that he is not willing to abandon his planet or its benighted inhabitants after all. Instead he intuits that it is only in our deepest primordial feelings that the truth of our existence may be found. Thus at the end of the book, standing over Elya's body, he silently recites a private kaddish for his benefactor, praising his goodness as the fulfillment of his contract with God, whose terms—deny them as we may—we all acknowledge in our hearts.

The black thief plays an important role in the arc of Sammler's spiritual recovery. At the outset, he appears as a frightening

predatory figure, strong in his barbarous pride and sexual power. But at the end, when he lies prostrate on the ground, bleeding onto the sidewalk after being repeatedly bashed in the face by Sammler's violent son-in-law, the old man feels compassion and pity. The thief reminds him of himself standing at the edge of the pit, abused and humbled, stripped of his clothes, his wife, his identity, his dignity, his very humanity, on the way to becoming a corpse, and he cries out to his son-in-law for mercy.

Sammler also sees in him an important human quality. The princely thief in his splendid attire has invested tremendous imaginative and spiritual powers in the making of himself, powers not comprehended in Marx's theory of commodity fetishism or the Freudian psychoanalytic paradigm. And this is what ultimately brings Sammler back from the grave and returns him to humanity — with all the pain of grief and loss that it entails.

This is why, when people ask me to explain my father's politics, I say they were not partisan but literary. Saul had a way of seeing people not through one eye, as products of abstract impersonal systems or sociological forces, but through both — as self-created beings who use the power of their imagination to make themselves into whatever they wish to become, expressing their individuality in every way, through speech and action, habits, dress, and even physiognomy. As such, they are not the sum of their socially determined identities, but spiritual beings who are often as mysterious to themselves as to one another.

What I later understood from publishing books that challenged the reigning liberal consensus is that the critical attacks on *Sammler* were entirely political and had nothing to do with literature. Saul had become an iconic figure in American letters and a prominent subscriber to liberal causes, writing articles in the press and putting his name to all kinds of letters and petitions. For a long time during the '60s he tried to maintain an intermediate position between expressing disapproval of the war and discomfort with the radical excesses of the antiwar, feminist,

and black-power movements. Grateful as a Jew for the safety and security provided by America, he was not prepared to cross over into anti-Americanism. Meanwhile he was pressured to conform by friends and colleagues whose business should have been writing books, not leading protests. Something had to give, and eventually it did.

Why did he do it, knowing the reaction it would get? All I can say, having known him as I did, is that he wouldn't surrender his independent judgment to any external authority. He wouldn't surrender it to Marx. He wouldn't surrender it to Freud. He wouldn't surrender it to the Communist Party. He wouldn't surrender it to any of the "mentors" who are supposed to have influenced his thought, like Ed Shils or Allan Bloom. And he certainly wouldn't surrender it to the New York Review of One Another's Books. He felt this pressure building up inside and had to let it out. Not the pressure of unexpressed bigotry and rage coming out in a literary tantrum, but of rebellion against the intellectual conformity that had become the price of membership in the liberal community. Because he felt that "lining up" over an issue was not his business as a writer.

For Saul to publicly turn to the right was unforgivable, a major blow to the prestige of the cultural Left and a breaking of ranks that could not be permitted. For more than anything else, *Sammler* was viewed as a betrayal by the author's liberal friends. And those who break ranks must be punished — marginalized, canceled, rendered unpersons. This is how the sectarian Left always deals with heretics. Being called a racist is just what happens when you put pressure on the ideological assumptions that bind the liberal community together. People you have known for years get mad and call you the worst names they can think of in an attempt to drive you off the public stage and kill your reputation. To that extent, the debate about Sammler may be considered the opening skirmish in what came to be known as the Culture War.

But let us return to the original question: How does the book's

argument hold up? What does *Sammler's Planet* have to say to modern readers?

Every generation knows a different New York City and attaches its nostalgia to a different stage in its endless cycle of renewal and decay. I myself have seen this cycle several times and have always been heartened by the city's remarkable ability to recover its vitality. So when I recently sat down to reread this great New York novel, with its hellscape vision of my Upper West Side neighborhood at the very time that I was growing up in it, I couldn't help but smile. What Saul, with his memories of a safer, cleaner, more civilized New York, saw as a horrifying descent into chaos I regarded as perfectly normal, even exciting and fun.

These days, however, Sammler's catalogue of urban disorder comes across as charmingly retro. New York today, like San Francisco and other large liberal cities, seems to be going down the drain after a series of manmade shocks, including a society-wide lockdown, a season of race-driven riots, an economic slump that hollowed out the city's business sector, a homeless crisis, an influx of undocumented immigrants, and a spike in violent crime and drug addiction. We see organized looting, public defecation, migrant encampments; we read in the *Post* about random stabbings, subway-track shovings, immigrant sex-trafficking gangs, all abetted by a hands-off approach to law enforcement. In short, it's fair to say that things are objectively worse than they were in the '60s.

