



# THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR

SUMMER 2023

Edited by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

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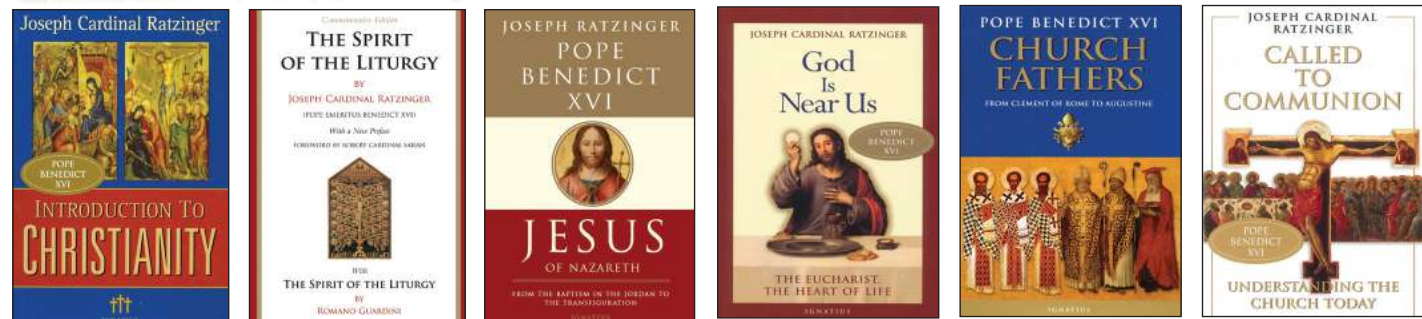
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## MOTTO

Politics is too important to be taken seriously.

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The core purpose of *The American Spectator* is to educate, entertain, and inform readers with smart and witty investigative journalism and editorial writing from a conservative point of view. What distinguishes *The American Spectator* is its wry, youthful, and fresh perspective.

## VISION STATEMENT

*The American Spectator* maintains fidelity to the conservative dogma of happy warriors of generations past while not being stuffy, inflexible, or incurious about new phenomena in politics and culture.

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THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR  
Summer 2023

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703-807-2011  
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www.spectator.org  
ISSN 0148-8414

The American Spectator LLC is a subsidiary of  
The American Spectator Foundation.

**LEGAL COUNSEL:** Solitary, Poor, Nasty,  
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**COVER ART:** Yogi Love

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE



# Education Has Reached Peak Absurdity, But There Is Hope

*The government's failure to educate America's youth has created opportunities for real change.*

by **Melissa Mackenzie**

It didn't seem possible that school could get more ridiculous than me as a fourth grader hiding under my desk with a three-inch-thick textbook on my head to protect my noggin from a tornado or nuclear fallout. Yet here we are in the United States of America defending our children's right to not have their innocence ruined by gay pedophilic rape books in elementary school libraries.

Peak absurdity wasn't *Silent Spring*. Peak absurdity is now: children's test scores are sliding and their IQs are declining because teachers aren't teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. Instead, teachers churn out barely literate cretins skilled in the art of condoming a banana but unable to authoritatively state that two plus two equals four.

If I recall correctly (and this was an eternity ago), my crimson-lipsticked, former cover model (she informed us while sitting cross-legged on her desk) public school English teacher played *The Day After* in 1983 to scare us seventh graders into a no-nuke stance. These days, she'd have rainbow flags and ally pins and secret meetings with students encouraging them to be their "true" selves and wear chest binders without telling their parents.

My point is that the academic world didn't turn upside down yesterday or even with Randi Weingarten's pandemic response; it's been a mess for a couple of generations. Millennial parents don't know what they don't know because of their own miseducation and couldn't correct most inaccuracies in modern curricula. What hope do their kids have? It turns out they have quite a bit. We're excited to share these hopeful changes in the pages of this magazine.

Addressing education in the print edition of *The American Spectator* has been a dream of mine. The various college-ranking books and magazines mostly stink. They do not address the most important considerations and options for schooling. Conservative parents — heck, good old-fashioned liberal parents — would like to have their children's minds inculcated with what used to be understood as the basics: English literacy, fluency in writing, mathematical competency, scientific knowledge, fact-based American and world history focused on the triumphs of Western Civilization, and a broad-based survey of the arts, with some practical knowledge thrown in. In generations past, a student could graduate high school with the skills to be a hairdresser, cook, or mechanic. Basically, American parents could count on the public schools to produce a literate graduate who would become a fully functional citizen and taxpayer.

No more. Parents are fortunate if their children graduate high school as agnostic heathens seeking satisfaction in the material realm. The worst public school outcomes



*Melissa Mackenzie is publisher of The American Spectator.*



include brainwashed potheads with purple hair seeking meaning at their local black-bloc Antifa meetup. Stupid and violent and disordered is no way to make it in the world, yet far too many products of the education system end up that way.

Turning the tide is going to take rehabilitating many formerly trusted but decrepit institutions, including religion, marriage, and medicine. Education is only one piece of the puzzle, but since so many resources both nationally and locally are spent on such obvious failure, it's a good place to start.

The articles herein are wide-ranging. We don't rank colleges and universities; we offer them and hope that you and your child will be surprised by the expansive and unique choices and find one that suits you. We likely have missed some excellent schools. We urge you to share your ideas and feedback with us.

We don't believe that there is one primary educational solution for your children or grandchildren — our writers discuss many of them, from homeschooling to online learning to classical education.

Our writers also address structural issues. Who created this dystopian education situation? Public-sector teachers unions deserve much of the blame. Randi Weingarten is feverishly attempting to rewrite history, but she and Anthony Fauci were consistent, pint-sized villains during the government's response to the COVID pandemic. Teachers unions must be held accountable not just for harming children by shutting down schools during the pandemic, but also for defending failing school administrators and teachers while leaving children behind.

We are honored to have Betsy DeVos, the former secretary of education, write about the institution she attempted to reform. Like all distant, powerful bureaucracies, the Department of Education's one-size-fits-all policies harm rather than help improve education. Ms. DeVos offers some radical solutions to the radical institutional problems she faced.

The government's failure to educate America's youth has created opportunities for real change. Parochial schools, classical schooling, and homeschoolers have remade the education landscape. The weaknesses of public school education illuminated during the COVID crisis accelerated reforms. Many states have passed school choice policies in which funding follows the student.

I grew up with the fear of nuclear annihilation — a legitimate fear, as it turns out. But most of the rest of the nonsense poured into heads in the years hence has been useless propaganda. Acid rain, the ozone layer, the Amazon rain forests dying, the mini ice age, global warming, and now climate change are used to instill irrational fear in America's youth, robbing them of hope. In the internet era of narcissism and isolation, 25 percent of Gen Zers identify as one of the "Alphabet People," as Dave Chappelle calls them. The kids are not alright.

Change happens one motivated parent at a time. Parents are running for school boards. They're challenging curricula. The pain that the public schools inflicted on American families ignited a fever that has yet to cool off. Americans are angry at what was revealed to them. Furious. And well they should be. The amount of money thrown at education in America is astonishing. The outcomes are embarrassing.

We hope that you will be heartened by what you read here and empowered to make better decisions for your family. We hope that you're instilled with hope. One of our writers is an eloquent 15-year-old who shares the joys of her unique and effective educational method. The future is bright for her, and she's not alone. That's a comforting thought. ✨



Riley Gaines (Amile Wilson)

## EDITOR'S NOTE



# College Past Its Decline

*When the life of the mind doesn't matter, is there really any point to college?*

by Wlady Pleszczynski

This can't be a happy time at the Wall Street Journal, what with its Russia-based reporter Evan Gershkovich being held hostage in a Stalinist prison. His reporting made the *WSJ* proud. Certainly it outpaced the *New York Times*, which is providing its coverage of Russia's war from the safety of not being there.

On the other hand, the *Journal* tarnished its image by doing its owner's bidding in smearing Tucker Carlson on his firing by that owner. It even resorted to the poison-dagger method of settling disputes, as when it noted, "Mr. Carlson sometimes trafficked in what critics—including some higher-ups within Fox—felt was thinly veiled racism on his show." I suppose they didn't have to say "thinly veiled," but did they need to accuse him of trafficking?

Such charges against an ideological target are a wokey standby. I saw the same thing recently in the *New Yorker's* long report on Hillsdale College and its transformational president, Larry Arnn. Unable to land a glove on him, the reporter, Emma Green, formerly of the *Atlantic*, did come up with this from the director of Claremont McKenna College's Salvatori Center, where Arnn served on an advisory board: "Even prior to the Trump Administration, [Arnn] had given a lot of people in the academic world real pause. Flirtation with the disreputable right, flirtation with serious racism." This comes early in the piece, something for the magazine's virtuous readership to keep in mind if further on

Arnn and Hillsdale come off looking better than maybe they should have been allowed to.

And just to reassert her own bona fides, Green observes later in the piece: "As I walked around [the Hillsdale] campus, it was ... impossible not to notice the whiteness of the student body and the faculty. Every professor I met was a white man." Isn't it awful when that

happens in America? She did make an exception for a professor who is Lebanese Catholic, not that his religion and the plight of Lebanese Catholics were of any interest to her.

Just before that, Green bemoaned the status of LGBTQs, who find it "almost impossible ... to form clubs" or come out as gender fluid. Doggedly she tracked down a few Hillsdale grads, one of whom felt "socially ostracized" there "after she cut her hair short and started dressing in a more masculine way." The traumas of life in a white man's world!

To be fair, Green interviewed a wide number of Hillsdale professors, and they all come across as cordial, intelligent, engaging, and straight shooting. One suspects that Green learned quite a few things from them that she might not have in New York, and the experience didn't immediately send her into psychiatric care. She's left somewhat speechless upon learning that weight lifting, a healthy alternative to the snowflake stresses and depression so common among today's youth, has become popular at Hillsdale. And she doesn't dispute that learning is central to Hillsdale's mission.

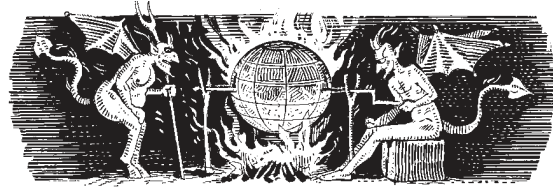
Oddly, there's not a word in her piece about a longtime scourge on U.S. campuses: alcohol. A decade ago, I asked an art professor whose husband was a dean at her small college: Why all this drinking? Most every night, vans circulated on campus picking up dead-drunk students and giving them rides to their dorms. She was completely on board with the debauch — students were learning tremendously about life and socializing and being away from their parents (whose payments of full tuition kept the college alive, she didn't need to add). She didn't appreciate it when I countered that a night in a police cooler might prove more instructive.

I'm grateful that Hillsdale has escaped the blight that alcohol (and who knows what else) has brought to my old college surroundings at the University of California, Santa Barbara. This year's spring break "Deltopia" in off-campus Isla Vista brought sixty medical calls and twenty-three arrests. But who's counting? For all we know, the affected attendees were what once were called outside agitators. When the life of the mind doesn't matter, is there really any point to college? You might find some answers in this special issue, if not in the *New Yorker*. ✨



Wlady Pleszczynski is executive editor of *The American Spectator*.





## Milton Friedman's Victory

*It took Milton a lifetime to popularize vouchers, but today he is winning.*

**R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.**

WASHINGTON — Who is buried in Grant's tomb? Actually, Ulysses S. Grant is buried in Grant's tomb, which comes as a bit of a surprise to young Americans educated in our modern educational factories — all air-conditioned, with counselors on every floor and armed guards patrolling the halls. Also, there are psychiatrists on duty daily for troubled students who may have encountered a rude word in their textbooks.

Harry Truman — the thirty-third president of the United States, for the ill-informed — certainly knew who Ulysses S. Grant was. Truman was educated in a one-room schoolhouse and never graduated from college, yet he knew that Grant won the Civil War and that with the help of another obscure American figure, Abraham Lincoln, they saved the Union.

Today's youths take little history. Most of today's students have no time for history or, for that matter, algebra, geometry, or gym class. Their days at school are taken up by courses in anger management, sex education, and films on how to be nice to transgendered folk. Actually, there are films on how to be nice to everyone.

I have been reading history for years, often to assist myself in my journalistic pursuits. I also read history for pleasure. I find history more absorbing than most modern novels. Presently, I am reading *Jerusalem: The Biography* by Simon Sebag Montefiore. It is a huge tome, but it is worth the effort. I often think that the early Christian Church harangued the faithful excessively about murder, torture, and slavery — brutalities that we modern Americans never encounter in everyday life. However, after reading Montefiore, I am going to pipe down my criticism of the early Church. The ancient world abounded with ceaseless atrocities. Maybe we do not encounter the bestiality that filled the world when the early Church was getting started, but perhaps admonitions against these atrocious behaviors are not a waste of time after all. That kind of brutality has existed for thousands of years, and it can return again. Consider what is happening in Ukraine. Consider what is happening in the rest of the nondemocratic world.



R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr. is editor-in-chief of *The American Spectator*.

A nation that is not familiar with history remains in the dark as to what horrors might await it. Remember the Nazis and the Holocaust. You do not have to go back very far to witness atrocities being authored by mankind. That is why our schools once taught civics along with history. Civics was usually a very boring study, but it was essential to a well-educated individual. We would not have all the hysterical nonsense about voter registration and the canards that go with it if our graduates left school well-grounded in civics.

There was a day in America when we could look to teachers to serve as founts of good sense. That day is gone. All the aforementioned courses in anger management and sexual hygiene have replaced the courses in civics and history, to say nothing of simple math and spelling. Today's teachers are ideologues spouting insanity that they insist is progressive thought. It will lead to a nation of dunces.

There is an alternative to the public schools that teach ideological pishposh, however. It is school choice, what Milton Friedman called the "voucher system." When he began calling for state governments to set aside monies for parents to spend on the education system of their choice, people thought he was crazy. The teachers unions in particular thought he was crazy. Yet Milton persisted, and the teachers unions persisted. Milton and those who thought as he did persisted in calling for school choice to be paid for with state-funded vouchers. The teachers unions persisted in forcing their ideological bunk on students and having taxpayers pay for it. It took Milton a lifetime to popularize vouchers, but my guess is that today he is winning.

Vouchers are the wave of the future in education. In some school districts, they are the wave of the present day. Meanwhile, the teachers unions get more extreme. Now they are rewriting works of fiction by people such as Roald Dahl so that some students will not be disturbed by what they read. The ideologues have come up with something called "trigger warnings" to alert the delicate students of stormy weather ahead.

It is all claptrap. The teachers unions' days are numbered. The Friedmanites are the wave of the future. It is a shame that Milton is not here to witness it. Yet, if he had survived, he would be 110 years of age. That is almost as old as Joe Biden.

Glory to Ukraine! 🇺🇸



## Dewey's Destruction: The Ideas and Influence of the Pioneer of Public Education

*The Bolsheviks regarded his educational ideas as ideal for their totalitarian state, and those same ideas are embraced by American public schools.*

**by Paul Kengor**

This article is adapted from Paul Kengor's book *Dupes: How America's Adversaries Have Manipulated Progressives for a Century*.

Google the phrase "founding father of public education," and you'll likely land on Horace Mann (1796–1859). But many of us would submit that the title ought to go to John Dewey (1859–1952), who has had a more profound, lasting, and damaging influence. Dewey is honorary president for life of the National Education Association. That title is fitting, and, really, it tells you all you need to know.

It is difficult to overstate the impact John Dewey made on educational philosophy, particularly during his time at Columbia University's destructive Teachers College. That sweeping influence has endured; at most education departments on university campuses, one genuflects before a statue of Dewey.

Like so many American youths, John Dewey began life as a Christian and ended up abandoning his faith in favor of the socialistic secularism that pervades education today.

Dewey's mother had made him a Christian, but his wife, whom he married in 1886, pulled him away from the faith. Harriet Alice Chapman was a corrupting influence. She was raised with a deep skepticism of organized religion and church "dogma." She more than sufficiently demonstrated that skepticism to Dewey.

Harriet contributed to Dewey's eventual understanding of Christianity as a "dying myth" (in his words), a religion based on "supernatural commands, rewards, and penalties." And among the members of "Christendom as a whole," it was orthodox Christians especially whom Dewey came to view as slack-jawed idiots. Those who subscribed to more orthodox forms of Christianity badly needed to be "progressively liberated from [their] bondage to prejudice and ignorance."

Harriet wasn't the only bad influence on Dewey. The American Communist Party was launched in Chicago in September 1919, setting up shop at 1219 Blue Island Avenue. Like New York City, where Dewey headed next, Chicago was a hotbed of Marxists and socialists. Like Dewey, the American Communist Party would eventually move to New York City.



Paul Kengor is editor of *The American Spectator*.





In New York, Dewey became a professor of philosophy at Columbia University, with a joint appointment at Columbia's Teachers College. It was in that capacity that Dewey became the Dewey known by history.

### *Dewey's Idiotic Politics*

John Dewey and Columbia University were no match made in heaven. It was at Columbia that young people as diverse as Whittaker Chambers and Thomas Merton and Bella Dodd arrived naïve and impressionable and were filled with Marxist rot. Dodd would end up becoming one of the highest-ranking female members of the American Communist Party and the chief organizer of the party's education front. In that capacity, she led a mass infiltration of the New York Teachers Union.

Columbia University by the 1910s had already become an extremely secular and politically radical place, no doubt in part a product of its unfortunate location in New York City, the epicenter of the communist movement and the headquarters of the Communist Party USA. A declassified March 2, 1948, FBI report titled "Redirection of Communist Investigations" disclosed that there were "approximately 30,000" Communist Party members in the New York City area alone. Remarkably, the document reported that "almost 50% of the Communist Party members in the United States are located in the New York area."

This Marxist milieu affected Dewey deeply. "[W]e are in for some form of socialism, call it whatever name we please," averred Dewey. "And no matter what it will be called when it is realized, economic determinism is now a fact, not a theory."

These theories also determined Dewey's views on education. Canadian scholar William Brooks observed that Dewey believed that schools needed to be liberated from religious influences — which, like Karl Marx, he considered medieval superstitions — in order to demonstrate that it was not Providence but rather man's labor that was responsible for progress.

As for communism, Dewey flirted with it, if not embraced it, especially as he made a political pilgrimage to the USSR in 1928. That Dewey trip is infamous, or at least it ought to be. I wrote about it at length in my 2010 book, *Dupes: How America's Adversaries Have Manipulated Progressives for a Century*, but here are a few highlights and lowlights.

The 1928 invitation from Moscow came about because the Bolsheviks were big fans of Dewey's work. From the beginning, the Bolsheviks studied and experimented with Dewey's educational ideas. Immediately after the October Revolution, even with the bloody Russian Civil War (1917–21) still raging, the Bolsheviks began rapidly translating Dewey's works into Russian. In 1918, only three years after it was published in the United States, *Dewey's Schools of Tomorrow* was published in Moscow.

It ought to shock the US educational establishment to learn that the Bolsheviks — Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Stalin — felt that John Dewey's understanding of educational collectivism was the perfect model for the Soviet Marxist–Leninist state's education system.

The Deweyan classic *Democracy and Education* became a Bolshevik phenomenon. That thought deserves special pause. Think about it. *Democracy and Education* remains Dewey's opus, the bible of Columbia Teachers College, the text of choice for college education departments, and the guidepost for public education in America. Dewey himself said that it encapsulated his "entire philosophical position."

And who loved it? Who quickly translated and implemented it? The Bolsheviks. The men who implemented the deadliest totalitarian state in human history.

Has this reality given American public educators caution? Not at all. And neither did it concern Dewey. To the contrary, Dewey was flattered and encouraged. According to his admiring colleague William Brickman, Dewey judged this "fulsome praise indeed."

To be fair, it must be emphasized that Dewey later came to reject the USSR in part. That is to say, he came to reject Stalinism. He did so as the namesake of a prominent commission in the late 1930s, the Dewey Commission, which took up the noble task of exposing Stalin's "Moscow trials" as barbaric show trials. Dewey did excellent work in that capacity. Yet, in so doing, he worked arm in arm with the Trotskyites, the anti-Stalin wing of the international communist movement. Dewey was anti-Stalin, but not anti-Trotsky.

So, Dewey spurned Stalinism, but not really communism. Ultimately, he came to say that he rejected official "Communism," — spelt with a capital letter, as he put it — as practiced by the likes of Stalin and Communist officials in the 1930s. Dewey wrote this in a brief April 1934 article published in *Modern Monthly* titled "Why I Am Not a Communist." It would take Dewey a while to come to that position, though he always seemed to harbor sympathies to "communism" (lowercase *c*) as an ideology.

Nonetheless, a crucial reality remains: Dewey's pioneering educational work, which set the standard and foundation for American public education, was deemed ideal by the Bolsheviks for their totalitarian state.

### *Dewey's Educational Philosophy*

All of this brings us to what Dewey taught. And figuring that out is not always easy.

Dewey's written work was as ambiguous as it was prolific. Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. called Dewey's writing "inarticulate." The Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain said that the innumerable "ambiguities" in Dewey's work fostered "a disastrous confusion of ideas." Leo R. Ward, a political scientist, rightly noted that "it is difficult to say for sure in what Dewey believed."

Dewey's ideas require some philosophical unpacking. He has been called the father of "pragmatism" and "experimentalism" in the classroom. Pragmatism, which was developed by Charles Peirce and William James, is the theory that the meaning of a course of action or proposition lies in its observable consequences; it is the sum of those consequences that constitutes the meaning of the action or proposition. This is considered a practical way of addressing problems. It can be — as it was by Dewey — applied to the classroom in the form of a desire to experiment in search of the best methods of learning. To this day, this thinking maintains a hold on educators, as does the sharp secularism and postmodernism that have come to dominate public education.

Dewey, too, favored that secular relativism and, in some respects, helped to shape it. When it came to the repudiation of religion and moral absolutes in the public schoolroom, Dewey was way ahead of his time.

The specter of Dewey thrives today in public schools and doctoral programs via the zeitgeist of constant experimentation, the seemingly never-ending and always-evolving search for new fads and fashions that treats your children as though they are educational lab mice. Your children are constantly subjected to the latest "research" in "outcomes-based education," "self-esteem," "values clarification," and whatever other nonsense is spoon-fed to aspiring teachers in education departments.

To Dewey and his minions, what mattered most were "enviroming forces," or, as he put it, "working adaptations of personal capacities with enviroming forces." Today, the minions call this "socialization" — the molten, golden calf of public education. One of the reasons they loathe homeschooling is because they believe that it fails to achieve this grand goal (or at least the kind of "socialization" they have in mind). To Dewey and his disciples, it isn't about the individual. What is indispensable is the formative role of the "collective," the "public." Dewey preached that "all morality is social."

The degree to which Dewey was a prophet who foresaw these trends or the originator of them is hard to discern. Either way, Dewey's specter is undeniably thriving in education today. Moreover, disciples of Dewey will never go unemployed, since experimentation and change are their *modus operandi*. There will always be something new to conjure up, to try, to need, with the one constant being the student, who is the subject of the ever-changing experimentation.

And yet ironically that student, that individual human being, is always seen as part of the "collective" — the collective experience of human beings, not the private thoughts or feelings of a unique individual. He or she is a product of the "public." Thus, "socialization" is again an essential core and perpetual driving principle. It is at the crux of public education.

This Deweyan view of an individual's personal education also conforms to Dewey's view of society and the larger world. Reality itself, the environment itself, and progress itself are always

moving onward, while also never satisfied with their present states. A process of constant flux and refinement is always at hand. This is the essence of political progressivism. Dewey's political and philosophical "progressivism" is the handmaiden to his educational views.

The specter of Dewey thrives today in public schools and doctoral programs via the zeitgeist of constant experimentation.

Like many of the twentieth-century radicals who went into education, especially those of the 1960s generation, Dewey judged that pursuing political and social change through politics was too slow. As he argued in *Democracy and Education*, enacting change through education could be much quicker and more efficient. Dewey judged that the schoolhouse could be much more efficacious than houses of legislatures.

It is no coincidence that leading '60s radicals like Bill Ayers of the Weather Underground gave up bomb making in the 1980s and instead enrolled at Columbia Teachers College. By the 2000s, Ayers was teaching in the education department at

the University of Illinois at Chicago and publishing books on subjects like "teaching social justice" through publishing houses like Columbia's Teachers College Press. His former Weather Underground colleagues, such as Mark Rudd and his sweetheart Bernardine Dohrn, to note just two, likewise headed to the halls of higher learning.

The classroom rather than the factory floor became the new battleground for winning over the masses and forwarding the revolution.

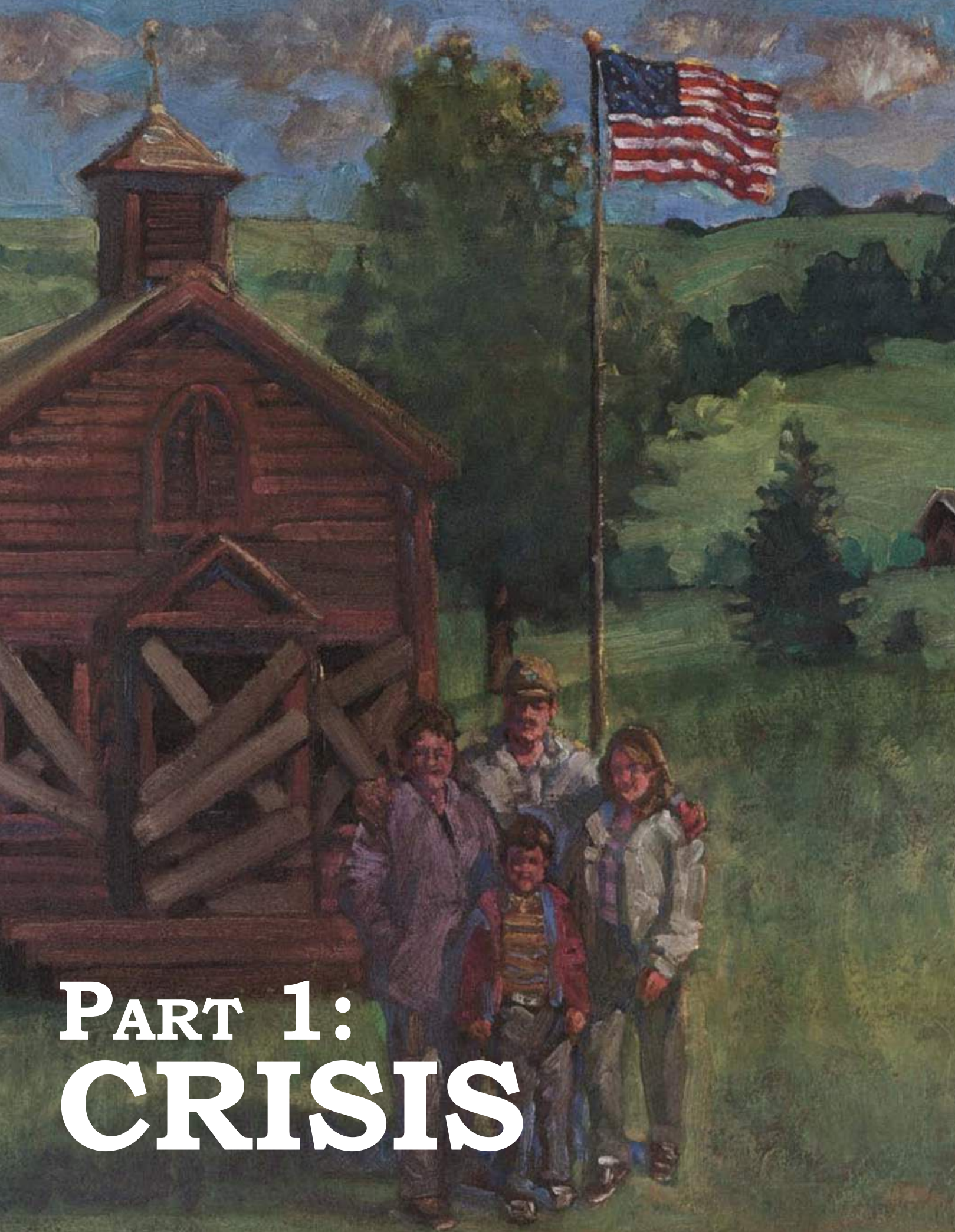
To John Dewey, secularization, socialization, and experimentation are the lifeblood of education. The masses are to be herded into the public educational collective, where they will evolve along with society in an ever-changing understanding of what is right. They need to get with history, or they will be washed away by the tide.

As for your children, they are the perpetual twitching guinea pigs in the always-evolving process of experimentation. It is not the parents at home who know what is best for their children. Those who know best are those experts who are armed with the latest fads from the most recent edition of the textbook that serves as the latest rage in the education department. Those newly minted PhDs and their trained student teachers know what is best because they have been trained properly. They have certificates.

This is democracy and education Dewey-style — a method for the ages. Such is the ongoing legacy of John Dewey's destruction. ✎

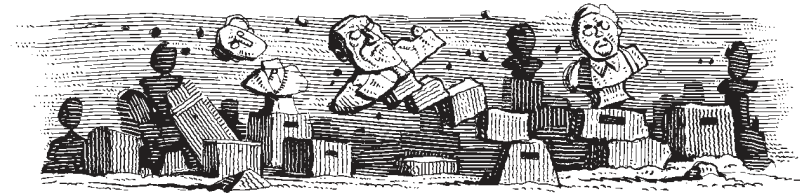






# PART 1: CRISIS

GET OUT WHILE YOU CAN



## There Is Nothing Worth Saving in America's Public Schools

*The heart of their mission is to indoctrinate children into being atheistic gender ideologues.*

by Theresa Farnan and Mary Rice Hasson

Another year, another election cycle. Already Republican candidates and pundits are testing carefully calibrated messages about education. A recent National Affairs article by scholar Robert Pondiscio, for example, sounds the following themes: Yes to school choice, but also yes to more funding for public schools. Yes to curricular transparency, but please no “bans” on teacher-led discussions of “sensitive subjects” (critical race theory and gender ideology). “Compromise” is good, even on “the most ideologically tinged” issues. And, by the way, conservatives ought to “cease fomenting parental discontent with public schools” lest activist teachers respond with retaliatory indoctrination of students. Sure, public schools are failing, but parents must “recommit to strengthening,” not “abandon[ing],” public schools. Why? Because “[i]f conservatives cede public schools to the left, they will effectively abandon the vast majority of America’s future generations to the progressive cause.”

This concern for America’s future generations is laudable — but stunningly

out of touch and decades late. A recent report by the Policy Exchange, a prominent UK think tank, on the sweeping harm of gender ideology in UK schools warns that policymakers are “Asleep at the Wheel,” an apt description that applies to far too many conservatives.

Wake up, friends. America’s stubborn commitment to progressive-controlled government education has already abandoned “the vast majority” of our children “to the progressive cause” for well over a decade. The results have been disastrous.

For starters, schools have failed abysmally in their fundamental task — teaching basic academic skills — despite spending staggering sums. In 2019, annual expenditures for K–12 public schools totaled almost \$800 billion, but, according to the Nation’s Report Card, barely one-third of public school students were “proficient” in math and reading pre-COVID, a dismal track record that worsened significantly post-COVID. Nationally, just 26 percent of eighth graders are proficient in math, with 31 percent proficient in reading. In Detroit, only 3 percent of fourth graders are mathematically proficient, while twenty-three Baltimore public schools reported exactly zero math-proficient students. Government schools, which enroll almost nine out of ten American children, repeatedly fail to deliver

on their promises but are rewarded with big budgets and near-monopolistic power.

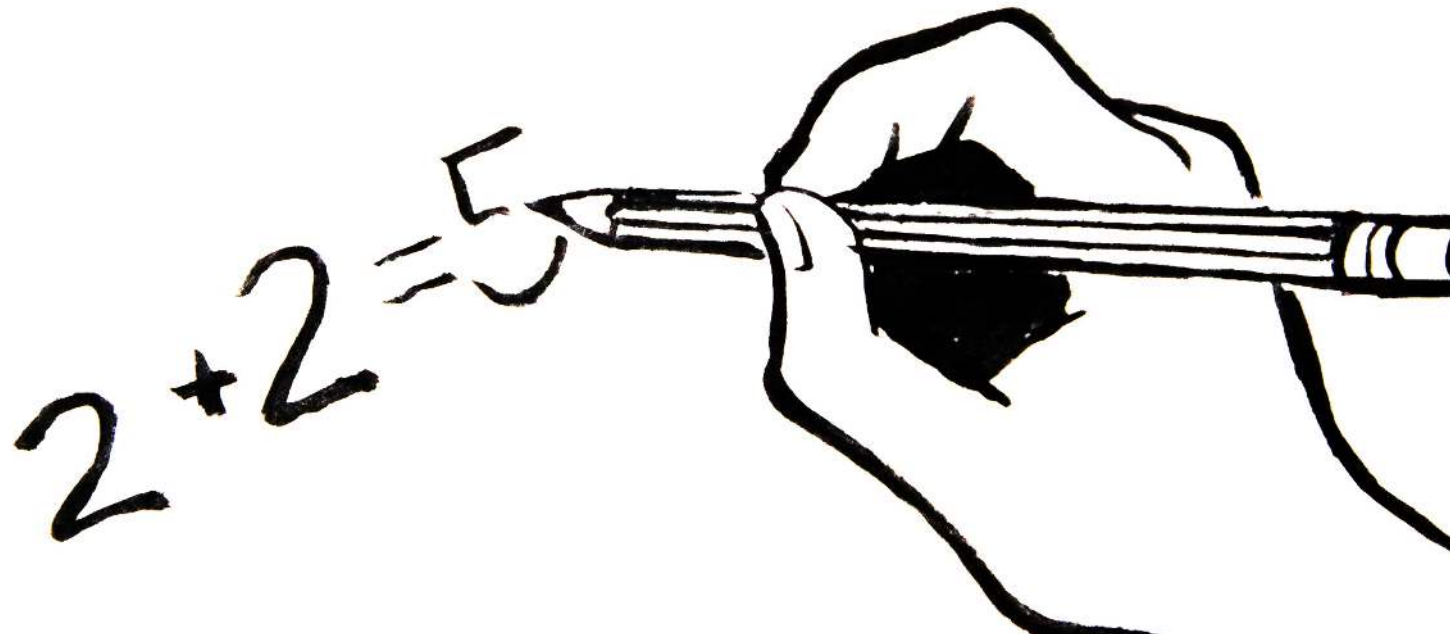
The most troubling aspect of our government school system, however, is not what it has failed to teach but what it has succeeded in teaching.

As cultural revolutionaries have long known, it is far easier to capture and mold the beliefs of children than to change the minds of adults. The evidence is in: the cultural revolutionaries are winning. A recent *Wall Street Journal*/NORC poll found disturbing gaps in the values embraced by Americans under thirty compared to those espoused by older adults. While majorities of older Americans say patriotism, religion, and having children are “very important,” shockingly few young people agree. Among Americans under thirty, just 23 percent consider patriotism and having children to be very important, while only 31 percent say the same of religion. The shift in the values and beliefs of younger Americans is dramatic but hardly surprising, as it tracks the leftward swing of our public education — indoctrination — system.

The progressive worldview has permeated nearly all aspects of public education — history, science, literature, and so on. Religion, even the idea of truth itself, has been steadily excised from the classroom, replaced by lessons in secular

*Theresa Farnan and Mary Rice Hasson are fellows at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and the authors of Get Out Now: Why You Should Pull Your Child From Public School Before It’s Too Late.*





pseudotolerance and rainbow inclusivity. Public schools condition children in practical atheism, in which God is deemed irrelevant to the important questions of life, and the human thirst for the transcendent goes unacknowledged. Children learn to think, live, speak, and relate to others as if God does not exist, to measure life by material consumption and virtual “likes.” They are taught that there is no human nature, no truth, and no objective good. Morality is relative, reality is “constructed,” and even identity is contingent on desire.

Dramatic declines in religious belief and practice among students testify, unfortunately, to lessons well learned. The rates of religiously unaffiliated youth (including atheists and agnostics) fresh from high school rose from 6.6 percent in 1966 to 29.6 percent in 2015 to 33.6 percent in 2019. On the first day of college, students are already markedly less religious than their parents. And no wonder — churches and synagogues typically offer forty hours per year of youth formation in a religious worldview, no match for the 1,200 hours per year that students spend in public school classrooms being formed in a secular (and often antireligious) worldview. Not surprisingly, declining religiosity goes hand in hand with sharp declines in moral values, according to polls by Gallup.

Into this religious and moral void, government schools have injected the state’s preferred belief system — gender ideology. Its associated symbols (rainbows everywhere!), terminology (“genderqueer,” etc.), and public rituals (“My pronouns are...”) shape the classroom culture and school environment. From kindergarten on,

children are introduced to images like the “Genderbread Person” or “Gender Unicorn” and become conversant in the language of gender ideology, using terms such as “gender identity,” “gender expression,” and “sex (gender) assigned at birth.” They are taught to answer the question “Who am I?” with “Whoever I feel myself to be” — regardless of their bodies.

Gender ideology endows children with near-mystical powers to self-define a

**Public schools may be “where the children are,” but that’s the case only because politicians have refused to give families a financial exit ramp.**

“gender identity” that transcends the reality of the sexed body. Feelings determine reality, according to this belief system, and thus give individuals a purported “human right” to modify the body as desired to “correct” a feeling-to-body mismatch. But gender ideology affects everyone, not just the child confused about identity. Teachers, staff, and classmates are told to accept, as a matter of “respect,” an individual’s asserted identity as true. Schoolchildren, catechized to “affirm” the false claims of transgender-identified classmates and teachers, learn to distrust

their senses and rely on ideology over reason. Religious students and students alarmed at the erosion of sex-based protections for female students self-censor, fearful of being labeled as “bigots.”

Timid politicians ignore public education’s embrace of gender ideology, dismissing it as a “culture war” distraction. This is a tremendous mistake. The stakes could not be higher. Gender ideology is a false anthropology, an erroneous set of beliefs about what it means to be a human person. It makes ideological claims that contradict science, common sense, and human nature and presents them as facts. As evolutionary biologist Colin Wright writes, the fight against gender ideology is “reality’s last stand.”

The hour is late. For over a decade, progressive ideologues have used their control of the public school system to indoctrinate America’s children into the pseudoreligious belief system of gender ideology. Federal promotion of gender ideology in public schools, begun during the Obama years, has reached a fever pitch in the Biden administration. Empowered by the legal bullies at Lambda Legal and the American Civil Liberties Union, government-paid educator-activists boldly promote the rainbow orthodoxy to their students, celebrate rites of “gender transitions” and “coming out,” and invoke the pseudosacramental bond of “confidentiality” between students and “trusted adults” to deny parents their rights. In major cities, school districts collaborate with gender clinics to fashion a school-to-gender-clinic pipeline, where “gender specialists” train teachers, and schools refer students to local gender clinics. And parents? Unless they

“validate” all things “trans,” they are cut out of the school-initiated process.

Indoctrination works. One in five Gen Z youth self-identifies as a member of the LGBTQ community, according to Gallup, which makes them vulnerable to the consequent physical and mental health disparities. A study of Pittsburgh high schoolers reported that 9.2 percent self-identified as “transgender” or, more generally, as “gender diverse,” while a study of rural youth found that 7.2 percent of adolescents identified as “gender diverse,” including 7.7 percent of twelve- to fourteen-year-olds. The “happy trans” narrative, however, is confounded with heartbreaking regularity by the tragic testimonies of formerly “trans” teens who have detransitioned.

Republicans who aid the money flow from taxpayers to government schools, or who limit families’ access to school-choice programs, are trapping American children in this toxic system. Public schools may be “where the children are,” but that’s the case only because politicians have refused to give families a financial exit ramp. America’s parents see what’s happening to

their children, and they want real choice. In 2018, we wrote *Get Out Now: Why You Should Pull Your Child from Public School Before It’s Too Late* to warn parents that public education’s academic failures pale in comparison to the harm done by its embrace of a radical pseudoreligion — gender ideology — behind parents’ backs. Back then, most parents recognized the general problem but assumed that their own public schools were good enough.

COVID was a game changer. American parents got a shocking, firsthand look through the digital window at progressive activism at work in their neighborhood schools. Parents cannot “unsee” the truth. From New York to California, parents express outrage at the pornographic “LGBTQ-inclusive” books in school libraries. They vigorously oppose the de facto caste system that results from “critical race theory” in K–12 classrooms. They are appalled that public schools condone hiding students’ “gender transitions” from parents. Parents feel betrayed when school districts arrogantly refuse to let parents opt their children out of objectionable content. And they wonder why

school boards, administrators, and teachers — who work for them — disdain their requests for transparency in course materials and curricular objectives.

Politicians cannot continue to fund failing schools that excel at only one thing: minting very confused, child-sized leftists. This moment is about real families. Parents don’t want their children indoctrinated in progressive beliefs and their parental authority undermined. They are keenly aware that time is short. Incremental change, while politically palatable, does nothing to help their children. “Recommitting” to public education does nothing to prevent progressive indoctrination or habits of unbelief from taking hold in their children. Nor will it prevent their confused adolescent from being steered toward “gender transition” by activist teachers or counselors. “Education reform” is a ratchet that has turned in only one direction — toward progressive ideology. Enough.

Parents know what their children need. They overwhelmingly support choice in education. It’s time for politicians to empower parents to “get out now” — to choose the schools that are right for their children. ✎



## Meet our 2023 intern team!

*Elizabeth Crawford, Hillsdale College, '24*

*Hunter Oswald, Grove City College, '24*

*Grace Reilly, Grove City College, '24*

*Mason Stauffer, Utah Valley University, '22*

*Emma Verrigni, Hillsdale College, '26*

## And veteran members of our Young Writers Program:

*Elyse Apel, Hillsdale College '24: social media coordinator*

*Mary Frances Myler, University of Notre Dame '22: assistant editor*

*Aubrey Gulick, Hillsdale College '23: reporter*

*Lucia VanBerkum, Hillsdale College '23: associate editor*

*Ellie Gardey, University of Notre Dame '21: reporter and associate editor*





# The Military Academies Have Turned Into Woke Wastelands

*Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are teaching cadets to oppose — even hate — our nation’s founding values.*

by Francis P. Sempa

In 1962, General Douglas MacArthur said to the Corps of Cadets at the US Military Academy at West Point: “Your mission remains fixed, determined, inviolable. It is to win our wars. Everything else in your professional career is but corollary to this vital dedication.” No longer is this the case. Sixty years later, the “very obsession” of America’s military service academies is not Duty, Honor, Country but Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion — DEI.

The rot of educational priorities at US military academies begins at the top and extends far beyond those educational institutions. In February and March of 2021, the Biden administration resumed DEI training efforts throughout government institutions, including those on “critical race theory and white privilege” subjects begun during the Obama administration, that had been curtailed to some extent by the Trump administration, which labeled such training as “un-American propaganda training sessions.” On June 25, 2021, President Joe Biden signed an executive order “advancing” DEI throughout the

federal workforce, including in our armed services, to end “the enduring legacies of employment discrimination, systemic racism, and gender inequality.”

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in February 2022 praised the president for his “commit[ment]” to diversity and inclusion in our armed forces, and in September of that year Austin announced the formation of a Defense Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion. General Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, upheld West Point’s policy of teaching critical race theory during a hearing before the House Armed Services Committee. Admiral Michael Gilday, chief of naval operations, defended the recommendation of Ibram X. Kendi’s book *How to Be an Antiracist* — which equates capitalism with racism — to sailors. In May 2021, the acting Navy secretary directed the Navy’s chief diversity officer to “develop an action plan to promote DEI in Department-wide policies, programs and operations.” Barbara Barrett, then secretary of the Air Force, in June 2020 created a “Diversity and Inclusion Task Force.” This task force expanded to become the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in January 2021, which is dedicated to promoting a “diverse and highly inclusive environment” throughout the Air Force. The Coast Guard, too, has

institutionalized DEI training led by so-called “change agents” to “develop an organizational culture that values respect, diversity, equity and inclusion.”

The most lasting effect of the trend toward wokeness in our armed forces will be seen in the service academies, where future officers in all branches of the armed forces are being indoctrinated with DEI. Fox News reports that the Air Force Academy’s diversity and inclusion training materials include instructions “to use words that ‘include all genders’ and to refrain from saying things like ‘mom’ and ‘dad.’” Diversity and inclusion, cadets are told, is “a warfighting imperative.” Diversity and inclusion resources include a diversity and inclusion “reading room” and “affinity groups,” the latter of which the academy website claims aids cadets in “gather[ing] around a shared affinity or bond” and allows them to be “identity-based.” Training includes courses on “unconscious bias,” “cultural sensitivity,” and “inclusive leadership.” Lieutenant General Richard Clark, superintendent of the Air Force Academy, told Fox News that the instructions to avoid using “mom,” “dad,” and the like were “taken out of context and misrepresented.” He asserted that diversity and inclusion training centered on “the warfighting imperative of leveraging

diverse perspectives to solve our nation’s most difficult national security problems.” I wonder what Billy Mitchell, father of the Air Force, or Curtis LeMay, the famous World War II general, would have said about that — but they are “dead white males”; nobody listens to them these days. The Air Force Academy’s website includes a video presentation on “Pride Month,” including LGBTQ+ and pronoun normalization. The academy’s “Diversity & Inclusion Resource List” includes books on topics such as “Unconscious Bias” and “Race-Specific Learning.” GOP senator Tom Cotton, a combat Army veteran himself, responded strongly to the news release; he wrote a letter to Clark in which he called the Air Force Academy’s diversity and inclusion training “divisive and un-American” and claimed that it teaches future airmen to have “contempt” for “our nation’s traditions and values.” Such training, Cotton wrote, has “no place in our military.”