Believe me, I know who I'm sounding like. Am I turning into Sammler as I age? In truth, however, I am not so despairing. New York may yet revive and flourish with a change in political leadership. But it will never be the city I grew up in, because in the interval the position of Jewish New Yorkers has suddenly and drastically deteriorated to the point where we can no longer feel the unconscious safety that we used to take for granted. Today we are faced with

> In a development that even Sammler might not have expected, the position of American Jews has dramatically deteriorated. Jewish New Yorkers in particular have been confronted with a new antisemitism on a scale hitherto unknown in the United States.

violent antisemitism on a scale hitherto unknown in the United States: campus mobs chanting "Death to Israel," Jews attacked and threatened in their neighborhoods, Jewish businesses painted with swastikas and their windows smashed, while again the cops do nothing. We all know where this kind of thing can lead.

If Artur Sammler could see all of this, he'd probably conclude that the neoconservative diagnosis of America's ills in *Sammler's Planet* has proven remarkably prescient. There certainly seems to be a direct line from the radical permissiveness of the '60s to the even more radical liberationism of today. But there is also an important difference. The activism of the '60s was sharply critical of America, but it was not without hope for reform and the fulfillment of its promise of greater inclusivity. It was also (with apologies to Artur Sammler) very sexy. Today's activists have taken the antinomian aspects of the '60s revolt to a point beyond discussion or debate. They cannot seem to articulate what it is they are protesting and can only howl in thwarted rage. They have no utopian vision of a better world, they just want to tear everything down.

What can explain their nihilistic rage and hatred of their own society? I think Saul would say something like this: Millions of people in Western countries, especially the young, seem to feel that they

are failing at life and no longer know how to be human. Rightly or wrongly, they blame the surrounding society for its false promise of happiness through material abundance. Having abandoned traditional religion, they feel a spiritual void at their core that deprives them of meaning and causes them pain and confusion, and their response to this is depression or anger. Directed inward, their alienation and self-loathing can lead to addiction or suicide. Directed outward, it leads to a cleansing orgy of mob violence.

A fair reading must therefore conclude that the book was nothing short of prophetic. Saul saw that underneath the veneer of liberatory licentiousness, the demand for total freedom from convention and constraint, there was real danger, the kind societies don't recover from. He also foresaw that Jews' eager embrace of emancipation from "the old system" in their transition from the old world to the new would not necessarily end well for them.

The silver lining may be the awakening of Jews from their long slumber of complacency and reflexive progressivism with a renewed sense of unity and purpose. The more perceptive of them can see they have been rejected by their former friends on the Left and are beginning to search for new allies. From where I sit as a publisher, I perceive an increasing convergence of interests among conservatives, Christians, Jews, and traditional liberals who have a common interest in the defense of the Western civilizational legacy in the face of a renewed challenge from barbarism within and without.

All of this is rather dark, so let me leave you with something lighter: a little verse my father composed that I do not think has been published anywhere else. I'm not even sure he wrote it down. But I do know he was very pleased with it. Think of it as *Sammler's Planet* rendered in four lines:

I wish I were a porcupine
so you might kiss my barbed behind
and know, that without Veneration,
there is no Civilization.

The note of belligerency is hardly accidental and that is what I like about it. You can almost hear his sonorous voice pronouncing "kiss my barbed behind" in an admonitory tone. To my mind it sums up in inimitable fashion the very problem we have been discussing — and points the way to the only real solution, which is to tell our critics exactly what they can do if they don't like what we have to say.

This is the stance Saul Bellow assumed in the world, and it has turned out to be mine as well. To that extent, I seem to have a lot of my cantankerous old man in me. ✳

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רַגְלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לִבְנַת הַסַּפִּיר
וּכְעֶצֶם הַשָּׁמַיִם לָטֹהַר׃

— שמות כד:י

Nothing you say or do should be in the service of co-opting the university itself to your side or shutting out or insulating yourself from opposing views.

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There's a long history of rigorous intellectual debate within Jewish culture. At the same time, the Jewish people have historically been the quintessential other. We're able to understand the intellectual value of viewpoint diversity and open inquiry, while also recognizing the moral importance of treating others with dignity and respect.

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We can honor the enduring partnership between the black and Jewish communities by establishing lasting endowments to celebrate our accomplishments in pursuing freedom, opportunity, and equality for all Americans.

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The rites of ritualized protest and righteously indignant censorship have taken the place of religious commitment for nonreligious students.

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