Meanwhile, at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland — which produced the likes of Alfred Thayer Mahan, John A. Lejeune, Charles C. Krulak, Ernest J. King, Chester W. Nimitz, William D. Leahy, Hyman G. Rickover, James Stockdale, and many other naval giants — the leadership has formulated a “Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan.” The plan’s introduction promotes a “path to inclusion” for an “inviting, safe, and supportive campus” where “everyone feels they belong and have equitable opportunity for success regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation or socioeconomic background.” Training at Annapolis will include “develop[ing] and maintain[ing] a comprehensive cultural awareness and

bias literacy ... framework”; “creat[ing] a metric that can measure and track belongingness”; providing students “with information and pamphlets with diversity and inclusion resources, programs, and initiatives”; and “promot[ing] membership in affinity groups.” The curriculum will “prioritiz[e] the inclusion of marginalized scholarship and hidden histories within

This woke experiment with the academies ... “will harm our military’s ability to perform its mission.”

midshipmen education.” There will also be a “confidential process for reporting bias incidents ... to proactively identify areas for potential additional training” and “admissions specific cultural awareness and bias literacy training modules for everyone” in the admissions and recruiting process. The Naval Academy, the plan states, should “intentionally promote diversity in service assignments,” develop and promote “proper reporting procedures for instances of discrimination,” and institute diversity and inclusion “summits” and “recognition awards.” This plan was signed by the senior leadership of the Naval Academy.

Critics, including 2002 Naval Academy graduate and former naval officer J.A. Cauthen, have accused the Naval Academy’s leadership of being “[w]illing

collaborators all too eager to appease their political masters.” Cauthen describes parts of the strategic plan as similar to “bygone Soviet and Maoist slogans,” policies both “pernicious and punitive” that will “fundamentally transform the education and training of midshipmen by supplanting rigor, merit, and superior performance with a focus on phantom grievances.” Revolutionary War hero John Paul Jones’s immortal “I have not yet begun to fight” is giving way to reality star (and featured speaker at the Naval Academy in 2019) Alexis Jones’s much softer “the importance of mutual respect.”

Over at the Coast Guard Academy, the Office of Inclusion and Diversity supports six “diversity councils” to “Cultivate a Supportive and Inclusive Environment.” Cadets called “Diversity Peer Educators” provide “information and support on ... race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity” subjects. The academy previously had come under fire for its lack of “cultural competence” in a report by the National Academy of Public Administration, which recommended reforms, including formulating a “detailed DEI action plan with a long-term timeline”; “broadening [the] responsibilities of the chief diversity officer” by making that officer a “strategic advisor of the superintendent”; and “detailing and tracking metrics to measure progress and guide efforts to improve cultural competence.” The less visible and less well-known US Merchant Marine Academy has also pledged to “establish[] a welcoming and diverse campus” and employs a “diversity recruiter.”

And then there is West Point, perhaps the most revered military academy in the



Bill Wilson



nation — the institution that produced Generals Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, George H. Thomas, William T. Sherman, John J. Pershing, Douglas MacArthur, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, Henry “Hap” Arnold, George Patton, Matthew Ridgway, Creighton Abrams, H. Norman Schwarzkopf, and so many other great military leaders. West Point has fallen victim to Congress and the Pentagon’s “Naming Commission,” which resulted in the removal of all traces of Robert E. Lee from public view and will influence the renaming of roads, barracks, and other buildings named for Lee and other Confederate generals. Wokeness, it seems, includes an Orwellian erasing of history.

West Point’s Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Equal Opportunity (ODIEO) was established during the Obama administration and is “the focal point for West Point Diversity and Inclusion outreach initiatives, projects, and plans.” ODIEO, according to West Point’s website, “identifies and advocates diversity and inclusion awareness opportunities and implements diversity training and education programs that develop socio-cultural competencies to meet the multicultural demands of the Army’s workforce.” Cadets can minor in “Diversity and Inclusion Studies,” which includes courses titled “Social Inequality,” “Power and Difference,” and “The Politics of Race, Gender, and Sexuality.” West Point hosts “Diversity & Inclusion Leadership Conferences,” has “Diversity Clubs,” and presents a “Department of the Army Diversity & Leadership Award.” Fox News reports that cadets are subjected to “pronoun

play acting” sessions. In 2021, former female West Point cadets criticized the academy for promoting a “woke ideology,” which included lectures on “White rage” and “extremism.” Students were tutored on “writing essays about critical race theory.” The activist group Judicial Watch last year obtained more than six hundred documents from the Defense Department affirming that critical race theory is being taught at West Point.

But the education in critical race theory is having its intended effect. In June 2020, nine recent West Point graduates, including two first captains, a Rhodes scholar, two Fulbright scholars, and two Marshall scholars, issued a forty-page policy proposal urging West Point’s leadership to institute policies to bring about an “anti-racist West Point.” Cadets at the academy, the authors wrote, must be “help[ed]” to “unlearn racism.” They called for Maoist-like struggle sessions and reeducation efforts to create “anti-racist” warriors. The proposal was “inspired,” the authors noted, by the so-called Black Manifesto of 1971, thus suggesting that nothing much has changed at West Point since then. The former cadets praise the Black Lives Matter movement and describe West Point’s “legacy” as one of “systemic racism, harmful exclusion, and overt white supremacy.”

One former West Point graduate called this document “wholesale moral blackmail of the Academy, its graduates, and its present-day leadership.” And he issued this dire warning: “Do not take comfort in the security which has hitherto been afforded to our nation by our armed forces. We have not been tested against a real enemy

in many generations. When we are, leaders like this will not be able to stand in the field of battle.”

The far Left’s infiltration and capture of America’s educational institutions now includes the leadership of our armed services’ educational institutions. This woke experiment with the academies that are supposed to produce our nation’s warriors — the leaders whom MacArthur described as “the great captains who hold the Nation’s destiny in their hands the moment the war tocsin sounds” — are instead propagating an ideology that, in Cauthen’s opinion, produces leaders unprepared “to wage and win wars against our enemies,” and that GOP senator (and former Air Force officer) Roger Wicker maintains “will harm our military’s ability to perform its mission.”

As the Heritage Foundation’s Thomas Spoehr noted last September, the very leaders we have elected are spreading an epidemic of woke ideology throughout our military, fundamentally changing the “purpose, character, traditions, and requirements” of the institution that protects our country.

Douglas MacArthur, speaking to the cadets at West Point half a century ago, observed that “the Long Gray Line has never failed us,” promising that, if ever it did, “a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and gray, would rise from their white crosses, thundering those magic words: Duty, Honor, Country.” MacArthur would be astonished to learn that, in the third decade of the twenty-first century, we have met the enemy — and it is us. 🇺🇸

## THE RIGHT PRESCRIPTION



# How Teachers Unions Co-Opted School Boards

*They conducted a decades long stealth campaign while most parents were not looking.*

by David Catron

In a recent opinion piece published in *USA Today*, Randi Weingarten delivered the following cri de cœur: “MAGA Republicans are destroying our public schools. Teachers and parents must fight back.” Weingarten is, of course, the president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the country’s second-largest teachers union. If her dire warning about the fell designs of the GOP seems semi-hysterical, it’s important to remember what she means by “our public schools.” For the AFT and its larger counterpart, the National Education Association (NEA), this term is synonymous with “union-controlled schools.” And, as we discovered during the COVID-19 lockdowns, they intend to remain in control.

Moreover, this control is by no means limited to the “teachers” we entrust with our children’s education. Throughout the past thirty years, these unions have used their enormous financial resources to take over local school boards, whose members ostensibly run our public education system for the benefit of students, parents, and the community. Before the pandemic, most voters ignored school board elections, and the unions exploited this apathy to pack these all-important bodies with people who could be counted on to put the agenda of the unions before any other consideration. How did they accomplish this? Stanford University political scientist Terry Moe explains in his 2011 book, *Special Interest*:

*The Michigan Education Association, for example, distributes a forty-page instructional (and hortatory) document to its local leaders, filled with operational details about how to evaluate and screen school board candidates, recruit friendly ones, run entire campaigns, set up phone banks, engage in door-to-door canvassing, get out the vote, and more. Its title: “Electing Your Own Employer, It’s as Easy as 1, 2, 3.”*

This manual was in circulation well over a decade ago, and it was not unique to Michigan. By the time parents learned during the pandemic that public schools had been promoting leftist dogma, pseudoscience, revisionist history, and transgender ideology, the teachers unions already controlled the school boards. Consequently, when concerned parents began appearing at school board meetings to express their unhappiness with what their children were being taught, they were shocked to learn that they were considered interlopers with no right to question ideologically tendentious



David Catron is a contributing editor at The American Spectator.



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curricula. As one father discovered in Virginia, parents are even discouraged from protesting policies that endanger student safety.

Michael T. Hartney of the Manhattan Institute has done extensive research on the teachers unions and their ongoing effort to dominate school board elections. Hartney tracked the success rate of nearly 5,000 union-endorsed candidates in California, Florida, and New York, and his findings clearly indicate that they win the vast majority of school board races. Moreover, the success rate of union-endorsed candidates has been just as high in Republican-leaning states as in Democratic-leaning ones. In other words, no matter where you live, it is quite likely that some teachers union controls the composition of your local school board. As Hartney writes in *City Journal*, four distinct patterns stand out:

*First, union-endorsed candidates win roughly 70 percent of all competitive school board races. Second, union support helps both incumbents and challengers, offering a greater electoral advantage than does incumbency. Third, union-friendly candidates tend to win in both strong (California, New York) and weak (Florida) union states, as well as in conservative and liberal school districts. Fourth, union endorsements can propel losing candidates to victory.*

Hartney also shows that the Supreme Court's 2018 ruling in *Janus v. AFSCME*, which precluded unions from forcing nonunion employees to pay "agency fees," has not eroded the power of teachers unions to dominate school board elections. What has begun to do so is the parents' rights movement, which first gained national attention in Virginia's 2021 gubernatorial election. This is what prompted the National School Boards Association (NSBA) to imply in a 2021 letter to President Joe Biden that parents who protested at school board meetings were domestic terrorists. As the *New York Post* reported at the time, the letter asked for federal protection: "NSBA specifically solicits the expertise and resources of the US Department of Justice."

This letter backfired badly, energizing the parents' rights movement and contributing to GOP governor Glenn Youngkin's victory in the Old Dominion. This movement continued to chip away at union control in 2022, particularly in Florida, where Governor Ron DeSantis aligned himself with "Moms for Liberty" before the August school board elections. An Associated Press report quoted DeSantis as saying, "We got involved to help candidates who were fighting the machine, fighting the lock-downers, fighting the forced-maskers, fighting the people that want to indoctrinate our kids." Two-thirds of the candidates he endorsed won. And, as *Newsweek* reports, Moms for Liberty made even further gains on November 8, 2022:

*About 61 percent of the group's 67 endorsed candidates in Florida, where Moms for Liberty spent \$50,000 in total on campaigning, were victorious on Tuesday. With votes in some states still to be counted, the organization expects roughly half of the more than 200 candidates they endorsed in other states will be elected, even though it spent zero helping them. In the next election cycle, Moms for Liberty intends to spend money in every state, co-founder Tiffany Justice told Newsweek.*

**Weingarten and her fellow union bosses blundered when they pushed for school closures and remote learning during the pandemic.**

Moms for Liberty is one of the most active parents' rights organizations in the country. In 2022, it nominated 500 candidates for school boards, 275 of whom won. They successfully flipped seventeen school boards that had been dominated by the teachers unions. And their reach goes far beyond the seven boards they flipped in Florida. They also flipped school boards in California, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The teachers union empire is, however, about to strike back. The *Daily Signal* reports, for example, that the Pennsylvania State Education Association has already devoted conference time to a session titled "Combatting Moms for Liberty Attacks on our Teachers and our Schools."

The description of the session on the conference registration form reads as follows: "This session will explore the dark-money origins of this astroturf organization and its real long-term goal, as well as provide strategies on how to defeat them in the ballot box and at the board meeting." Formulations like "dark-money origins" and "its real long-term goal" contain more than a whiff of conspiratorial thinking. The teachers unions obviously use this kind of language to delegitimize any group that threatens their control over school boards. But parents' rights groups are not going away. As Jarrott Skorup writes in the *Hill*, Moms for Liberty boasts 195 chapters in thirty-seven states with almost 100,000 members.

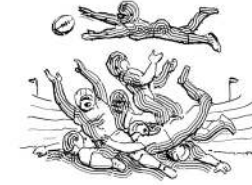
This is what Randi Weingarten is really worried about when she makes wild claims like "MAGA Republicans are destroying our public schools." And when she calls on parents to "fight back," she doesn't mean the folks who belong to Moms for Liberty. Why not? Because such people want "politicized" classrooms. Yep. That's what Weingarten says. In reality, of course, she knows that they are a threat to the enormous political power that the teachers unions amassed while parents weren't looking. Weingarten and her fellow union bosses blundered when they pushed for school closures and remote learning during the pandemic. Now the parents are on to them, and they are planning to take their local school boards back. 🐦



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## PROFILE OF A PRIEST



# The Man Who Made Notre Dame

*Fr. Theodore Hesburgh and the contradictions of the modern Catholic university.*

by **Mary Frances Myler**

Legendary University of Notre Dame football coach Lou Holtz once gave an apt description of the university he loved: "For those who know Notre Dame, no explanation is necessary. For those who don't, no explanation will suffice."

Holtz is right. Notre Dame is an iconic institution in the American Catholic imagination, but it is a difficult place to explain to those who keep up with the university through (usually unflattering) headlines or occasional visits to campus. Nevertheless, the life and legacy of former university president Fr. Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C., can provide a preliminary explanation for the current state of Notre Dame, as well as the present landscape of Catholic higher education.

As James Keating, a professor at Providence College, discusses in a recent *First Things* essay, the Catholic university has been in crisis for decades, and the problems have a singular point of origin. The Land O' Lakes Statement transformed Catholic education in America, boosting the "size and reputation of Catholic colleges and

universities during the 1970s and '80s," Keating writes. He doesn't mention Fr. Hesburgh by name, but the charismatic president of Notre Dame — who also happened to be the architect of the Land O' Lakes gathering — haunts Keating's discussion. So who was the man who changed Catholic higher education?

Fr. Hesburgh, who served as the president of Notre Dame from 1952 to 1987, is a neat profile of postconciliar Catholicism. A man of deep faith, he genuinely sought to bring Catholic education into the modern world. But Hesburgh's approach to the Catholic university seems naively optimistic in retrospect, almost tragic in its mid-century confidence.

Hesburgh believed that institutional independence was necessary for the Catholic university. He wanted Notre Dame to be taken seriously by its secular peer institutions, but he feared that the Church hierarchy's potential interference in academic matters could stand in the way of the school's ability to participate on equal footing. Academic freedom, then, became Hesburgh's rallying cry — a cry that would completely alter the landscape of Catholic higher education in America.

In 1967, during his tenure as president of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, Hesburgh gathered twenty-six other North American educators to study the "role and nature of the contemporary Catholic university." The resulting Land O' Lakes Statement gave Hesburgh and his like-minded peers the chance to envision the future of Catholic higher education. The document claims the necessity of "true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself."

This call for academic freedom seemed to offer a rosy future for American Catholicism: unhindered by lingering suspicion about popish interference, Catholics would integrate into the broader academic community. The American academy would benefit, Hesburgh hoped, from the depth and beauty of Catholicism, and the vital energy of the Church would help the ivory tower to stand a little straighter and see a little further.

He cared deeply about the religious identity of the Catholic university, and his fellow educators felt similarly. The Land O'Lakes Statement outlines the expectation that a Catholic university should preserve

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its distinctive identity as an institution “in which Catholicism is perceptibly present and effectively operative.” But what followed was not so much an integration into the wider academy as it was an assimilation. The Catholic university traded submission to the Vatican for submission to secular academic standards.

Hesburgh’s cherished concept of academic freedom has brought myriad challenges to the Catholic identities of Catholic universities. Because he took cues from secular institutions, Hesburgh delivered a rather flat understanding of academic freedom nearly unrelated to the freedom proposed by the Church. True freedom is possessed not by abstract collectives like the academy, but by human beings who are given the daily choice to seek God’s will or to stray from it. And while many scholars at Notre Dame understand their research and teaching in the context of their faith, many others insist upon an academic freedom that looks more like academic license. As the culture war escalates, the university will need to evaluate the conflict between her mission of Catholic education and the secular permissive attitude that academic freedom enables.

Hesburgh’s impulses were not entirely disastrous. Despite the challenges to her Catholic identity, Notre Dame has served as a powerful credentialing institution for American Catholics for decades. The institutional prestige that Hesburgh sought

**Hesburgh’s approach to the Catholic university seems naively optimistic in retrospect, almost tragic in its mid-century confidence.**

has given Catholic thought a prominent platform in American discourse, whether academic, religious, or political.

It is because of this continued prestige that Catholics cannot abandon Our Lady’s university. If nothing else, Notre Dame provides young Catholics with an entry point into the nation’s elite institutions.

Institutional access is waning for those who object to today’s secular orthodoxies, but Notre Dame has retained the credentialing power envisioned by Fr. Hesburgh, who rightly recognized that culture is changed from within. In opening the doors of the Catholic university, Fr. Hesburgh may have let the world in more than he let the Church out, but the impulse to silo Catholic thought into parallel institutions should not be universalized, either.

In many ways, Notre Dame dwells in the shadow of Hesburgh, haunted by his flawed intuition that conformity to the world might help the world conform to Christ. But the university also boasts robust Catholic communities, an abundance of chapels, opportunities for Mass, confession, and Eucharistic Adoration, and the top theology department in the world. This, too, was Fr. Hesburgh’s dream — that faith might flourish in tandem with academic excellence. And with a core of faculty, staff, alumni, and students who draw strength from the heart of the Church, the fate of Notre Dame’s Catholic identity is far from a foregone conclusion.



Ken Woller/Shutterstock

# JOIN THE FIGHT TO SAVE WOMEN’S SPORTS

Unfortunately, the women’s sporting category is today being eroded by discriminatory policies that allow men who identify as women to compete on women’s teams and in women’s events. Allowing men in women’s sports discriminates against female athletes by taking titles, awards, and opportunities to compete from women and girls.



*“There is no equity, fairness, sportsmanship or opportunity for women to succeed at an elite level without sex-based categories. It is crucial that as a society we open our eyes and recognize the irrefutable damage that is being done to women’s sports and everything Title IX was created for.”*

## JOIN INDEPENDENT WOMEN’S NETWORK

Visit [iwnetwork.com](http://iwnetwork.com) for ways to get involved!



*Riley Gaines*

12X All-American Swimmer &  
Independent Women’s Forum  
Spokeswoman







# To Hell With the Universities

*Affirmative action is the least of higher education's problems.*

by John Jiang

Affirmative action in higher education is set to face the judgment of the Supreme Court. The moment is quietly exhilarating. This is an injustice that has been hoisted upon so many, for so long, and with the patronage of so many powerful institutions that it seemed perhaps too big and too heavy to ever remove. Yet the same was true of *Roe v. Wade*, and now *Roe v. Wade* is gone.

Some of the details of the case, which was argued on October 31, 2022, are comical. Harvard University claims to take “personality” into account when reviewing applicants. This is understandable, as it takes more than book smarts to excel in life. But Harvard admissions officers, in their great wisdom, apparently concluded that blacks on average have the most interesting personalities, Hispanics are significantly less interesting, whites are less interesting still, and Asians are the least interesting of all — coincidentally an exact inversion of test score averages. It will be a fine day when this sort of barely hidden racial discrimination is gone.

But much like the repeal of *Roe*, a ruling against affirmative action would only begin a much more difficult fight. The proliferation of liberal policies at universities is, after all, not some historical accident: it is the product of an increasingly large and powerful administrative class in academia. Regardless of the Supreme Court's decision, these people will remain, as will the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) agenda that they uphold.

Affirmative action is merely the bluntest instrument in the woke administrator's tool kit, and there exist other ways of effecting racial discrimination. Take diversity statements, which have now become standard practice for faculty-position applications at top institutions like the University of California, Berkeley. If you are a white applicant, these provide an opportunity to lie prostrate, condemn the fact that there are too many people who look like you in your field, and beg to be the last white person whom the hiring committee ever considers.

A conservative who swallows his distaste may be able to pen a sufficiently orthodox diversity statement. Unfortunately, a progressive statement is no match for a progressive résumé. Academics are more than happy to discriminate against would-be colleagues on whom they detect a single whiff of conservatism, according to surveys. Consequently, only 6 percent of American university faculty self-identify as conservative.

These same rotten institutions are currently dismantling their own credibility with their obsessive pursuit of diversity over ability. A meritocratic hiring process is a sign of a competent organization. Putting aside questions of fairness, it may be worth



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asking: How much would it actually benefit Americans to improve the competence of such a hostile institution as the liberal arts university system? Would America actually be better off if more of its most intelligent young people spent their twenties in adjunct cubicles at Harvard?

## *Higher Education Is a Prisoner's Dilemma*

For most of early American history, universities served as finishing schools for the upper class. Fewer than 2 percent of Americans were college educated. Latin and Greek were entry requirements; these subjects were of little use in professional life but provided efficient filters for status.

It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that our modern vocational view of college education began to take shape. The US had just become the world's largest economy and subsequently was in great need of engineers, foremen, clerks, and technicians. Out of this need sprang the first community colleges, which offered vocational courses. By 1950, college attendance rates had jumped fivefold to about 10 percent.

It was on the back of this newly educated middle class that America ascended to superpower status. But as college attendance continued to explode post World War II, the tertiary degree began to come unstuck from its original industrial purpose, and the modern progressive ideology of “college for all” was born.

It is currently unfashionable to take an instrumental view of college education. Notice that leftists stumping for free college will never discriminate between degrees or programs: the mathematician and the gender studies major are considered equally deserving of subsidies. We are so far removed from the vocational schools of the last century that the act of attending college has, in the popular imagination, taken on a sort of alchemical quality. In this view, a student is transmuted into a higher class of citizen merely through

attending college — what he learns during that time is relatively inconsequential.

Defenders of the modern liberal arts education retort that colleges teach writing ability, curiosity, critical thinking, good citizenship, and a host of other humanist qualities, regardless of the degree or the major.

There are a few problems with this perspective. To point out the most obvious, knowledge is forgotten over time. Indeed, it is forgotten more quickly and more completely than most people realize. A 2006 study on retention tested the knowledge of students previously enrolled in a course against randomly selected baseline individuals who had never taken that course. The authors found that students of every caliber experienced a similar rate of knowledge decay. Within a year, C-grade students performed worse on the test than the uneducated baseline; within two years, even B-grade students were performing barely above the baseline.

Knowledge decay was not much of an issue in the early days of higher education because college was merely a networking opportunity for the wealthy. Nor was it an issue during the vocational period, when a college-educated technician could expect a job upon graduation that required immediate application of his newly gained technical knowledge. The current chapter of higher education history is not nearly so sensible. The average modern college attendee majors in art history or environmental science, finds a job working with Excel spreadsheets at an insurance company, and by his midtwenties has forgotten nearly everything that he went five figures into debt to learn.

At its essence, the twenty-first-century college degree is frequently an exercise in social signaling rather than education. Unfortunately, status is relative, and if the majority of society attains a particular status symbol, then it must necessarily become banal and unprestigious. The result is a prisoner's dilemma: both



everyone going to college and no one going to college produce the same relative social standing, all else being equal. But because your fellow spreadsheet wranglers go to college, so must you, lest you fall behind.

### *Your College Is a Temple*

The prestige of the elite college degree is a conduit through which many other forms of prestige are accessed, particularly those in law, government, and industry. This sort of monopoly on social power is not only increasingly undeserved but also dangerous.

It is tempting to imagine that the university system could be restored to some previously unblemished state. But it is probably more accurate to think of pure meritocracy and ideological agnosticism as the historical exception rather than the rule.

Consider England, whose universities have long been regarded as among the best in the world. When in the sixteenth century the country broke with the Roman Catholic Church and established Anglicanism as the state religion, popular adoption of the new religious tendency was piecemeal and gradual. But the most important step in the process was the endorsement of Anglican belief by the ruling and administrative elite.

In 1673 and 1678, the Test Acts were passed by the British Parliament, imposing religious tests as a precondition for holding public office. At the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, aspiring students and faculty were required to demonstrate their knowledge and fealty to the Church of England's Thirty-nine Articles of Religion. This practice remained in place for nearly two centuries, by which point the Anglicanization of England was complete.

The university as a tool of ideological consolidation has taken on new forms today. Across the Islamic world, many universities still embrace the use of tests of religious faith as a requirement for entry. And, of course, in England, America, and elsewhere, the secular religion of social justice fills a similar role.

This is not to imply that the ideological capture of a university system makes it useless. Anglicanization helped to consolidate a unique identity among England's elite. While the Test Acts were in place, England achieved the Industrial Revolution and laid the foundations for its later empire. But the nature of the ideology obviously matters: it is difficult to imagine a less impressive ruling class than the one currently being created by DEI policies.

As long as there is a culture war in America, higher education will be used as a weapon. The prestige and intellectual legitimacy conferred by universities made these institutions a tool irresistible to ideologues of the past, and today is no different. And as long as universities are weaponized, progressives will wield that power — because more progressives aspire to become academics and are demonstrably more willing to discriminate on the basis of belief.

### *Degrees of Rent Seeking*

If the concept of universal tertiary education were to disappear, what would supplant it? There is no need to strain the imagination, as the keys to its replacement already stand in place.

Universities no longer possess a monopoly on knowledge. Decades ago, a university might have possessed its city's most

extensive library. Centuries ago, it may have had the city's only library, and maybe even its only literate people. The internet has made knowledge accessible to all.

Nor are universities now necessary for concentrating human capital. The most impressive reservoirs of genius are today found in Silicon Valley and at enterprises like OpenAI, SpaceX, and the many others that define American scientific prowess.

Nor are they necessary for hiring purposes. The prisoner's dilemma of education indicates that college degrees are now so ubiquitous that companies use them as a screen for intelligence and conscientiousness; the actual job-related education transpires after the hiring. But this screening utility is easily replaced. For example, many tech companies now use coding challenges like LeetCode as the primary method of assessing applicant competence.

Of course, certain fields, like that of medicine, exist in which self-tutoring is much harder, if not impossible. But the dirty secret is that even in these cases, college is hardly relevant. Medical schools and law programs brag about all of the English, history, and drama students in their incoming classes. They make a point of reassuring applicants that their passion matters more than their major. In other words, they utilize the college degree in precisely the same way as most companies — to find smart and hardworking applicants — in lieu of developing better screening methods.

Despite their increasing pointlessness, universities carry on like giant parasitic amoebas, sucking up the time and money of entire generations of young people. Pointless habits do not always disappear easily, and sometimes they disappear not at all. (After all, the Japanese still love their fax machines.)

But there are at least a few steps that can be taken to cut colleges down to size. Offers of federal tuition subsidies and easy student loans should be withdrawn. The virtual guarantee of taxpayer money has all but eliminated competitive pressures at universities, leading to ballooning numbers of administrative staff, lazy rivers, and insultingly pointless grievance studies programs. These subsidies were introduced at a time when there existed a strong case for higher education as a public good, but that time has long passed.

Young people have a part to play in this as well. No one can be individually faulted for going to college — no virtue lies in being the sucker in a prisoner's dilemma. But the trend of treating higher education as a backup plan for life, and the master's degree, doctorate, and postdoc as means of delaying entry into working life, ought to stop. Do not give the university system any more time and money; four years and tens of thousands of dollars is more than enough.

As for the future scientists and CEOs who will now stand a chance of getting into Harvard if affirmative action is repealed? We can only hope that all of them take their smarts elsewhere afterward, rather than becoming barely paid adjunct fodder.

For now, the possible end of affirmative action is a victory to celebrate, even if it only gives a bloody nose to the ideologues who have taken over some of America's most venerable institutions. The Supreme Court should do as it ought to and ensure that the Civil Rights Act is being applied fairly for all races of people. However, in the long run, it cannot be enough to simply improve the fairness of a system that, in its current form, should not exist. ✎

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Despite their increasing pointlessness, universities carry on like giant parasitic amoebas, sucking up the time and money of entire generations of young people.

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## CANCEL CULTURE



# University of Pennsylvania Versus Amy Wax

*Where is Penn's founder, Benjamin Franklin, when we need him?*

by Richard Vedder

The University of Pennsylvania proudly says that it was founded by Benjamin Franklin, who also chaired its governing board in its formative years. That famed colonial polymath and Founding Father would no doubt be unhappy if he saw what leaders of Penn are trying to do to Amy Wax, the university's Robert Mundheim professor of law. Professor Wax is something of a Franklin-like academic wunderkind, who, among other things, holds degrees from Yale University, Harvard University, Oxford University, and Columbia University, including a medical degree as well as a law degree.

Why would Ben Franklin be unhappy with Penn? Because he was a staunch supporter of freedom of expression. He is quoted as saying, "If everyone is thinking alike, then no one is thinking." Amy Wax does not "think like" a large proportion of American academics, often citing inconvenient truths that offend many of them. Yet reasoned and civilized debate between peoples is at the heart of what makes great universities — and nations. Again,

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in the words of Franklin: "Whoever would overturn the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech." Yet the dean of Penn Law, Ted Ruger, and many of his colleagues are trying to "severely sanction" (in nonacademic jargon: fire) Professor Wax. (Marginally relevant factoid: the very first law professor at Penn, James Wilson, was a key figure in drafting the US Constitution).

We are in an age of enormous self-censorship — people are afraid to express their thoughts publicly for fear of being ostracized. By contrast, Amy Wax has very publicly made a number of statements that have angered or infuriated people; these assertions are mostly factually correct or, minimally, at least defensible opinions expressed with civility and in good faith. Let me mention four of Amy Wax's ideas that have resulted in contretemps: her spirited defense of the bourgeois family values that prevailed in the 1950s; her idea that some nations or cultures are inferior to others; her assertion that black law school students do not fare as well academically as whites; and, most recently, her suggestion that America would be better off with a smaller Asian population and less immigration. But before proceeding, full disclosure: I sit on the board of the National Association of Scholars

with Professor Wax and have been enriched by having Wax as a friend. I also talked to her in connection with this modest epistle (although she has not seen the final result).

In a 2017 op-ed for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Wax and Larry Alexander, a law professor at the University of San Diego, argued that the "bourgeois values" of the 1950s — hard work, a stable two-parent home life, thriftiness, modest crime rates — produced a vibrant and happy society. Soon, a torrent of indignant responses appeared, one a letter from fifty-four students to the *Daily Pennsylvanian* lamenting that Wax and Alexander venerated values "steeped in anti-blackness and white hetero-patriarchal respectability." Never mind that, aside from acknowledging the racial discrimination of the era, Wax and Alexander scarcely discussed race and made no derogatory remarks toward gays. Wax and Alexander were guilty of approving of a lifestyle different from what the signatories of the letter seemed to favor.

Adding gasoline to the firestorm, Wax and Alexander asserted — horrors of horrors — that not all cultures are created equal. As Mona Charen, defending Wax and Alexander, ingeniously argued, the protesters in reality *accepted* the Wax–Alexander proposition.



For example, they surely believe, as she put it, “that Alabama’s culture, circa 1952, was inferior to that of Philadelphia in 2017,” and probably they would additionally concede that “Afghanistan’s cultural practices vis a vis women and minorities are inferior to those in Belgium.” As Wax has pointed out on several occasions, empirical evidence of the superiority of Western civilization is pretty strong — most persuasive are the millions of migrants who uproot their lives to move to the most advanced manifestations of that culture, including in Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and so on. Migration from, say, Pakistan or Somalia to Britain is dramatically greater than in the reverse direction. Far more Pakistanis want to live in London than English want to live in Karachi or Islamabad.

All of Western cultural supremacy arose out of the Industrial Revolution, which began in the West (Britain, to be precise) and led to worldwide affluence. The Industrial Revolution itself was an outgrowth of the Enlightenment, which gave us such luminaries as Isaac Newton, Galileo Galilei, Leonardo da Vinci, William Shakespeare, John Locke, Adam Smith, James Watt, and a host of other thinkers, inventors, and entrepreneurs, leading to the rise of democracies and a rediscovery of ancient verities as well as new discoveries of vast amounts of knowledge and geographic areas.

Wax’s inconvenient truth that perhaps trumped all others, however, was her assertion in class that her experience was that most black Penn Law students graduated below the average of their peers. Wax apparently said, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a black student graduate in the top quarter of the class, and, rarely, in the top half.” The dean of the school asserted, “These claims are false.” Wax’s statement was viewed as wrong, outrageous, insensitive, hurtful, and insulting to a significant number of students — as protests duly demonstrated. Interestingly, Penn has not provided Wax or her lawyer with detailed empirical data to confirm the dean’s claim that Wax’s assertion was incorrect. Several solid studies — one by Richard Sander and Stuart Taylor Jr., for

example (*Mismatch: How Affirmative Action Hurts Students It’s Intended to Help, and Why Universities Won’t Admit It*) — have provided empirical evidence that law schools preferentially admit blacks, often to their own detriment, if bar exam passage rates are any indication.

More recently, Wax has added to the outrage with her opinion that America would be better off with fewer persons of Asian background and a smaller pool of immigrants. As a lifetime student of American immigration, I strongly disagree with Professor Wax on this point, but I certainly think that she is entitled to say it. Indeed,



it provides a basis for an interesting and desperately needed dialogue on the pros and cons of current and proposed immigration policies. Her views could help foster debate and a search for improved policies — this is what universities should be doing.

Firing a tenured professor is very rare at Penn, as at most universities. Most often, efforts to de-tenure arise out of outrageous and often illegal personal conduct: sexually attacking or threatening students, stealing money, or frequently failing to show up for class. Not Wax. She is not even being accused of launching nasty ad hominem attacks on specific students or faculty; indeed, Wax makes her arguments sharply and strongly, but relatively courteously. Wanting to verify

that, I listened to an hour-long class lecture on YouTube and thought that she was remarkably well-mannered.

To be sure, once in a while a professor genuinely needs to be de-tenured. I once participated in a de-tenure procedure, assessing a situation where a professor who had clearly lost his mind gave every student in a large class an F. In the internal adjudication of the matter, I strongly favored severing the professor’s relationship with my university. In another case, a professor used university resources to run a private business for profit. Merely being a mediocre teacher or a lazy individual who hasn’t written a journal article or book or received a grant for many years is not enough — colleges are littered with all sorts of these amiable mediocrities and academic debris. The attempt to oust Wax, by contrast, is more akin to an academic assassination — unjust and immoral.

Nonetheless, in 2019, a large group of students unhappy with Wax called a “town hall” meeting for students — and Penn Law dean Ted Ruger. Ruger allegedly told the students, “Her presence here ... makes me angry, it makes me pissed off.” Ruger has championed himself as a defender of the students against supposed attacks on them made by Wax.

It is relevant to note that Wax has won the prestigious Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching. Aside from being a voluminous author, Wax has also argued at least fifteen cases before the US Supreme Court — that’s about as good as it gets in the legal profession. Her only sin, however, from the viewpoint of many academics, is a grievous one — she tells truths that most Penn Law professors and students (and the haplessly subservient Dean Ruger) don’t want to hear. She is being punished for being intellectually honest and truthful, not for being immoral, incompetent, or lazy.

Ironically, very little has actually officially happened since Dean Ruger began his attack on Professor Wax. Several years ago, she was taken off of teaching her large first-year class on civil procedure, which had been her

major instructional contribution. On June 23, 2022, Dean Ruger indicated in a letter to the chair of the Faculty Senate that he wanted to initiate major sanctions against Wax. She had committed numerous sins, according to Ruger, including “incessant racist, sexist, xenophobic, and homophobic actions and statements.” Besides, as Ruger mentioned, Wax had appeared on *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, and that itself may be viewed by the woke intelligentsia as an implicit sign of moral and intellectual degeneracy. The bottom line: Ruger doesn’t agree with Wax, and, therefore, he wants her fired.

Several lawyers have apparently been hired, and I have seen scores of pages of legal arguments from Wax’s attorneys. Wax doesn’t even think that the Faculty Senate is the appropriate venue to hear the complaint. According to her interpretation of university rules, that job resides with something called the Grievance Commission and the Faculty Senate’s Commission on Academic Freedom and Responsibility. A particularly sad and arguably disgusting dimension of this sad saga: Wax has been undergoing cancer treatment. Penn appears to be attacking a sick septuagenarian and has ignored her pleas to defer this action during her illness.

Actually, as at most schools, the procedures relating to faculty sanctions are rather complicated and involve various faculty groups all the way up to the university president, so it could take months (years?) just to get the matter adjudicated within Penn, much less the courts.

Penn’s dragging of its feet in this case might make good sense from its perspective, as some prestigious and wealthy alums have shown that they are very angry at Penn for its actions toward Wax. Most notable among this group is Paul Levy, a major donor to the university and Penn Law, who early in this brouhaha

resigned from his position as a university trustee over the shameful treatment of Professor Wax. And a growing chorus of respected groups and scholars are speaking out, including the Academic Freedom Alliance and Roger Kimball, the publisher of the *New Criterion*. Kimball said, “[I]t is for stating such obvious truths that Wax is being dragged into the Star Chamber at Penn.” Perhaps muddying the waters a bit, Ted Ruger is stepping down as dean.

Additionally, in what strikes me

## Empirical evidence of the superiority of Western civilization is pretty strong.

as a brilliant move, Professor Wax has counterattacked, filing a grievance complaint against Ruger with Penn’s Grievance Commission, saying, among other things, that Ruger’s charges “are nothing more than an attempt to use the sanction process ... as a means of punishing the most powerful dissenting voice on campus and preventing students from being exposed to important conservative ideas.”

This account of university infighting is abridged considerably in the interest of maintaining reader interest and sanity. For example, I have not discussed a secondary contretemps that evolved over Wax’s inviting Jared Taylor, an advocate for racial segregation, to her course on conservative thought, nor her discussion of the views of British politician and scholar Enoch Powell. Powell lamented the large inflow of mostly black immigrants into Britain in the last half of the twentieth century and the negative impact he perceived

that it had on Britain. Powell was a major British politician, a force in the Conservative Party, and a man of considerable intellect and thoughtfulness. I personally knew him and treasure a lovely book of poems he authored and gave me at London’s important Institute of Economic Affairs. It seems to me entirely appropriate to meet or discuss individuals like Taylor or Powell.

Universities are incredibly politically myopic. The collective decision-making environment in the academy (at Penn, as manifested in the Faculty Senate, informal student protests, and probably the local diversity and inclusion bureaucracy) is on a different planet — indeed a different galaxy — from American public opinion. That disparity is a major reason why university enrollments are falling and public support for universities is cratering. Ruger’s cheerleading the woke Penn masses to high levels of indignation and furor may soon meet the reality of furious alums, donors, and, who knows, possibly even skeptical jurors. Could Ted Ruger get elected Philadelphia dog catcher if it were an elective office?

The modern world was created by challenging the reigning political, religious, economic and academic establishment. It took bold individuals to argue that the charging of interest is not sinful and that the sun does not revolve around the earth. It took bold individuals to introduce and expand the concept of private property rights that, ultimately, along with revolutionary new scientific advances and inventions, created the modern world. Progress came by questioning old beliefs and developing a scientific method to verify empirical propositions. The University of Pennsylvania was founded by Benjamin Franklin, the premier American embodiment of that tradition in our nation’s formative years. Similarly, Amy Wax is a modern-day continuation of that tradition and a national treasure.





# The Birthplace of Woke: Identity Studies in Academia

*Power-hungry university “scholars” spawned the toxic revolution obsessed with radical change that dominates our society today.*

by **Bruce Bawer**

In 1983, having spent four years earning a PhD in English, I instantly turned down the reasonably secure entry-level faculty position my alma mater offered me and chose instead to sign up for that most financially insecure of all professions: freelance literary journalist. Why? Partly because it had taken me that long to face the fact that I just wasn’t the academic type. And partly because I saw that the kind of jargon-heavy approaches that were taking over America’s English departments — from politics-driven “feminist criticism” to pretentious postmodern “deconstruction,” straight out of France by way of Yale University — had nothing whatsoever to do with my own reasons for wanting to spend my life reading and writing about books.

In the years that followed, I often found myself sighing with relief at my narrow escape from the ivory tower. For, as time went by, the humanities fell increasingly under the thumb of leftist radicals who were preoccupied with the phenomenon of social and cultural power, who inflexibly depicted Westerners (Americans

especially) as imperialist oppressors and non-Westerners as victims, who replaced real liberal education (that is, the development of critical thinking) with outright Marxist indoctrination, and who even played the tiresome game of questioning reality itself. In the new humanities disciplines, the focus was more and more on identity groups — notably women, blacks, Latinos, and “queers” — who, cast in the role of perennial underdogs, became the subjects of grievance studies whose practitioners didn’t perform potentially useful scholarly research into those groups’ histories and cultures but instead endlessly pondered, professed, and protested their purported oppression.

In my 2012 book *The Victims’ Revolution* (TVR) — in preparation for which I interviewed some of the leading figures of this movement, sat in on college classes, read shelves full of turgid tomes, and attended academic conferences in cities ranging from Berlin to Baton Rouge to Berkeley — I provided an overview of several of these “identity studies.” I told the story of women’s studies, one of whose founding figures, the Marxist writer Betty Friedan, depicted the 1950s suburban American kitchen (which at that time was nothing less than a dreamscape for most women around the world) as a gulag,

black studies, which was founded by race hustlers, many of them semiliterate thugs, after university administrators surrendered to violent rioters (including Black Panthers); and queer studies, which has nothing whatsoever to do with homosexuality but is, rather, in the words of queer academic David M. Halperin, a celebration of “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” — or, more correctly, a self-celebration by privileged professors who, while being viewed as ornaments of the educational establishment, pretend to be at odds with the established order. (As if to prove this fact, the founding mother of queer studies, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, was a monogamous, heterosexual Jewish housewife who spent her career holding elite faculty positions at, in turn, the University of California, Berkeley; Dartmouth College; Duke University; and the City University of New York.)

TVR has just been issued in paperback with a new foreword by the UK *Spectator’s* Douglas Murray and a new introduction in which I discuss some of the ways in which these identity studies’ guiding dogmas have, since the book’s original publication, spread out into society at large. For example, the

abominations known as critical race theory and “antiracism,” which in recent years have infected primary school classrooms and corporate boardrooms alike, had their genesis in black studies; the widespread demonization of men — including the stereotype of all men as rapists, which dominated the #MeToo movement at its most extreme — is rooted in women’s studies; and the sheer fantasies that make up transgender ideology — and that have also become an orthodoxy in any number of established institutions — can be traced directly to the reality-defying notions of gender identity that are preached in the classrooms of queer studies.

Unfortunately, when writing this new introduction, I wasn’t able to retrace my steps and see how the landscape has changed; that would’ve been a prohibitively expensive proposition, and even in the waning days of the pandemic, it would’ve been exceedingly tricky in terms of travel. But thanks in large part to that same pandemic, the last few years have resulted in a small archive of online lectures, discussions, and conference sessions that provide a pretty clear picture of what’s happened to identity studies since I was researching TVR all those years ago. Herewith, a brief report.

In TVR, I observed that women’s studies, the largest of all the identity studies (which often goes by women’s and gender studies), had over the years become increasingly preoccupied with other identity categories, race above all. That this remains the case was made instantly clear by the poster for last November’s annual conference of the National Women’s Studies Association, which took as its theme “Killing Rage: Resistance on the Other Side of Freedom”; drawn in a kind of pseudo-primitive African style, the poster depicted two black women in African-looking garb. The theme of the forthcoming October 2023 conference is “A Luta Continua/The Struggle Continues: Resistance, Resilience, Resurgence.” A *luta continua*, as it happens, was the founding motto of Mozambique’s Frelimo party, whose war for independence from Portugal (1964–75) enjoyed the support of both China and the Soviet Union. (One wonders how many of the white feminists who founded women’s studies ever imagined that their discipline, which at its birth was preoccupied with liberating middle-class housewives from their dreaded kitchens, would end up in the hands of tenured women

who, living in leafy American college towns, get a kick out of the illusion that their jargon-drenched scribblings have some connection to mid-twentieth-century communist revolutions in Africa.)

None of these identity studies pros are remotely interested in discussing human identity in a remotely mature and responsible way.

As for queer studies — whose first practitioners legitimized their Marxist enterprise by pretending that the discipline was centered on the study of homosexual life and culture — it has less to do with gay men and lesbians than ever before: to peruse the titles of the papers delivered at last year’s Queer History Conference at San Francisco State University is to encounter one opus after another on transgenderism, “female sexuality,” “queers of color,” or — especially — “queer” life south of the border. Moreover, given that in the last few years many primary school teachers have been introducing their pupils to gender fluidity and storytellers in full drag regalia, it’s not surprising that one of the conference sessions was entirely devoid to the apparently noble effort “to make queer histories more visible” in “K–12” spaces. Also — and I may be wrong here — the description of another session, “Regulating Sex Between Men and Boys in the Anglophone World, 1840s–1910s,” certainly makes it sound as if the participants were engaged in a defense of pedophilia.

As part of my research for TVR, I attended a 2011 presentation at a queer studies conference in Berlin by Susan Stryker, a star transgender professor then teaching at Indiana University who told us that one welcome, if imperfect, solution to the problem of US “neoliberalism” would be a pragmatic alliance between the intellectual Left and the “fascist” Tea Party movement. As I stated in TVR, Stryker plainly didn’t grasp what it meant to stand in a lecture hall on the Unter den Linden, a short distance from the Brandenburg Gate, and speak blithely about allying with fascists. Appearing a few months ago at a “queer history” conference in Bergen, Norway, Stryker, now “Professor Emerita” at the University of Arizona, was still at war

with “neofascists” — who, in the 1970s, we were told, sparked local resistance by turning slum housing and community facilities in the “old trans sex work ghetto” in San Francisco’s Tenderloin into upmarket apartments.

Stryker described the Tenderloin of that era as a “carceral” environment — a “place of confinement for criminalized populations.” In Bergen, just as in Berlin, Stryker — who proceeded to rail against police and prisons generally — seemed deaf to context: whereas many of the misfits who found a home in the Tenderloin half a century ago doubtless saw it not as a penitentiary but as a place of freedom, Stryker was speaking a short distance from the *Skrekens hus* (house of horrors), from which the Gestapo, during the five-year Nazi occupation of Norway, ruled brutally over a city that really was a “carceral” environment. Furthermore, the terrible reality of what “defunding the police” has meant for the once-lovely City by the Bay made Stryker’s antiprison bombast seem especially blinkered.

Indeed, Stryker came off as utterly irresponsible. But then again, none of these identity studies pros are interested in discussing human identity in a remotely mature and responsible way. They’re no more interested in formulating sensible ideas for the future than they are in owning up to past views that have proven fallacious. Their “work,” far from having the remotest relevance to the realities of anyone’s lives, is about the endless mouthing of reality-defying woke bromides as if they were professional mantras; hence, Stryker’s Bergen talk concluded with a banal windup to the effect that the “militant trans resistance” in yesterday’s Tenderloin can help us “imagine what can transpire” there in the future — even though that “resistance” did nothing whatsoever to change that hellhole of a neighborhood for the better.

In Bergen last year, as in Berlin eleven years earlier, Stryker spoke at a queer studies conclave. One of the major changes in identity studies during the last decade, however, has been the massive increase in courses and conferences exclusively, or principally, devoted to trans studies, a field that, at the time I wrote TVR, didn’t even merit inclusion in my chapter on small up-and-coming disciplines. “The State of Trans Studies in the 2020s,” a 2021 online discussion sponsored by units of the University of Massachusetts and Clark University and featuring six contributors to the new *SAGE Encyclopedia of Trans Studies*, proved illuminating on this front. Asked what questions are guiding



his own present journey through trans studies, Marquis Bey (“they/them”) of Northwestern University replied — and okay, hold on to your hats, for here comes the obligatory dose of identity studies patois — that he’s currently preoccupied with

*the question of materiality: what does it mean to have, be, a certain kind of body, and how do we assess and think about what it means to be certain kinds of, in particular, gendered subjects, and for me that’s rendered as a question because it seems to me that the very notion of materiality, the very notion of embodiment, by way of trans studies and by way of trans analytic, is being thrown into a kind of crisis of questioning. So how then can we think about reconfiguring, reimagining, maybe even abolishing various tenets on which the body rests? And that to me is incredibly exciting, also incredibly terrifying too, precisely because if one of the things that situates us in space, situates us in relation to other people, is the purported facticity of the body, to throw that into question is then to throw into question our very status as subjects in relation to other people. But I do think genuinely that that throwing into crisis implies or looks toward a different modality of being and relating to one another on grounds that are not constituted by the normative, constituted by violence, constituted by all these various kinds of hegemonic identities that are imposed upon us, so how can we then think about materiality and subjectivity and embodiment, et cetera, otherwise?*

I quote this passage in full to demonstrate that, whatever else may or may not have changed in identity studies, the tendency of its practitioners to serve up staggering amounts of pretentious rhetoric conveying little or nothing in the way of substance is alive and well. Bey’s main point here, you may have gathered, is that if you buy into the premise of transgender theory — namely, that simply saying you’re a female overrides the testimony to the contrary of every cell in your body — it’s only natural to follow up on this act of faith by questioning the importance, and even the reality, of the physical self. I noticed that Bey wasn’t the only member of the panel who was preoccupied with the issue of “materiality” — which was interesting because, if you decide that you don’t really exist, then where does the university mail your check?

Checking out Bey’s website, I found that if, on the one hand, he’s playing the game of questioning his own existence, on the other hand — as I discovered on his website — in

his “field-defining academic monograph,” *Black Trans Feminism*, he imagines himself as a veritable Genghis Khan of identity politics, engaged in “a wholesale dismantling of the world we have been given.” Yes, a *wholesale dismantling of the world we have been given* — what self-respecting identity studies scholar today would admit to a lesser goal?

The brand of numbing English that Bey churns out — a legacy of the insanely influential Judith Butler, a pioneer of queer and women’s studies who won the 1998 Bad Writing award from the journal *Philosophy and Literature* — is common in identity studies, but not quite ubiquitous. Those who want to be taken

seriously as scholars and who therefore feel a need to pretend they’re struggling with complex ideas feel compelled to sling the recondite argot, but those who strongly identify as activists and wish to communicate with the grievance-group hoi polloi prefer to keep their language simple. So it was that in this online discussion, an older participant, Aaron Devor, chair of transgender studies at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada, contended that if trans scholars “want to change the world,” they should eschew “excessive academese and jargon.” Bey didn’t look happy.

Another participant, Ann Travers of British Columbia’s Simon Fraser University,

also sees it as her job to “change the world”: witness the title of her 2018 book *The Trans Generation: How Trans Kids (and Their Parents) Are Creating a Gender Revolution*. In Travers’s view, trans studies should be concerned less with winning acceptance for trans adults than with recruiting “trans kids” — or, if you will, rescuing them from “a constellation of interest groups with an investment in conservative heteropatriarchal gender politics, many of whom are into white-power nationalism.”

Although this online discussion was purportedly trans focused, the subject of race kept coming up. Travers bragged that whenever she runs across a trans studies book that doesn’t incorporate “a critical race perspective,” she deep-sixes it. Another participant complained that “whiteness . . . has robbed us of the time to develop a particular relational ethic” and that “everybody in trans studies needs to deal with their relationship to blackness.” As I noted in *TVR*, identity studies has become obsessed by “intersectionality” — the vapid observation that, say, a black lesbian can experience a heady cocktail of bigotry composed of racism, sexism, and homophobia — and women’s studies has been all but taken over by issues of race. Still, in these recent identity studies conferences, the degree of insistence on the need to prioritize blackness, no matter which identity category is nominally under examination, is unprecedented in my experience.

As for black studies itself, it appears — as one might expect — to be stronger than ever. In addition, the related field of whiteness studies, which I touched on briefly in *TVR*, has gained considerable traction, thanks in large part to bestsellers like Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility* (2018), which — either ignoring such chronic black-subculture issues as single motherhood, ghetto crime, drug gangs, and high dropout rates, or refusing to admit the slightest degree of black culpability for them — seek to blame all of black America’s problems on white racism.

What exactly is whiteness studies? As Cheryl E. Matias, author of *Feeling White: Whiteness, Emotionality, and Education*, explained in a 2020 talk at the University of Denver, the field teaches that whites are natural “colonizers” who wield unearned and often unconscious “power,” who feel “entitled” and instinctively behave in a “supremist” manner, and who respond to criticism of any of these defects with “emotionality.” Thanks to white power, the Western literary canon consists entirely of works by “white men,” and the black character in movies “is always

the sidekick.” As you might imagine from this thumbnail description, the field’s practitioners are entirely Western-oriented (listening to them, you wonder if they’ve ever heard of the Ottoman Empire or the Empire of Japan, or if they’re aware that some national literature is actually the work of *nonwhites*), and they often talk as if they’re living in a pre-MLK America, where there’s never been a president named Barack Obama, a Nobel laureate named Toni Morrison, or a two-time Oscar-winner named Denzel Washington.

Matias, who made a point of specifying that she teaches “black whiteness studies” as opposed to “white privilege” pioneer Peggy McIntosh’s “white whiteness studies” — a distinction I hadn’t encountered before — parroted the familiar lie that white cops are massacring innocent blacks and condemned “the narcissism of whiteness” (although I’ve rarely, if ever, seen any professor talk as much about herself as Matias did in that presentation). Needless to say, it would be professional suicide for a white academic to generalize as crudely and negatively about black people as Matias did about whites. And what, one wonders, would happen if one of Matias’s students dared to ask her why black social pathologies persist in the US even as relatively new Asian and African immigrant communities have been models of success? No doubt the troublemaker would be reported to a dean and expelled on the spot.

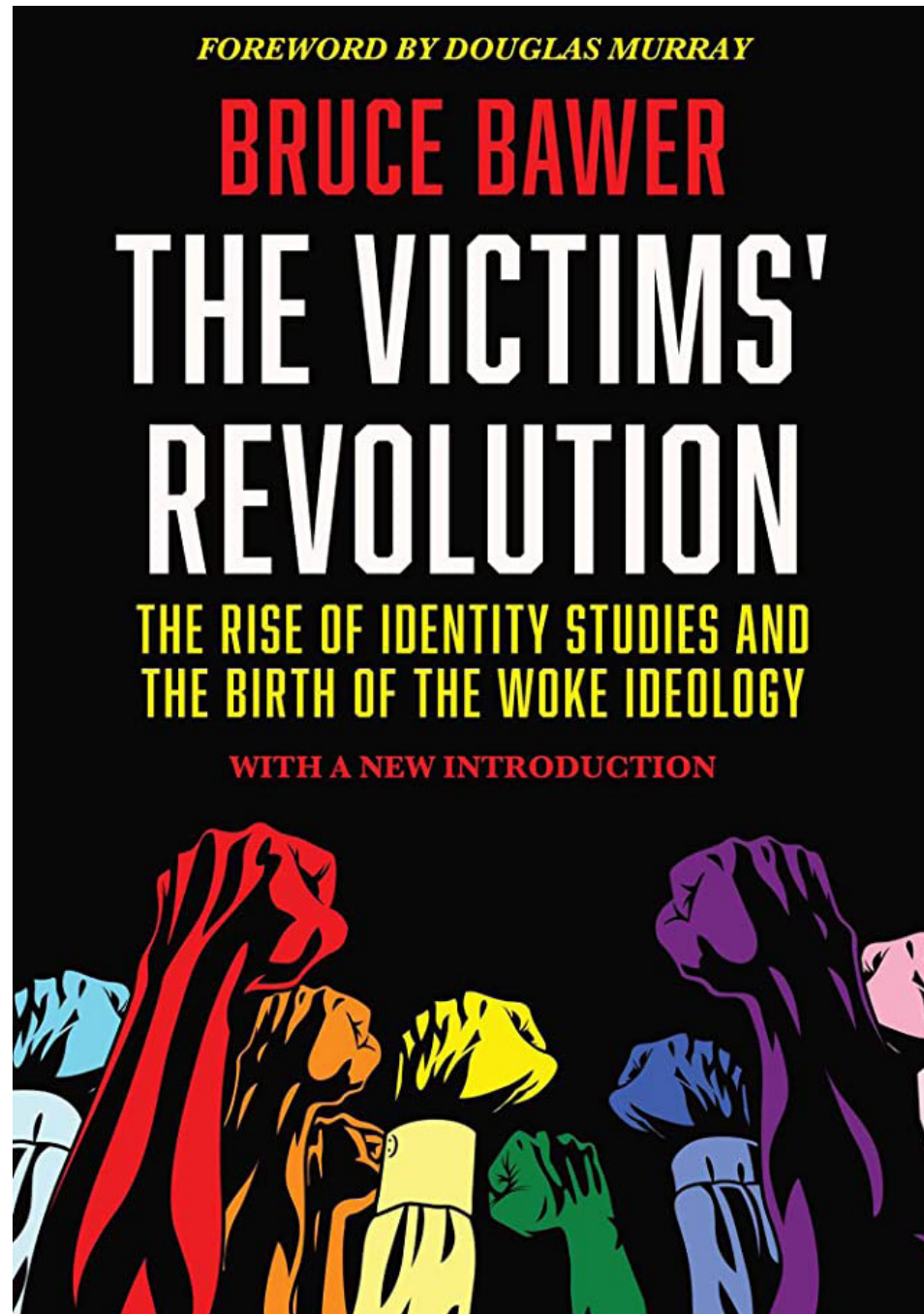
Two “identity studies” that unhelpfully turn medical conditions into victim groups also continue to thrive. One is fat studies, which tells morbidly obese young people (mostly women) that they can enjoy “health at any size.” Indeed, as I wrote in *TVR*, fat studies argues that “encouraging people to watch their health is a coercive and potentially fascist act linked to capitalism, racism, and Nazi-style eugenics.” Last year, podcaster Steven Crowder subjected fat studies to the kind of brutal parody it deserves: in a pricelessly hilarious video, Crowder, wearing a fat suit and wig and using the pseudonym Sea Matheson, delivered, via Zoom, a deliberately ridiculous paper, “Embracing Fatness as Self-Care in the Era of Trump,” at a fat studies conference session. Not only was Crowder not fingered as a jokester and summarily ejected; the other attendees gave him “rave reviews,” and “Matheson” was invited to review a paper for a fat studies journal.

Even more unsettling than fat studies is disability (or, believe it or not, “crip”) studies, which encourages the disabled to regard their handicap as their identity — and which, therefore, views any effort to cure deafness,

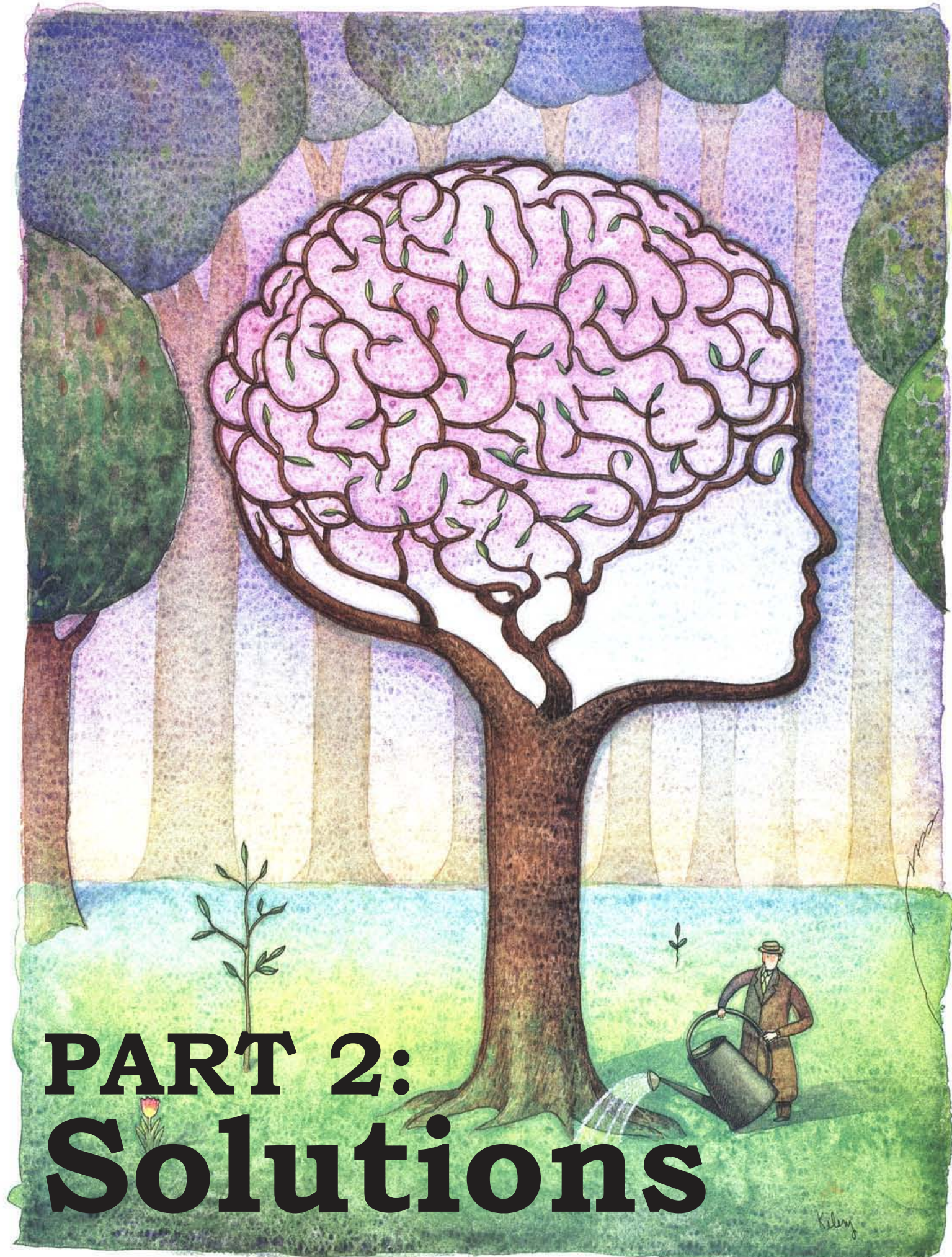
say, as attempted genocide. In a 2020 TEDx Talk, Noah Bukowski, who has cerebral palsy and teaches disability studies at the Ohio State University, explained that he resents being told by loved ones that he’s walking or talking better because, to him, that means he’s walking or talking “less like me.” In other words, progress in overcoming his disability amounts to “erasure of my disability.” (In disability studies, incidentally, abortion is a fraught issue: killing healthy fetuses is, of course, no problem, but terminating early-stage embryos who will have severe birth defects is deeply problematic.)

In none of the identity studies is it clearer than it is in disability studies just how wide the intellectual gap is between those frauds whose entire education consists of having memorized a handful of inane bullet points and the genuine professionals, operating far beyond the bounds of identity studies, who actually know something about the topics in which those ideologues are supposedly experts. When it comes to disability studies, for example, we have, on the one side, brilliant researchers, doctors, and surgeons who seek to free humanity from deliberating afflictions; on the other side, we have vapid careerists who come very close to demonizing those scientific professionals even as they push the grotesquely reductive proposition that, at the end of the day, you are what ails you.

And none of what the practitioners of identity studies actually do has the slightest connection to legitimate education or scholarship. Their job in the classroom is unambiguous: to fool callow young people into thinking that they’re learning something when, in fact, they’re being indoctrinated into a fatuous ideology and trained to be fanatical crusaders for socially destructive ideas. There are cosmetic differences among the various identity studies, but in every case the guiding premise is, briefly put, that America, outside of the university, is crying out for radical change because it’s organized in certain old-fashioned and deeply unjust ways that systematically privilege heterosexual white men while consistently marginalizing women, gays, “people of color,” and “gender nonconforming” persons. In fact, in the year 2023, off-campus America, at least in its leading corporate, media, religious, military, and cultural institutions, has already been transformed by a toxic revolution whose battle cries are right out of the identity studies playbook. It’s all sheer mischief, as dangerous as it is puerile; and if it isn’t rolled back soon — not just in mainstream society but also on the university and college campuses where it originated — it’ll be too late to return America to sanity, order, and individual liberty. 🗨️

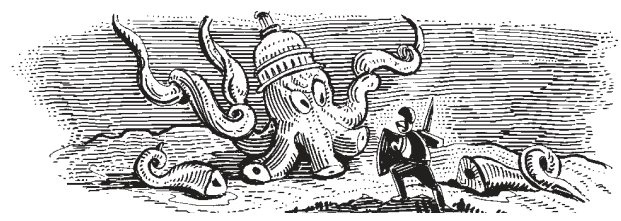






# PART 2: Solutions

## ASK THE EXPERT



# Shut Down the Department of Education

*Why the department does more harm than good — and how we could actually help students.*

by **Betsy DeVos**

Imagine a government program that existed to achieve one goal — a laudable goal. But after spending more than \$1 trillion in taxpayer dollars — that’s trillion, with twelve zeros — in pursuit of that goal, not only had the agency failed to achieve the goal, but it had also made the problem demonstrably worse.

Perhaps it’s not that hard to imagine because so much of what the federal government does is to fail in its mission.

But that scenario is far from hypothetical. It’s the regrettable truth about the US Department of Education. And those trillion dollars only scratch the surface of why the agency is a failed experiment and a malignancy to those who love freedom and believe students are more important than “the education system.”

The department’s main function in elementary and secondary education has been to spend money ... a *lot* of money. But over the course of its four-decade history, there’s scant evidence that the department has done anything to improve student

outcomes. In fact, there is considerable evidence to the contrary. It doesn’t take much more than a cursory skim of the Nation’s Report Card to see that it’s true.

But with money comes power. And because the Department of Education controls so much money, it has the power to push schools around, meaning that even things like “nonregulatory guidance” and “Dear Colleague letters” quickly become law in schools because the department threatens to withhold funding from those who don’t adhere to its edicts.

Power has been the department’s primary purpose. Its bulging bureaucracy has created rules, guidance, conditions, and red tape that have consistently stifled innovation, shackled teachers, slowed student achievement, advanced political agendas, and squandered most of the trillions in taxpayer dollars that have come through “Big ED’s” Brutalist doorways.

In one sense, it’s almost unfair to criticize the department for its failure to improve the condition of education; it doesn’t have any of the requisite tools to do so. But in another sense, that fact ultimately proves why the department need not exist at all.

People are often surprised when I recite what the department does and does not do.

They seem to assume that the department runs schools — it does not. Or that the secretary is “in charge” of public education — she is not. The department does not hire or train teachers. It does not set learning standards. It generally doesn’t “do business” with teachers, students, or families at all. Instead, its main “customers” are state education bureaucrats and trade associations — namely, the unions and the alphabet soup of organizations they financially control and who in turn financially benefit from the department’s mere existence.

Rightly, and perhaps most importantly, the US Department of Education is statutorily barred from having any role in curricula whatsoever. The law very clearly delegates that role, as it does almost all meaningful decisions in education, to states and communities:

*No provision of a program administered by the Secretary or by any other officer of the Department shall be construed to authorize the Secretary or any such officer to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution, school, or school system, over any accrediting agency or association, or over the selection or*

*Betsy DeVos served as the eleventh US secretary of education and is the bestselling author of Hostages No More: The Fight for Education Freedom and the Future of the American Child.*



*content of library resources, textbooks, or other instructional materials by any educational institution or school system. (Section 103[b], Public Law 96-88)*

That's a pretty unambiguous line of demarcation. But it didn't stop the Biden Department of Education from trying to impose the racist and factually flawed "1619 Project" on schools and students via a "grant condition" on awards in 2021.

That's a small example that proves a broader point. The department's mere existence as a political body within the executive branch creates a magnetic pull toward overreach in pursuit of an agenda — a problem that frankly has plagued both parties. We saw this clearly with No Child Left Behind under George W. Bush and Race to the Top under Barack Obama. As secretary, I had to fight that pull against elements of the Trump White House and many members of Congress. When there is a lever of power that can be pulled, people in Washington just want to pull it.

A short recitation of the history of the department is important to understand why it was a failed experiment from the jump.

In 1976, the federal role in education was comparatively de minimis and resided within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. But a new trajectory was created that year when then governor Jimmy Carter cut a deal with the National Education Association. In exchange for its first-ever endorsement in a presidential campaign, Carter would form the US Department of Education as a Cabinet-level agency.

The NEA made no bones about its motives; then union boss John Ryor said it out loud:

*Electing candidates dedicated to meeting the needs of education isn't a goal, it's a means to an end. Our goals, the things we need to enable us to teach more effectively and to live more comfortably — things like one-third Federal funding, collective bargaining legislation in every state, national health care, a separate Secretary of Education, equity in teacher retirement nationwide — will not accomplish themselves.*

The NEA got their man, and, in turn, they got *their* Cabinet agency.

I use "their" deliberately. When I became secretary, the department maintained a shuttle between "its" buildings in Washington. Those included the three owned by the federal government, and also those owned by the NEA and the American Federation for Teachers (AFT).

Today, the Office of the Secretary houses a "senior liaison for labor relations." My successor has a monthly meeting with the union bosses, and his staff has twice-per-week "check-ins" with the unions' lobbyists. They do joint events and joint TV appearances. President Joe Biden, when he isn't uncomfortably talking about "sleep[ing] with a NEA member every night," headlines Democratic National Committee fundraisers at the NEA's headquarters. The AFT's Randi Weingarten is a Democratic superdelegate.

It is important to note that this does not make the unions' "our way or the highway" mentality strictly partisan. While they called on me to resign seemingly daily, they also passed a resolution calling on President Barack Obama's secretary and close friend, Arne Duncan, to resign. His supposed crime? Having the audacity to agree with a court ruling that stated that low-income students deserved better than low-quality teachers — a position that was good for kids, but bad for union bosses.

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## Power has been the department's primary purpose.

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All of this makes it little wonder that the unions were given special — and unprecedented — access under Biden to edit Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance on school reopenings to meet their liking (which was keeping children masked and schools closed).

It's an outcome so obvious that even the *Washington Post* saw it coming. In 1978, the *Post* editorialized:

*One of the principal risks of creating a creature of its clientele. That clientele would not necessarily be the schoolchildren and their parents affected by the federal government's education programs. Much more probably it would be the National Education Association, the organization of teachers and school administrators who already exert a great deal of influence on education policy in Washington. In a way, this would be giving them their own department. (emphasis mine)*

Back to the money. As mentioned earlier, Congress gives the Department of Education a lot of taxpayer money. Last year, it received more than \$80 billion (excluding the \$100 billion-plus in student loans

it originates each year). It costs taxpayers more than \$1.5 billion just to pay for the department's 4,000 employees, buildings (three in DC alone), and basic operations. By comparison, the Departments of Labor, Treasury, and Interior receive approximately \$14 billion each in yearly discretionary funding — one-sixth the amount of the Department of Education.

When I walked veteran reporter John Stossel around just a few floors of one of the Department of Education's buildings, he was aghast. "What do all these people *do*?" I told him that for many, I have no clue, and for many others, I wished I didn't know. The answer is almost never: help students.

The Department of Education isn't even close to being the primary funder of K–12 education. In most states, the federal share of education spending is less than 10 percent. In my home state of Michigan, last year's state budget increased K–12 spending by more than what the federal government sent, making it hard to argue that the federal funding is irreplaceable.

Many have quipped that the Education Department provides 10 percent of the money but 90 percent of the paperwork. We weren't able to concretely substantiate the claim, but even Randi Weingarten shared that reducing the department's paperwork burden was an area of agreement between us.

Of course, the funding would be well worth it if the return on investment was there. But when researchers from Harvard University and Stanford University studied fifty years of federal spending on education, they found quite the opposite. Recall that the department has redistributed more than \$1 trillion in taxpayer dollars to K–12 education systems across the nation since its inception. The express, primary goal of that spending was to close the socioeconomic achievement gap. Title I, the federal department's largest K–12 expenditure, is targeted exclusively at schools in the lowest-income areas of the country. The achievement results show that not only has the gap not closed, but, in most every case, it has actually widened. So too have the gaps between the highest- and lowest-achieving students, which widened ever more dramatically with the unnecessarily prolonged COVID closures.

Looking specifically at Title I, a 2015 Brookings Institution study concluded, "[T]here is little evidence that the overall program is effective or that its funds are used for effective services and activities." This was hardly news. A 1984 study, the first longitudinal study conducted after the Great Society passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, found that the "gap in achievement is not closed over time." In short, the spending isn't working to achieve the goal.

The same was true in a study released just as I took office. That report looked at so-called School Improvement Grants, a \$3 billion program created by the Obama administration with the explicit goal of fixing chronically low-performing schools. But the study found that "implementing any SIG-funded model had no significant impacts on math or reading test scores, high school graduation, or college enrollment." It was the largest-ever federal government investment in trying to fix failing schools, and it failed — miserably.

There's a cautionary tale here as well. In response to consistent findings about the ineffectiveness of federal education spending, Republicans have been quick to propose cuts. Their generally poorly articulated arguments cause backlash. As a former Democratic education aide put it: "The defenders became overly protective and didn't want to make any changes. It caused a hardening of positions rather than reaching for solutions." I certainly experienced this firsthand.

It is a critical lesson to learn. Well-intentioned conservatives, dating back to Ronald Reagan, have tended to be lazy in their critiques of the Department of Education, often simply stating that it doesn't do anything beneficial or that education isn't a proper federal role. Both are true; the department does very little productive work, and education is best and properly left to the states, localities, and, ultimately, families.

But those rhetorical barbs leave too much room for opponents to claim that such propositions are not realistic or, more often, are harmful to schools. They do so most successfully by leveraging the fact that few Americans, let alone probably most members of Congress, actually know what the department does or does not do.

Accordingly, the answer conservatives must put forward is not to simply "abolish" the department, as Representative Thomas Massie's bill would do. Instead, we must provide a vision of a stronger future state for education. We should put forward policies that empower students and their families, improve the teaching profession, and restore local control.

In our final budget proposal to Congress in 2020, I laid out a roadmap for how to do all this. The same ideas hold true today:

***Unlock Educational Freedom for Students***  
When we were in office, we advanced legislation called Education Freedom Scholarships. In short, it would have created a federal tax credit for taxpayers who donated to state-based school choice scholarship programs. The program wouldn't have grown federal power one bit or created anything for the US Department of Education to do — or, more likely, to mess up. It would simply

be another available tax credit on your 1040, but with the important element of providing rocket fuel to education freedom programs designed and run by states.

In this Congress, that idea has taken shape as the Educational Choice for Children Act, brought forward by Senator Bill Cassidy. Congress should pass it, or something similar, without delay.

The imperative has only grown as more states have implemented education freedom programs. As of this writing, West Virginia, Arizona, Iowa, Utah, Arkansas, and Florida all

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## It's hard to serve as the protector of women's sports when you're the one putting males on the team.

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have passed laws that provide education savings accounts (ESAs) to every single student in the state, with the funds able to be used for any educational expense the family chooses. Many more states have existing tax-credit programs, and many more — most notably Texas — are currently working to pass new ones.

This shift in the balance of power, from the education system to the student, will radically transform the K–12 experience and improve outcomes. It will also elevate the value of teachers by allowing them to grow in their careers, instead of being artificially capped by the one-size-fits-no-body system.

Fiscally, the tax credit would be a relative bargain. If Congress could find \$190 billion to send to the K–12 system as COVID "relief," without requiring them to reopen schools, it can certainly find \$10 billion in tax credits to unlock new learning opportunities for millions of kids and give them a fighting chance to catch up academically.

### ***Block Grant Funds to the States***

The US Department of Education does one thing well: it takes taxpayer money appropriated by Congress, shuffles it around, adds strings and red tape, and absorbs some of it to feed itself before finally "granting" it to intermediaries, like state education agencies. They, in turn, shuffle it around, add strings and red tape, feed themselves, and then finally send it to school districts. Eventually, some of that money finds its way to a classroom and something a student actually benefits from, or at least interacts with ... probably.

There's clearly a more effective way. At the very least, we should cut out some of the middlemen.

We proposed that Congress combine the funding for the dozens of programs that the Department of Education administers at the K–12 level into a single block grant to the states — without red tape. In addition to improving efficiency, and increasing the total number of dollars actually available to schools, block-granting the money might prompt states to try new ideas and innovate. The people closest to students are the most likely to know how best to use those funds to improve student outcomes. We should unleash that creativity and see what flowers, not continue to constrict it from on high.

Much the same could be done in higher education. For example, the Department of Education currently administers eleven separate programs for minority-serving institutions. By consolidating them into one block grant, schools could almost certainly better target the dollars and serve students.

Though the "sky is falling" crowd will cry differently, the only harm done in this scenario would be to the power center in Washington from which the Blob (as Secretary Bill Bennett famously named the education lobby) has long fed. When I shared this idea with America's governors, they immediately understood the flexibility that it could give them to pursue ideas that work. One literally jumped up and down with excitement.

Of course, it would be even better if we block-granted the money to families themselves. This could be done by bundling up every cent that the federal government spends on education, from Head Start to worker training programs, and depositing those funds into interest-bearing Lifelong Learning Accounts given to every American infant. With states, charities, and families also contributing to these accounts, we could more than fund preschool, K–12, college, and ongoing learning for every man, woman, and child in America.

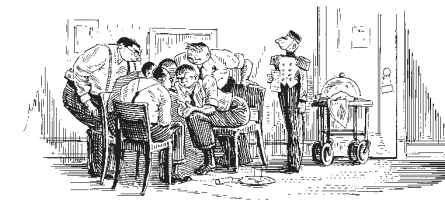
### ***Make FSA an Autonomous Government Corporation; Restore Private Lending***

While I believe that the Department of Education is ill-equipped to productively manage much of anything, it is particularly ill-equipped to run one of the nation's largest consumer banks.

Federal Student Aid (FSA) is just that. It has a loan portfolio of nearly \$1.7 trillion, making it bigger than Bank of America, JPMorgan, or Capital One. For comparison, Wells Fargo is the nation's largest mortgage servicer, and it holds less than \$1 trillion in mortgages.

Such scale requires strong governance and deep financial expertise. But FSA has neither.





## A Practical Remedy for University Cancel Culture

*Standing up to woke tyranny requires the very moral virtue in shortest supply in academia — courage.*

by Bradley C.S. Watson

Our institutions of higher learning are in freefall. The dominance of progressive political orientations among faculty members and administrators is well known, and the consequences of this intellectual monoculture are equally obvious. I need not recount the innumerable instances of cancel culture on American campuses, or the political pogroms launched even against established, tenured faculty members who have refused to bow before the progressive passions of the moment.

I was recently the subject of cancellation myself when the president of my former employer, Saint Vincent College, decided to take control of a long-standing and highly respected academic center that I directed — due to his objections to a single speaker whose arguments against affirmative action he deemed unacceptably heterodox. *L’Affaire* Saint Vincent attracted considerable national publicity, including two pieces that appeared in these pages. But it’s fair to surmise that there are other cancellations that do not get the attention they deserve — not to mention the countless daily demands for intellectual conformity with which professors, administrators, and students

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meekly comply for fear of being seen to oppose progressive orthodoxy.

In the film adaptation of Philip Roth’s novel *The Human Stain*, the fictional professor Coleman Silk is accused of racism by college authorities for using ordinary — and demonstrably nonracist — language in a classroom. It is language that is grossly misinterpreted — either intentionally or unintentionally — by unseem, unduly fragile students.

In an administrative kangaroo court, the angry professor — played brilliantly by Anthony Hopkins — stares at his colleagues and exclaims: “To charge me with racism is not only false; it is spectacularly false. And you know it!” And indeed they do know it. Yet not one of them will speak up for their colleague. As he storms from the conference room in which the academic show trial is being held, Silk ironically thanks one of his silent faculty friends.

Silk’s accusations point to the nub of the problem: colleges are facing a moral crisis as much as an intellectual one. There are still decent people on America’s campuses — many of them professors with tenure — who are decidedly not on board with the various woke outrages *du jour*. However, they often choose not to engage when they have the opportunity — nay, obligation — to defend open discourse or even other members of

their college community who find themselves under assault.

This dynamic repeats itself on campus after campus. Alexis de Tocqueville identifies the reasons for it in *Democracy in America*. He notes that standing against dominant opinions is particularly difficult in democratic times for fear of the disapprobation of the multitude. And the modern university is nothing if not a democratic institution — that is, one beholden to the opinions of the progressive majority that composes it. In most cases, this is a majority ethos more than an actual voting majority, but it is all the more powerful for being so. Once the majority has spoken, says Tocqueville, “everyone is silent, and friends and enemies alike seem to make for its bandwagon.”

Tocqueville notes, for example, that while a king has only physical power, a majority possesses both physical and moral authority. It thus encloses thought “within a formidable fence,” and anyone who traverses it “must face all kinds of unpleasantness and everyday persecution. . . . He believes he has supporters; but he feels that he has them no more once he stands revealed to all, for those who condemn him express their views loudly, while those who think as he does, but without his courage, retreat into silence as if ashamed of having told the truth.” Such is the democratic manifestation of the natural timorousness of men.

Instead, as I said at its annual conference in 2019, FSA’s mission is to serve students and their families, but its structure is set up to serve politicians and their policies. As has been noted, no one can serve two masters.

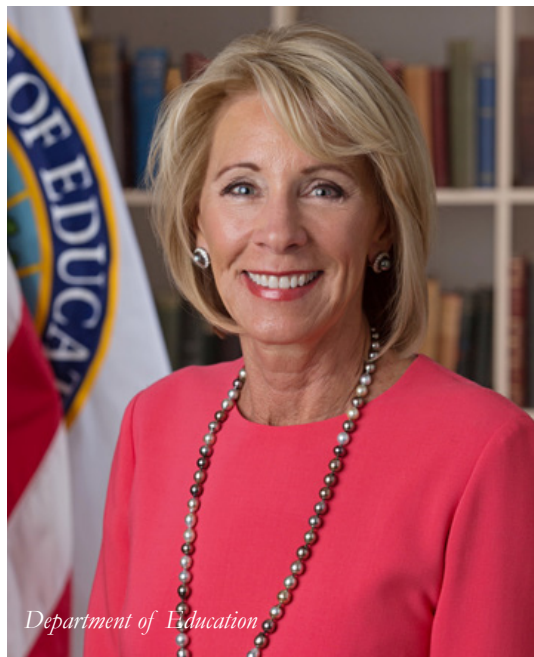
Consider the current Biden proposal to “cancel” hundreds of billions in student loans. Ignore, for a moment, that the plan is flatly illegal. FSA’s charge, under law, is to secure repayment from student loan borrowers, that is, to function like a responsible lender. Ignore, too, that Biden’s student loan cancellations are unfair to students who responsibly repaid their loans or avoided borrowing altogether — not to mention the veterans who served their country and earned their loan forgiveness. Biden can ignore all those things because he wants to get reelected, and his advisers clearly believe that delivering student loan “relief” will help him win over younger voters. As a result, FSA is currently focused on eliminating as much of its own loan portfolio as possible, regardless of the fiscal harm done to taxpayers as a result (let alone the clear signal it sends to schools to just keep raising tuition).

We envisioned exactly this type of scenario when we proposed spinning FSA out of the Department of Education and making it an autonomous government banking institution, similar to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. It should have an independent board of governors, appointed by the president with staggered terms, who are experienced financial professionals and hold a fiduciary duty to the US taxpayer.

Doing so would make it harder to raid the Treasury in search of a political payoff. It would also force financial transparency. FSA should produce a complete and meaningful balance sheet to Congress and, by extension, taxpayers each quarter. If Congress passes laws that lead to FSA losing money, that’s Congress’s prerogative. But taxpayers should have a clear line of sight into where their money is going. Today, too many student loans are being written off in the dark, without an appropriation to pay for them. To wit, the Department of Education failed its last audit because its auditors, KPMG, found that the department “was unable to provide adequate evidential matter to support certain key assumptions used to estimate the [student loan] subsidy costs.”

Much of this is due to the complete federalization of student lending in 2010 as a “pay for” for Obamacare. Yes, the student loan program, which loses money, is budgeted as a money maker. Such things can only happen in the Swamp. In the real world, a bank with books like FSA’s would be shut down and its leadership imprisoned.

Reintroducing a private lending market would benefit taxpayers and borrowers. Banks would be able to offer some students better rates and terms than the government can, while creating shared accountability for repayment. Federal higher education loans have no underwriting. While that is important to ensure access for those with insufficient credit history, it also needlessly punishes those who could access better terms. A better solution would look more like the “Lending Tree” model, where, following completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, a student and their



family could review a menu of available lending options, including the federal government. Getting multiple bids tends to yield better deals.

### *Combine Forces to Protect Students*

The Department of Education enforces civil rights law for all students based on race (largely under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act), based on sex (largely under Title IX of the Education Amendments Act), and based on disability (largely under the Individual with Disabilities Education Act).

These laws provide necessary protections against discrimination that require ongoing federal effort, especially as these are areas where the states have not always lived up to their obligations. However, these laws — as important as they are — hardly necessitate having their own Cabinet-level agency.

Take civil rights. The Department of Justice has a Civil Rights Division charged with upholding “the civil and constitutional rights of all persons in the United States, particularly some of the most vulnerable

members of our society.” It even has an Educational Opportunities Unit, in no small part because the Department of Education doesn’t have litigation authority and must rely on the Department of Justice to prosecute. It’s hard to argue that the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights couldn’t, let alone shouldn’t, live there.

Similarly, the Department of Health and Human Services is home to numerous programs for Americans with disabilities and is already home to a disability rights enforcement arm.

While these bureaucracies are certainly not free from political influence or overreach, they exist within structures much more attuned to the rule of law than the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights has proven to be.

Consider how the Office for Civil Rights has weaponized Title IX, a one-sentence law that reads:

*No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.*

Today, the Biden administration has two proposals to torture that sentence into a liberal social engineering juggernaut. First, it would restore Obama-era “guidance” on addressing claims of sexual misconduct that so aggressively undermined basic due process protections that many likened the results to kangaroo courts and the English Star Chambers. The second would leverage Title IX, which most Americans find synonymous with protecting women’s sports, to destroy women’s sports by redefining “sex” to mean “gender identity.” It’s hard to serve as the protector of women’s sports when you’re the one putting males on the team.

In sum, if each of these ideas were enacted, the proper — and greatly diminished — federal role in education would be restored. The real work would again be done in the states and amongst students, families, and educators. The need for a bulging federal bureaucracy would disappear. If, as a result, the US Department of Education itself disappeared, so much the better!

The seismic power shift would make American education stronger, more student-centered, better funded, less bureaucratic, depoliticized, and higher-achieving.

In many ways, it would accomplish everything that the Department of Education has chronically failed to do. ✎





# Give Your Kids the Gift of Parochial School

*Let me take you back six decades to Yeshiva Rambam of Brooklyn, circa 1960.*

by **Dov Fischer**

Your kids won't be imbued with decent values from our era's public schools. They won't be taught to respect authority or to love their country and flag. They will learn about condoms and LGBTQIA+, but there are no guarantees that they will learn about history, math, science, and English literary excellence.

They won't start the day with a prayer to a Supreme Being greater than they, nor will most even begin with the Pledge of Allegiance and "The Star-Spangled Banner." Even if the school "allows" the pledge to be recited or the national anthem to be sung or a "moment of silence" to be had — a big "if" — there may well be some kid demonstratively sitting in protest, another kneeling with eyes rolling. There won't be *uniform* respect and patriotism, with hands over hearts and pride in the words.

In public school, they may learn about homosexuality or lesbianism or drag queens this or transgender that. They may learn about condoms or safety techniques in Uranus or theirs. They may learn techniques to avoid pregnancy or tools for the day after or options for abortions.

But respect for authority? They will learn that police are racist. They will learn that their parents can sue their teachers or the principal. They will learn that teachers can be fired if they get out of line by expecting kids to be prepared. Also, by the way, they will learn that their parents are not as smart as they thought they were. Who knows? Maybe they even will hear of boys and girls who later learned that their daddies are not really their daddies, or of others with two live-in daddies.

What *will* they learn in class? In history, perhaps in 1619 Project lessons, they will learn that America was founded in racism by racists who came here to own slaves. If the kids are White, they will learn that they are racist even if they don't know it yet. Perhaps they will be asked to stand and apologize to those not White or to the wall. In math, they will learn that there are no "correct" answers, that *all* answers are right. Two plus two certainly can be four. But it also can be five or eight, as long as that is Your Truth. In science, they will learn that America is causing global warming, that the whole planet will explode in their lifetimes if Republicans get elected. Every rainy day, even during the rainy season, will be because of climate change. Every freezing-cold day in winter will still be because of global warming. The science is settled.

Let me take you back six decades to Yeshiva Rambam of Brooklyn, circa 1960. I was in first grade in this Orthodox Jewish parochial school. Each day began with the pledge and "The Star-Spangled Banner." Sometimes, we also sang "America the Beautiful"



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Like Tocqueville's majority, wokeness "does not understand being mocked.... The least reproach offends it, and the slightest sting turns it fierce." Overcoming the hegemony of the woke will, therefore, not be easy. The battles will be long, fierce, and messy — but it's best to fight them now, rather than delay them to our disadvantage.

Alas, to fight requires the very moral virtue that is in shortest supply in academia — courage. The characteristic attributes and mores of academics are no substitute for courage. It is the nature of academics to value their perks and privileges rather too highly, to elevate urbane erudition over the moral virtues. Yet it is courage that makes the other virtues, including the intellectual ones, possible. There's a reason why urbane cosmopolitans often don't seem to be the sharpest knives in the drawer — a man cannot think straight when his knees are trembling. We are now dominated by the loudest and proudest voices in our institutions, largely because so many who might oppose them are wary of conflict, always afraid of being labeled impolitic, impolite, or resolute.

C.S. Lewis warned us that "no justification of virtue will enable a man to be virtuous. Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism." As much as academics might wish it to be true, "it is not syllogisms that will keep the reluctant nerves and muscles to their post in the third hour of the bombardment.... Reason in man must rule the mere appetites by means of the 'spirited element.'" Perhaps only in academia are "men without chests" so highly valued precisely because they are without chests. We castrate and then bid the geldings be fruitful intellectuals.

All of this has grave real-world consequences. Too many leaders of our national institutions — whether they be educational, corporate, cultural, political, or religious — now signal not only their own wokeness but also their intention to enforce conformity to woke dogma. To a large degree, they learned these attitudes, and cultivated their nascent authoritarianism, in colleges and universities. Yet in academia, far too many decent but timorous people are merely riding out their careers, fully concentrated on self-interest maximization — somehow hoping, or expecting, that civilization will continue on, more or less as normal, as Rome did after the fall of its traditional legal and moral authorities. But the barbarians at our gates are far more insistent and totalizing than were the Goths at the gates of Rome. And it is the new barbarians who will replace the silent ones; it is their ideas, their actions, that will replace what remains of the old

order — of which there will not even be an echo if it continues to remain silent.

So what to do? I offer a brief but concrete recommendation, directed mainly at faculty members. If my analysis is correct, academics — even tenured ones — are particularly susceptible to a characteristic danger of democratic ages, that is, fear of the very real power of the majority. There is no cure for this, given the natural proclivities and character traits of academics. But there is a feeling of safety to be had in numbers. I strongly suggest that faculty members opposed to the intellectual monoculture organize themselves preemptively on every campus in America on which even a handful of them can be found. They should meet regularly and make their presence known. This will allow them to become aware of others

like themselves and, with this knowledge, develop the confidence to speak and act when academic freedom, and intellectual freedom more broadly, are threatened. And it will also put woke administrators on notice that, should they overreach, there will be very public consequences. Such campus organizations could articulate principles similar to those set out in the University of Chicago's 2016 letter to freshmen — an explicit rejection of cancel culture and a commitment to diversity of opinion. They could model their activities, in microcosm, on those of the Academic Freedom Alliance, pledging (and coming up with specific strategies for) mutual aid in times of threat.

The hour is late for our institutions, and for our civilization. For academics, it's time to man up. ✎







Bill Wilson

or “G-d Bless America.” We placed our little Jewish hands on our big Jewish hearts and learned to love America. We learned about Americans who gave their lives for our freedom. And Mrs. Sherman taught me the difference between *then* and *than*. The Yankees no longer were “better *then* the Mets.” They were “better *than*.” During the religious half of my school day, Morah (the title for *teacher*) Rothberg taught me to respect my parents and to say please and thank you.

In second grade, Rabbi Schroit taught me my first Torah, the biblical verses about Noah and the Ark. We learned our first foreign language, memorizing translations for those verses’ Hebrew words. He also taught us to love and respect our parents. He was a man of impeccable character. During the secular half of our day, Mrs. Platt taught us how to dial a telephone and how to answer if called. Never begin by asking, “Who is this?” Rather, begin with: “David Fischer speaking. Hello.”

And so it went. Mrs. Raucher taught me grammar in fourth grade, while Rabbi Fastag taught us Hebrew songs about the holidays. Mrs. Ganzel taught me a world of reading, writing, and arithmetic in third and fifth grades. Mr. Bettinger finished ninth-grade math with us by the end of seventh grade, leaving Mrs. Wolfson frustrated the next year because we already knew the eighth-grade stuff and were ready for sophomore-year geometry. Meanwhile, having hardly begun mastering Hebrew and only the book of Genesis, we entered fifth grade by being immersed in the language of Aramaic and the Babylonian Talmud. We learned about ownership rights and ethics, the difference between owner liability the first time his ox gored someone versus its third goring. We learned the laws for what to do if we find lost objects — when we are required to publicize and return what we found. And we learned we are required to stand respectfully any time an elderly person comes within our ambit. And we learned to respect our parents.

**We all emerged loving America deeply, patriots one and all.**

It was more of the same in yeshiva high school at Brooklyn Talmudic Academy. We finished the entire New York state high school math curriculum by the middle of sophomore year, so Rabbi Cooper and Mr. Rubinstein ended up teaching us college math — calculus and stuff — the rest of the way. We kept learning the Talmud. Kept learning American history with Mr. Merlis, who told the best jokes and the corniest puns. Mr. Zuckerman taught high school chemistry at the college level. Mr. Berkowitz did the same in biology. Mr. Tarendash in physics. And Mr. Strum taught me literary writing skills.

Get this: In twelve years through high school, we never heard a word in the classroom about homosexuality, lesbianism, pregnancy, or abortion. And yet, without any birth-control classroom education, without any freely dispensed condoms, not a single one of us got anyone pregnant. We were an all-boys school because Orthodox Jewish parochial school separates the sexes. And our “sister school” had no pregnancies either.

We all emerged loving America deeply, patriots one and all. And we knew of Nathan Hale’s only regret and of Patrick Henry’s heroic disjunctive demand.

*But weren’t there any misfits?* Glad you asked.

In our first year of yeshiva high school, there were three boys who were rambunctious. Twice a year, we kids would be assigned, in groups of eight, a two-hour oral examination in the Talmud conducted by an exceptionally holy rabbi

who oversaw the religious direction of the school. Whenever that rabbi entered the classroom to speak with a classroom rabbi, everyone would jump out of our seats and stand in respectful attention until he exited the room or signaled for us to sit. One time, the three amigos were part of an octet assigned that day’s oral exam at the rectangular table headed by the holy rabbi. They clandestinely brought a basketball into the room and started

dribbling it and kicking it to each other under the table while the oral exam proceeded. Of course, at some point it inadvertently got kicked astray and, of course, ended up rolling under the table until it gently struck the holy rabbi’s shoes. Everyone laughed in embarrassment. The rabbi smiled gently. That trio were the very worst of the misfits our school had. Pretty good, huh? And, oh yeah, the next day the three fellas were expelled from the school. No more misfits.

The great debate in the 1970s was whether we kids in the yeshiva parochial schools would end up so cloistered and insulated that we would be unable to contend and compete in a fundamentally non-Jewish secular world. So, most nonreligious parents sent their kids to public schools. What became of us, the cloistered?

Sven (fake name) ran a C average in high school. He learned the stuff; he was just a slacker and never studied for exams. Two decades later, my sister Rhonda sent me “regards” from the guy, explaining that he now was their family doctor, a prominent physician. His best friend in high school, Olaf (also a fake name), ran the same C for the same reason. Olaf buckled down in college and ended up chairman of a medical department in one of America’s most prominent hospitals and the world expert on a rare disease, leading him to deliver guest lectures annually to medical researchers all over the world. Buzz (a real nickname) was the greatest of teenage baseball players, and he could have been a major league star, but he would not pursue those talents because games are played on Friday nights and Saturday afternoons, the Holy Shabbat. So he instead became a partner at the nationally prominent Ernst & Young accounting firm. Me? I went to Columbia University, got elected by the undergraduate student body to represent the entire college in the Columbia University Senate, and went on to become a rabbi, then a clerk for a federal appeals court judge, then a big-

**If you send your kids to an American public school circa 2023, you are — forgive me — absolutely nuts.**

firm attorney and law professor, and then a contributing editor for this great magazine. We all came out as success stories.

Whether you are Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, or atheist, if you send your kids to an American public school circa 2023, you are — forgive me — absolutely nuts. A parochial school will teach your child patriotism, respect for your parental authority, respect for teachers and institutional authority, respect for police and

other first responders, respect for those who serve and defend our country at home and abroad, and solid traditional values. Parochial-school kids will not face a higher risk of getting pregnant or getting someone else pregnant as they have separate bathrooms and are not soaked with eight to twelve years of LGBTQ indoctrination and free condoms. They will learn to recite and sing the words to the pledge and the national anthem with pride. They will

grow strong without needing safe spaces and trigger warnings to protect them from microaggressions. They will learn real history, real math, real English literature, cursive writing, and the stuff of Dead White European Men and Women.

And they will learn about the Creator of the universe and His Intelligent Design, bestowed a little humility to understand that the world does not revolve around them. They won’t be perfect. Contrary to what Gillette and to the emasculators say, boys always will be boys. But girls won’t; they will be girls. Kids still will get out of line once in a while. But, when the final numbers are tallied, most parochial-school graduates do not get shot by cops and know to respect them, most do not perpetrate mass shootings, and most learn more secular studies in half a school day (since the other half is set aside for religious, spiritual, and moral instruction) than their public school peers cover in a full day.

Just one caveat: make sure they do not dribble a basketball under the table during catechism lessons. 🐼



Bill Wilson





# School Choice Is Empowering Students and Teachers — And Devastating Unions

*Promisingly, 15–20 percent of union workers in education resigned their memberships last year.*

by Jarrett Skorup

Most states provide at least some support for parents who choose to send their child to a private school, such as tax credits, education savings accounts, or vouchers. Historically, this has not been a partisan issue. Among the states that spend the highest percentage of their education funding on choice programs, Florida and Indiana are strongly Republican, Vermont and Maine are strongly Democratic, and Arizona and Wisconsin are split.

In many states, however, choice programs are limited in the types of students they can serve and in how much public money parents can spend on the school of their choice. As a result, only a minuscule amount of government education funding is expended on any program outside of the traditional neighborhood public school.

But that's changing.

West Virginia, Arizona, Iowa, Utah, and Arkansas have all recently passed universal school choice bills that offer programs to

all students. According to school choice advocate Corey A. DeAngelis, similar bills are moving, or likely to move, in Oklahoma, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Nebraska, Ohio, South Carolina, and Texas. (A majority of lawmakers in Wyoming have also signed on to full school choice, but it is currently being blocked by the Republican House speaker.)

School choice is popular. Even in Democratic-controlled states, lawmakers have not — yet, at least — rolled back private school programs. In Michigan, where private-school choice programs are unconstitutional, about a quarter of students still want choice, attending public schools other than the one assigned to them based on their home address — either a charter school or one in a nearby district. The state's new Democratic legislature, the first in forty years, has not signaled an interest in restricting these choices.

School choice is also effective: EdChoice, an education-reform nonprofit, found that the vast majority of studies on educational vouchers and tax credits show that choice results in significant learning gains for students, as well as such benefits as increased parental satisfaction and less bullying of students.

There are two main obstacles to expanding school choice: one is the traditional public school establishment, and the other is teachers unions. But the latter's power and influence are gradually being gutted across the nation.

Why? Because of union choice.

## *Janus Expands Union Choice*

A decade ago, Michigan became a right-to-work state, which ensured that no employee could be forced to pay union dues. Since then, the two state teachers unions have gone from having more than 142,000 active members to having fewer than 97,000. That's a 32 percent decline — despite the number of teachers and school employees in Michigan increasing.

This year, Michigan became the first state in sixty years to repeal its right-to-work law, and the legislation is a major blow to workers and the state's economy. After losing jobs, income, and population throughout the decade prior to the passing of the right-to-work law, Michigan families finally saw substantial wage and employment growth; moreover, the state's population decline even turned around.

While the law will be a financial boon to private-sector unions, adding tens of thousands of new dues and fee payers to their ranks immediately, the repeal does not affect union choice for school employees.

That's because, in 2018, the Supreme Court ruled in *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)* that public union activity is innately political and that the government cannot force anyone to pay government union fees. In sum, all public-sector workers — federal, state, local, and school — are “right-to-work” employees across the entire country.

The subsequent changes in union membership nationwide have been significant. According to federal filings, the National Education Association has lost 8 percent of its membership since the *Janus* decision, and the American Federation of Teachers is down more than 10 percent. In total, the two largest unions have lost almost 250,000 members.

This is severely undercounting the results of *Janus*, however. Federal filings report all members in those unions, including those who work in the private sector and in states that were not affected by the decision. The Mackinac Center for Public Policy has filed hundreds of public-records requests to government entities across the country to track changes in union membership. Our results show that 15–20 percent of union workers in schools resigned their memberships in 2022.

Total union membership is currently at the lowest ever recorded by the federal labor department. One reason why is *Janus*: the decision has cost unions hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue because they

can no longer force public employees to pay them dues.

## *The Future of Choice Is Bright*

So, what's next? Some states are taking major steps when it comes to school choice, but there has been movement toward expanding union choice, too.

Many parents recognized, for the first time, that their priorities for their children did not match up with their school's.

Indiana passed a law requiring public unions to inform school employees of their First Amendment right to not pay dues. The state also made it easier for teachers to resign their membership, if they so choose. Teachers must confirm their continued membership annually.

And in Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis has been pushing a bill that would require teachers unions to regularly obtain the support of 60 percent of teachers so as to retain the organization's certification. The bill also would prevent school districts from collecting dues on behalf of unions and stop unions from distributing certain information on school grounds. These changes all make sense: no one should be forced into an organization, and

political groups should not be able to use government resources or facilities to collect money or distribute information.

School choice and union choice are advancing, but why now?

School policies enacted during COVID are one driving factor. Many parents were satisfied with sending their kids to the local public school until they felt disrespected by school closures, mask mandates, and other strategies that went on for far too long. It didn't help that unions drove many of the closures and assured parents that hastily implemented online education was just as good as in-person instruction — a claim anyone with kids at home knew to be false. Many parents recognized, for the first time, that their priorities for their children did not match up with their school's.

These changes in education and union policy are good — for parents, for teachers, and for students. Research, such as the work performed by Caroline Hoxby of Stanford University and Katharine O. Strunk of Michigan State University, has found that the presence of unions does not lead to better educational outcomes in schools. And, as we've seen with recent strikes in Chicago and Los Angeles — two of the largest districts in the country — unions often lead to disruptions in the lives of children and parents. Unsurprisingly, unions also tend to fight against school choice.

There's one key reason why states rarely pull back or eliminate choice in education: a built-in constituency has arrived. Millions of people are now taking advantage of these policies, whether they are families exercising school choice or teachers choosing to forgo union membership. Let's hope more follow their example. ✎



Jarrett Skorup is vice president for marketing and communications at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a free-market research and educational institute in Michigan.





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## SPECIAL REPORT



# Let Kids Drop Out: Why Compulsory Education Harms Even the Most Gifted Students

*A radical proposition for educational freedom.*

by **Shelby Kearns**

Long after students have returned to in-person learning, grim headlines still depict the educational hit that students took during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, a Stanford economist recently predicted that learning loss for students whose schools shifted to virtual learning will cost them \$70,000 in lifetime earnings.

To right the wrongs of the pandemic, the solution is “more school,” at least in North Carolina, where lawmakers are alarmed by rising dropout rates. A bipartisan bill would raise the age of compulsory education from sixteen to eighteen, a requirement held by the majority of states.

But is attending school until age eighteen really the best way to prepare for entering the workforce? Or have policymakers just lost their imaginations?

New Hampshire state representative Travis Corcoran has not lost his. He recently introduced HB 399, which would give New Hampshire students a way to test out of high school and receive a high school equivalency certificate. In an interview with *The American*

*Spectator*, he called the state’s public schools “super expensive government-run schools that cater to the lowest common denominator and have a multi-decade-long track record of accomplishing precious little.”

Corcoran’s bill is the latest instance of a conservative education policy that sets itself apart by pledging to promote freedom. He emphasizes that his bill does not necessarily present the choice to drop out. Students are still free to attend school or no school at all after receiving the certificate.

The bill, he writes, is for “exceptional students who can prove that they have mastered all of the content expected of average students — and more.”

“The stakeholders who support the bill include tons of homeschoolers, gifted students, tutors who work with gifted students, and others,” he continued. He said that the bill’s opponents are “Democrats” and “public school teachers who live off of tax dollars.”

“Several gifted teenagers I spoke to told me that, in fact, they’d rather go to college, engage in independent study, [or] research nuclear power preparatory to a career in the Navy,” Corcoran told *The American Spectator*.

While the newfound scrutiny of compulsory education, at least as Corcoran envisions it, could benefit the most gifted students, it could also benefit those who struggle the most.

In his 2020 book *The Cult of Smart: How Our Broken Education System Perpetuates Social Injustice*, Fredrik deBoer describes students who no superstar teacher, charter school, or standardized test preparation can help. DeBoer, who taught at both the K–12 and collegiate level, is one of few people on the left who acknowledge inherent differences in academic ability. Schools, he says, should close skill gaps that exist because of socioeconomic status. DeBoer argues that when significant skill gaps remain, students should be able to drop out at age twelve.

Though the non-profit Chalkbeat notes that data on dropouts is hard to come by, available data seems to support deBoer’s proposal. The top-rated reasons for dropping out of high school, according to the National Dropout Prevention Center, include chronic absenteeism and not liking school. Some of these students, as the National Dropout Prevention Center notes, receive insufficient support from their families or their schools. Others are likely the

*Shelby Kearns is an associate editor at Campus Reform.*



students described by deBoer who find school unbearable because of their ability level.

One need not be a bleeding-heart liberal like deBoer to worry that education might be the cause of, not solution to, adverse outcomes, especially for students born with a disadvantage even harder to fix than poverty: low academic aptitude.

When it comes to the decision to drop out, George Mason University economist Bryan Caplan says that “deference to parents is the least-bad option.”

In his 2018 book, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Caplan argues that the value of education has more to do with what a high school or college diploma signals to employers. Diplomas signal students’ ability to withstand hours of boredom and follow directions, among other skills. The expectation that a diploma equates to these skills — whether or not graduates actually

have them — is why college graduates do better financially than high school graduates, and high school graduates do better than dropouts.

In an interview with *The American Spectator*, Caplan suggested that the best way to prepare for work is to work. Vocational training, he asserted, is “not going to be a big factor” in preparing students for the workforce “compared to all of the informal job training that happens on every job every day.”

He argued that while dropping out of school “limits upward mobility,” it “also limits downward mobility into crime and permanent unemployment.”

For students who are frequently suspended or register lackluster academic performance, getting introduced to meaningful work opportunities at an earlier age could keep them from earning a living through crime.

Caplan said that if low-quality teachers heavily populate schools, “[i]nstead of

keeping kids in school until the schools work, how about let[ting] them out until the schools work?”

Conservatives are at the forefront of letting parents decide how best to prepare their children for college or the workforce. They are also questioning the value of compulsory education, a practice Corcoran says dates back to the Progressive Era and was “designed with a few key goals in mind, among them, training children to accept the prevailing social order.”

What Corcoran calls “one-size-fits-all schooling” — mandating that students attend school at the same time and learn the same curriculum — no longer fits the needs of the students whose academic abilities are at either end of the bell curve.

Though scaling back compulsory education defies nearly one hundred years of tradition, it’s time to let kids drop out.

## A DIFFERENT WAY



# A Guide for Parents in Search of a Truly Classical School

*From trivium and quadrivium to Latin and Greek, the Western education shapes young adults with hearts and minds oriented toward the good, the true, and the beautiful.*

by Winston Brady

Over eight hundred schools in the United States identify as classical, meaning that they subscribe to the educational philosophy of the Greeks and Romans, who grounded education in what they termed “the liberal arts.” These arts include the trivium — grammar, logic, and rhetoric — and the quadrivium — music, astronomy, arithmetic, and geometry. The name “liberal” indicates that these subjects liberate students from ignorance and teach them to enjoy said liberty wisely. Herein lies the value of a classical education: it educates the whole student.

The term *classical* goes beyond rooting education in the Greco-Roman world. The idea of a “classic” as better than others in that same class indicates that classical education is oriented toward the very best books, music, and other artifacts of human ingenuity from the past twenty-five centuries.

A classical school may be a charter school, private school, or homeschooling alternative, such as a pod, co-op, or microschool. Such

schools may carry the name “classical,” but what makes them such? And what should you — the interested parent vetting the best educational options available — look for in a school if you want to ensure that your children are classically educated?

### *The Curriculum*

The word *curriculum* means “racetrack,” the kind on which the Romans would race their chariots. In education, *curriculum* refers to the courses students take throughout the year: the books they read, the languages they study, and the ways of the trivium on which they travel.

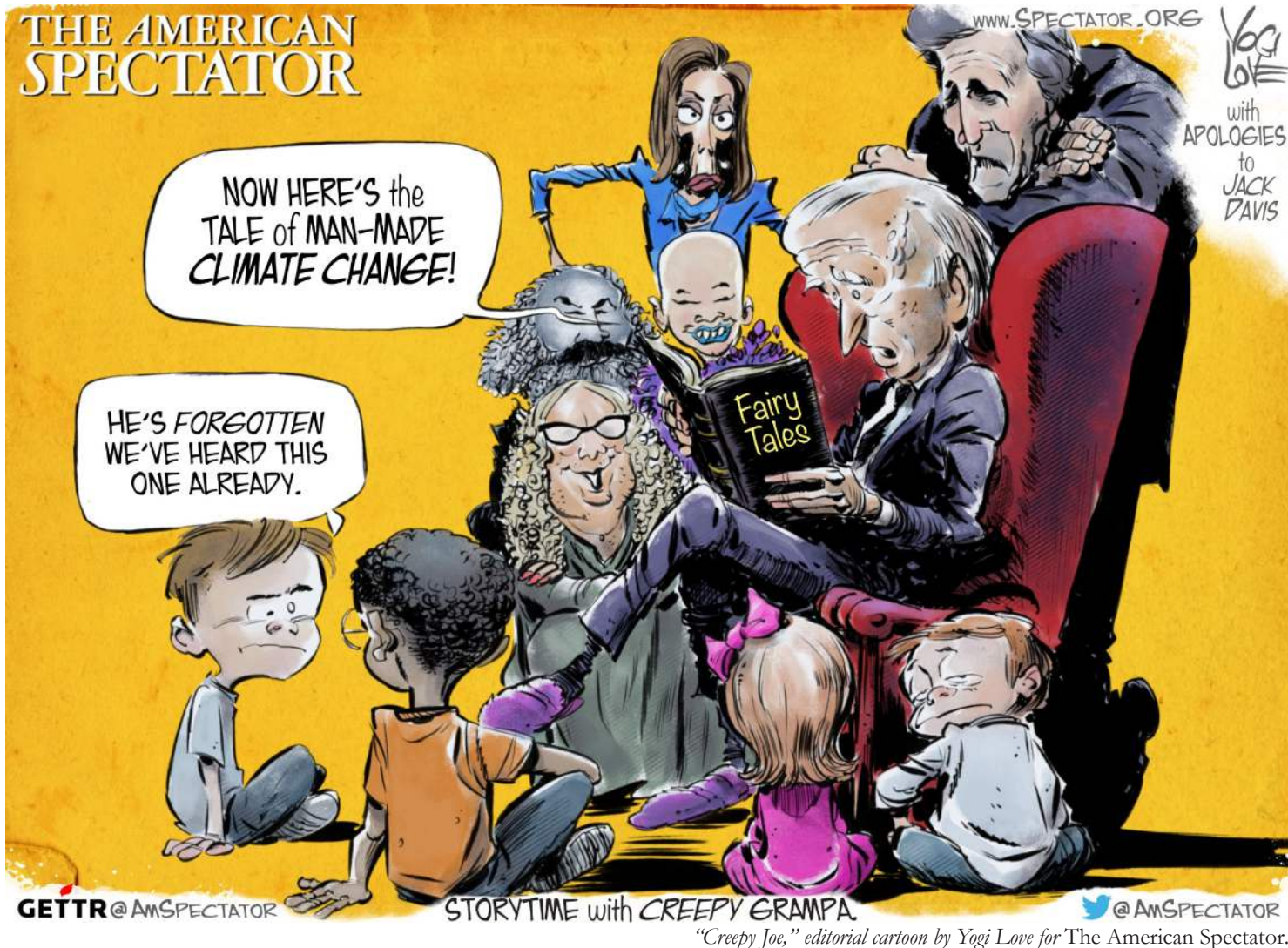
Most classical schools organize their instruction around works known as the “Great Books.” These books form the backbone of the Western tradition and include the dialogues of Plato, Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the works of Shakespeare, the Old and New Testaments, and a host of other works of literature, philosophy, science, and history. Such classics have stood the test of time, present a high view of mankind and of man’s abilities, and help the reader understand his purpose and place in a chaotic and confusing world. Their authors wrestled with the overarching questions of life and

wove their insights into engaging storylines, incorporating deep themes and beautiful language. In reading these great works, teachers and students alike cannot help but be impacted in mind, heart, and soul.

But that is not to say that students in classical elementary schools are Shakespeare. Instead, students in kindergarten through fifth grade typically read age-appropriate adaptations of such stories, followed by longer, more contemporary, novel-length versions in middle school. Students generally read the primary sources themselves beginning in high school.

Following the second tenet of classical education, most classical schools offer courses dedicated to Latin or Greek. These languages hold a special place in the classical curriculum because their acquisition opens the world of the Greeks and Romans to the students. Latin is found on the curricula of more schools because its alphabet is more accessible — the Anglo-Saxons borrowed the Latin alphabet, after all.

Of course, students can and should learn other languages, for learning a new language imparts untold benefits to students. Mandarin and Spanish, for example, are often offered at upper-grade levels. Still,





classical schools give pride of place to Latin and Greek because of their connection to the ancient world and their foundational role in shaping languages “alive” today.

Lastly, most schools offer a puzzling series of courses called the “trivium.” The word *trivium* comes from the Latin *tri*, meaning “three,” and *via*, which means “way” or “road.” Thus, *trivium* is the metaphorical place where the three ways of grammar, logic, and rhetoric meet. The first way, that of grammar, refers to, well, grammar and the fundamental rules of communication. The second, logic, concerns the art of argument, the task of organizing information and identifying truth from falsehood. The last, rhetoric, is the art of public speaking, which encompasses the tools needed to compose creative works and stirring speeches. Students in ancient Rome and Greece had to study the trivium before they could continue on to study the more difficult subjects in the “quadrivium”: the four ways of astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, and music. Together, the trivium and the quadrivium comprised the seven liberal arts found at the core of education in the Greco-Roman world.

Modern educators jettisoned the trivium, but its rediscovery began with Dorothy L. Sayers’s influential essay *The Lost Tools of Learning* (1947). Sayers was an English novelist and a friend of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Speaking at the University of Oxford, Sayers argued that removing the trivium from schools kept students from distinguishing truth from falsehood. Sayers said, “[I]f we are to produce a society of educated people, fitted to preserve their intellectual freedom amid the complex pressures of our modern society, we must turn back the wheel of progress some four or five hundred years, to the point at which education began to lose sight of its true object, towards the end of the Middle Ages.”

In the modern world, students must make sense of a disparate array of facts. According to Sayers, the means to do that is found in the trivium, which orients all of education toward the discovery of truth.

### The Teachers

Those who teach in a classical school should recognize, first and foremost, that they are themselves still students. Teachers are far from having learned everything there is to know. As such, classical teachers recognize that their course of action is to bring to the classroom the joy that should always accompany learning — that is, they should model what it is to read and discuss something of great value.

Classical education is rich in content and oriented toward the appreciation of truth and beauty.

At heart, classical teachers are curious, and they display a Socrates-like joy when discussing ideas that matter as well as an eagerness to help students better understand what is true, good, and beautiful. Such teachers love discussing philosophical questions, solving mathematical proofs, or conducting experiments, and they seek to share that joy with those in their classrooms throughout the day.

### The Students

Last but not least, we turn to the students. Students in a classical school should seem engaged and happy during a lesson. Classical education is rich in content and oriented toward the appreciation of truth and beauty; as such, students should find plenty to capture — and keep — their interest. Indeed, many classical educators strive to magnify this natural tendency, intentionally orienting lessons toward the cultivation of *wonder*.

In presenting children with the very best of what has been taught and thought

throughout human history, classical education helps students become their very best — and it shows in the way they interact with adults and enthusiastically take on new challenges.

### The Mission

The Roman educator Quintilian (35–100 AD) identified the creation of the “ideal orator” as his goal for educating students: “We are to form, then, the perfect orator, who cannot exist unless as a good man, and we require in him, therefore, not only consummate ability in speaking but every excellence of mind.” Quintilian believed that students should be taught not only how to write and speak well but also how to live and be well, a goal that inspires classical teachers today. “Every excellence of mind” certainly reaches beyond just writing and speaking to include math and the sciences, hard work and vocational skills, and truth telling and personal integrity — all that composes the nature of what philosophers call “the good life.”

That promotion of the good life is ultimately the goal of classical education programs across the country. As Aristotle explained in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, the good life is a state of human flourishing, a life well lived in which people exercise their intellects and gifts through the habits of moral excellence, or virtue. Aristotle and his teacher, Plato, wanted to connect knowledge and content with virtue and character, for the knowledge they imparted to their students about the world and themselves would help them become more responsible, more competent, and more virtuous adults. Upon completing the racetrack of a classical school, students should love that which is worth loving: their families, their neighbors, wonderful books, strong friendships, and meaningful conversation — in short, everything that makes up the good life. As such, students study the great books of the Western tradition so that they can take on the whole world. 🐘



## TECHNICALLY RIGHT



# Adaptive Apps: New Technology Adjusts Lessons Based on Students’ Skill Levels

*This software has the potential to solve problems that have long vexed education.*

by Kate Alexandra

For the past twenty years, K–12 test scores in America have been falling, not rising. Only 36 percent of eighth graders read at grade level, and many students are years and years behind.

COVID only exacerbated this trend. During school shutdowns, kids learned — or, more accurately, didn’t learn — at very different rates. Studies show that post-COVID, the range of students’ knowledge spans nine grade levels in a single classroom.

While COVID learning loss made this problem more apparent, it’s not new. Even before COVID, the knowledge range in the average classroom spanned seven grade levels.

This gap is hugely problematic — how can you teach to seven grade levels at once? — but it’s impossible to close within our outdated system. The whole system is setting teachers up to fail; since teachers can’t teach to thirty individuals at numerous grade levels, they’re stuck teaching to the mean.

In a typical fourth-grade classroom, a teacher — let’s call her Mrs. Smith —

would teach her class first division, then fractions. Learning fractions requires an understanding of division, which isn’t problematic if every kid has mastered division before the class moves on.

But here’s the issue: when Mrs. Smith began teaching division during those first few weeks of school, she had kids in her class who had known how to divide for years in addition to others who still couldn’t add or subtract because they had fallen behind in their previous grade level. Regardless of the amount of work she puts in, Mrs. Smith’s instruction won’t apply to most of the students in the room.

To add to this struggle, because in math knowledge builds on itself, the inability to personalize lessons causes the students who are ahead to be bored and the students who are behind to fall further and further behind. A student who can’t add and subtract can’t master division. If division hasn’t been mastered, fractions are impossible. Without fractions, algebra doesn’t stand a chance.

This issue isn’t just limited to math. It applies to all subjects. What’s more, teachers can’t help kids catch up because they have to teach to state standards for

each grade. Since Mrs. Smith must follow the fourth-grade state standard requiring kids to analyze short stories, she can’t pause instruction to teach kids how to read. But, needless to say, a kid who can’t read can’t analyze a story.

So, what’s the solution? Adaptive educational apps.

Educational apps allow each student to learn at his or her own pace. Students who quickly understand the material can advance to the next level; for those who are confused, the apps allow students to stay at that level until they grasp the concepts they are missing. Think Duolingo — but better — for every subject.

Because it’s adaptive, the software adjusts the lesson based on what an individual student knows (and doesn’t know). With built-in lessons, pop quizzes, and tests, these apps have the power to stand on their own, separate from the classroom, to teach the entire Common Core curriculum. Although “Common Core” is a divisive topic in our country, most parents agree that the knowledge itself is useful. What they take issue with is that students must take twelve years to learn its curriculum. Adaptive learning apps cut this time in



half by making large-scale personalized learning possible.

From kindergarten to eighth grade, students can learn an entire year of material by spending two hours per day on online apps. In high school, learning takes three to four hours per day. This means that students are learning twice as fast as they would in a standard classroom.

How do we know that apps help students learn twice as fast? Kids learning through adaptive apps succeed by that metric on nationwide standardized tests, such as the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. For example, at Alpha, an alternative school in Texas where students learn academics exclusively through adaptive apps (and where I currently attend high school), students' MAP test scores consistently demonstrate double the knowledge growth of students in a standard classroom.

These apps use learning-science techniques that have been proven to foster this "twice as fast" learning. For example, the apps use mastery learning techniques (students must fully understand a lesson — regardless of time — before continuing to the next), spaced repetition (students must review information at intervals until it's sufficiently retained), and retrieval practice (students must recall knowledge they have previously learned).

Online learning and educational apps can even provide the solution to Bloom's "two-sigma problem," a classic educational dilemma.

In the 1950s, Benjamin Bloom, an educational psychologist, found that the

Students are learning twice as fast as they would in a standard classroom.

average student tutored using mastery learning techniques — used by adaptive learning apps — performed two standard deviations (for those who don't remember their high school statistics, that is a lot) better than students taught in a standard classroom setting. Read that again: two standard deviations.

Sixty years ago, when Bloom's research was published, it was almost impossible to give every student a tutor, who could then create custom, individually tailored content. But now that we have learning apps, we can easily use mastery learning practices to give each student the equivalent of their own personalized tutor.

Aside from solving Bloom's two-sigma problem and helping students through COVID learning loss, adaptive apps also make learning more enjoyable for students. Instead of falling asleep to boring lectures or staring at a math problem for hours, students can focus on a curriculum that meets them at their level.

And because students can learn academic content twice as fast as they would in a traditional classroom, they can spend half their day in project-based learning workshops, practicing nonacademic skills such as leadership and teamwork. Spending half the day working together allows students to form strong relationships and build better social skills than those at a standard school do.

Of course, some parents prefer to limit their child's screen time and would view as problematic the amount required to learn in this way. In addition, if parents use online learning apps as a form of homeschooling, then they will need to ensure that they find adequate means of socialization for their child.

Adaptive learning apps have the potential to solve problems that have long vexed education. By giving each student a personalized learning pathway, we can help them unlock their potential — both in academics and beyond. 🦋

## COLLEGE RECOMMENDATIONS



# How to Stay Conservative in College

*It's not always a Democratic Socialist of America ambassador who is trying to catechize you.*

by Marlo Slayback

It's every conservative parent's worst fear: you send your child off to college, and instead of growing intellectually, he or she joins in the debauchery that has overtaken college campuses.

It's already a fear I have for my own children, one made especially salient by the birth of my first child last summer.

I attended a public college in the late 2010s, when conservatives were considered outcasts but weren't quite the pariahs they're treated as today. Since that time, the situation has only gotten worse. I currently direct student programming for the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, an organization that promotes conservative thought on college campuses, so I have witnessed all the ways that social pressures can alienate conservative students but also tempt them to make the trek over to the other side.

I believe that the possession and cultivation of a steadfast moral character provides the best guard against the excesses of the college campus. Here I supply some practical tips to help students flourish during their time in college.

### *Put Your Faith First*

Do not abandon your faith in college. It will keep you tethered to the truth, staving off the nihilism that can infect college students.

*Marlo Slayback is national director of student programs at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute.*

If you're Catholic, go to Mass every Sunday and on holy days of obligation, and, if you attend a secular university, join your campus's Newman Center. If you're Protestant, find a church and join a group like InterVarsity or Campus Crusade.

Pray for your peers and professors who disparage or belittle Christians. Don't participate in the excess and vulgarity that has disordered relationships between men and women, such as hookup culture. Find a friend group through your church or a conservative organization on campus that will support you and help your faith flourish while also keeping you from feeling alienated. Nurture your faith so that you may also avoid becoming an ideologue.

In the words of the late bishop Fulton J. Sheen, "If you don't behave as you believe, you will end by believing as you behave."

One key warning: many religious groups on campus, like many religious colleges, have gone woke or succumbed to the religious Left. Be careful and discerning. Not all Bible studies are necessarily good for you.

### *Visit and Speak to Your Parents Regularly*

College comes with newfound freedom, which is exciting, but this also creates opportunities for young adults to drift away from their family's values. It's easy for young people to forget where they came from while in college, especially if they're far from home.

We conservatives believe that tradition

is a good thing — it's a playbook from our elders that helps us navigate life and its vicissitudes without needing to resort entirely to trial and error. Make it a habit to text or call your parents multiple times per week, and don't dismiss their advice. The independence you have as a college student shouldn't create distance between you and your parents.

Parents, college also shouldn't mean that it's time to have a "friendly" relationship with your child — your child still needs a parent. The vocation of parenthood doesn't end once your child legally becomes an adult. If anything, strong parenting is essential during the college years, especially if you want to help your child remain devout in his or her faith and convictions.

### *Don't Do Drugs*

You should just say no to any kind of recreational drug, including marijuana. Drugs are simply a canoe ride upstream from leftists and liberals. Alcohol, consumed in moderation and legally, can be a helpful social lubricant, and even Roger Scruton himself was passionate about wine, having written an entire book on the subject. But stay away from drugs.

### *Get a Real Job*

Find a part-time job that challenges you to grow in the virtues of patience, gratitude, and humility and allows you to work alongside people who come from disparate backgrounds. This excludes a lot of on-



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campus jobs, like being a research assistant or secretary. The idea is to interact with people beyond the curated confines of the university, where you already share things like age and educational background with the majority of your peers.

Through my summer jobs in college, I grew close to coworkers with different life situations, including a single mom without a college education and a security guard who was taking night classes at a community college. My jobs exposed me to a real-world snapshot of the community of which a college campus isn't representative. My coworkers were concerned with picking their children up from day care and school, taking disabled parents to doctors' appointments, and leaving work on time so that they could make it to their second job across town. I learned that life is messy, unfair, and unsafe, with no organically created safe spaces out in the wild. I also appreciated the dignity of hard work and commensurate pay.

*Join a Conservative Group*

Much like joining a religious group or church, there is much to be gained in joining a conservative organization. A few that stand out are my own employer, the Intercollegiate

There will be constant pressure to reject first principles in favor of the progressive politics du jour.

Studies Institute; Turning Point USA; Young America's Foundation, or YAF; the Leadership Institute; Young Women for America; the Clare Boothe Luce Center for Conservative Women; and, of course, College Republicans.

*This Is a Demanding Endeavor*

Although this list is a good start for holding yourself accountable in college, I want to emphasize that staying conservative in college is not easy. Temptation isn't always obvious. It's not always a Democratic Socialist of America ambassador earnestly trying to catechize you into the socialist cause. In fact, this is rarely the case.

There will be constant pressure from your professors and peers, advertising and big business, social media and the government, to reject first principles in favor of the progressive politics du jour. The acceptance of social pathologies that are central to the Left's agenda, such as abortion and transgenderism, will be framed as compassionate, even good.

You will be tempted to deny what is true and right in favor of comfort and acceptance. But diamonds are made under great pressure.

Stay true to the pursuit of virtue in every aspect of your life on campus, and you can stay true to remaining conservative.

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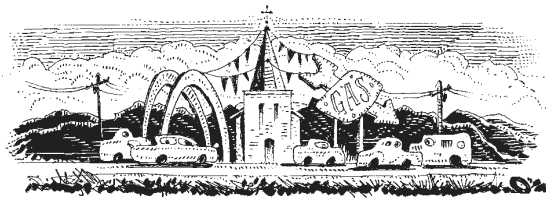
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# How to Find an Evangelical College That Isn't Woke

*With trendy leftism flourishing at numerous Protestant colleges, parents and students need concrete suggestions for discerning those true to the faith from those subscribing to Woke U.*

by David Ayers

It is no secret that American colleges and universities are increasingly becoming Orwellian dystopias. Those who dissent from the prevailing orthodoxies often survive by keeping their mouths shut and their heads down. Concerns about the transformation of much of higher education into grossly overpriced hotbeds of leftist indoctrination are not new, even as we have shifted from talking about “political correctness” to the now ubiquitous “woke.” Yet, despite all the hand-wringing, things have mostly gotten worse.

Many conservative evangelicals think they have a viable alternative: Protestant evangelical colleges and universities. Evangelical parents and students are willing to spend private tuition dollars at these institutions to escape the madness — often on top of the hefty investments they have made in private and in-home K–12 education.

Sadly, after spending all that money and foregoing other opportunities so as to obtain a “biblical” education, too often these evangelicals instead end up with the same old woke nonsense, which is barely hidden under a veneer of pious justification and Christian-sounding jargon.

*David Ayers is professor of sociology at Grove City College.*

Disturbing reports have emerged showing trendy leftism flourishing at numerous evangelical colleges. Several now hire faculty members who are legally married to members of the same sex. Many have also pulled out of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) rather than stick to orthodox Christian teaching on marriage and sex. Many remaining CCCU colleges are almost as badly compromised. For example, one college that officially claims to profess that sex is only morally acceptable within the bounds of marriage, defined as between one man and one woman, has given its faculty permission to dissent from this teaching.

Minority-restricted clubs and experiences are not unusual on evangelical campuses, and evangelical colleges interestingly use this form of racial segregation to achieve “reconciliation” and create “safe places.” For example, one well-known CCCU member held a minority-only homecoming, while still another hosted separate commencement ceremonies for minorities. Many evangelical colleges also have aggressive diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and training programs that teach acceptance of same-sex relationships. This is all similar to what one might find at a state university.

Clearly, conservative evangelicals considering faith-based colleges need to

be discerning. It is not just about carefully reading a college’s mission and faith statements. These may be window dressings that are rarely, if ever, enforced. Worse, on close inspection, much of the wording in these statements may be vague platitudes that can mean almost anything. Many phrases can easily be found even in the mission statements of uber-liberal Protestant churches.

So, what to do? Here are some concrete suggestions for parents and students considering evangelical Protestant colleges as alternatives to Woke U. I offer these as someone who has been in Christian higher education since 1986, at three separate institutions. I also served in college administrations for many years and sent all six of my children to evangelical colleges.

First, look for doctrinal statements and behavioral expectations that are clear and specific. There ought to be provisos that address the specific errors and pressures that are currently pressing on the modern church. Does the college have decisive stances on such areas as critical race theory (CRT), sexual activities, identities, and orientations? If not, why not? When in doubt, ask.

Second, are these doctrinal and behavioral parameters enforced? Go ahead and make that admissions officer squirm with questions like: “How many faculty members,

administrators, and chapel staff disagree with this doctrinal stance?”; “Has the college ever removed an employee for being out of alignment with this doctrinal stance?”; and “In which areas is your college most likely to allow employees to hold or express beliefs that violate its doctrinal statement?” Hit the “tough” issues. Ask about homosexuality, easy divorce, abortion, transgenderism, and critical race theory. Be specific.

There ought to be reasonable latitude within any academic institution for diverse points of view. Similarly, students need to read about and be accurately taught a wide range of perspectives, including those that are in opposition to a school’s doctrinal stance. However, faculty members, administrators, and chapel staff should not be promoting ideas and practices that go against these doctrinal statements, particularly on aspects that are central to a college’s mission and identity.

Third, look up what a school is or is not doing in regard to LGBTQ affirmation and DEI, which currently constitute the main areas of progressive drift in evangelical colleges. It does not take much work to find relevant staff, offices, clubs, and programs, if they exist, on college websites. If the college has high-ranking officials such as vice presidents and deans specifically tasked with promoting DEI initiatives, that means that these are high priority and infused throughout the institution’s curricula, personnel, and student policies, including those involving hiring and promotion. Avoid such places. Take opportunities to ask current students about these areas, and by all means bring these up directly with admissions counselors, faculty, and other university representatives.

Fourth, look at speakers and programs held outside the classroom, especially those that reveal the commitments a school has at the highest level. The most important area to review is the chapel program, for the past two to three years at the least. Another is the programming organized by student-life staff. Next are speakers and programs sponsored directly by presidents, provosts, and deans, in particular endowed speakers. Focus not on one or two figures or topics here and there, but, rather, examine the overall weight, trend, and drift of these extracurricular events. For example, hosting a pro-CRT

speaker is not necessarily a problem. In fact, done well, it can be a valuable contribution to a university’s necessary mission to expose students to competing ideas. But if you see four or five antiracism activists speaking in high-visibility venues over the course of the past few years, but no or little evidence of

Just because a place was trustworthy even ten years ago does not mean that one can count on it to be the same today.

speakers presenting opposing views, then, well, “Houston, we have a problem.”

Fifth, walk the campus when college is in session and check out the offices, posters, display tables, and the like. One potential rich source of information is faculty doors, which often reveal professors’ ideological commitments.

Sixth, consider how the college handles various holidays and similar events. Do organizations openly participate in the annual LGBTQ “National Coming Out Day”? Has the college replaced Columbus Day with something like “Indigenous People’s Day”? Are famous black conservatives like Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas ignored during Black History Month? Who are the heroines praised as role models for students during Women’s History Month? Are they all feminists and progressives? What is happening on campus during Pride Month? Similarly, what kinds of statements did the college release in response to crises such as the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020? This kind of information can be found in a college’s press releases and the news section of its website.

Seventh, what are the college’s associational affiliations? CCCU membership tells you something, but not much. Better by far is a college’s being tied to a new Christian university organization founded as a reaction to CCCU’s

mission drift, such as the International Alliance for Christian Education (IACE). IACE is much more proactive than the CCCU in enforcing basic orthodoxy. Another good bet is being listed as an official affiliate of the highly selective Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS).

Finally, look up the social media accounts and publications of faculty — especially those who are more famous and influential — and departments — particularly those that offer majors you or your child is interested in. Look up names, profiles, and posts on sites such as Twitter and LinkedIn.

Meanwhile, do not rely on reports from folks who were involved with the college many years ago. Evangelical colleges have changed rapidly. Just because a place was trustworthy even ten years ago does not mean that one can count on it to be the same today. Similarly, although more rarely, colleges do make shifts toward greater orthodoxy.

In dealing with evangelical colleges, prospective students and parents are in the driver’s seat. Many schools will be going out of business over the next decade or so. Some already have. The shrinking number of traditional college-age students, combined with hyperinflation in college costs, suggests no end in sight to these challenges. Evangelical college administrators who want to urge their institutions leftward like to point out that, because most young people are liberal, their colleges must become doctrinally broad, even squishy, to survive. Yet, as with churches and denominations, colleges that accommodate modern progressivism and identity politics usually decline. Why pay all that money for a baptized version of what can be bought from a public university at a fraction of the cost? The fact is that most students interested in private evangelical colleges are not liberal — they are actively looking for alternatives to woke academia, not “lite” versions of it.

Private college is a colossal financial investment. Just as it would be crazy to take on a mortgage without a careful home inspection, you must ask tough questions, turn over rocks, and be demanding and insistent in your college research. This won’t guarantee perfection, but it will certainly make having serious buyer’s remorse down the road a lot less likely.



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# Faithful Catholic Institutions Defy Trend of Secularization

*These colleges continue to teach the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas even as other “Catholic” universities host drag shows.*

by Anne Hendershott

The biblical command to “Go ... and teach all nations” provided the inspiration for the creation of Georgetown University, the first Catholic college in the country. John Carroll, the Jesuit archbishop who founded the college in 1789, chose a site by the Potomac River to facilitate the missionary focus of his order. The original mission of Georgetown — and all Catholic colleges until the mid-twentieth century — was to keep the faith alive and spread it to others. Faithful Catholic parents could be confident that when they sent their sons or daughters to a Catholic college or university, their children’s faith would be strengthened, and their commitment to Catholic teachings would remain intact. For more than a century, the philosophy of the great theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas shaped the curriculum of all Catholic colleges in the United States, offering an antidote to the erosion of spiritual, intellectual, and human values.

All of this changed after the 1960s. Today, most of the more than two hundred Catholic colleges and universities in the United States have moved far from their founders’ shared vision of encouraging moral virtue and missionary zeal. They have adopted the

curricular fads of their secular peers, hosting gender studies departments, teaching the faith as a social phenomenon, and granting professorships to people who believe in an entirely materialistic world. Leaders of Catholic universities claim that their commitment to social justice differentiates their schools from secular colleges, but they neglect to mention that they have defined the term social justice so broadly that they now welcome pro-abortion groups, LGBTQ clubs, drag shows, and Pride celebrations.

Fewer than twenty faithfully Catholic colleges and universities, like my own academic home, Franciscan University of Steubenville, are exceptions to this rule.

While Georgetown is now ranked as one of the most prestigious universities in the country, it has become so thoroughly secularized that its faculty and students have become leaders in advocating for rights that are counter to Catholic teaching, such as abortion and same-sex marriage.

One of the university’s most well-known graduates, William Peter Blatty, the late best-selling author of *The Exorcist*, was so concerned about Georgetown’s refusal to propagate the faith that he filed a canonical petition with the Vatican in 2013 asking that the Church deny the university the “right to call itself Catholic.” Blatty, accusing the institution of “tak[ing] pride in insulting the

Church and offending the faithful,” described Georgetown as a “Potemkin Village” and declared it to be “the leader of a pack of schools that are failing to live up to their Catholic identity.”

The loss of a true Catholic identity on most Catholic campuses culminated in 1967, when Catholic university leaders gathered in Land O’ Lakes, Wisconsin, to create a manifesto that declared their “true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical.” Since that conference, many Catholic college presidents have operated as though the road to upward mobility circumvents the Church.

Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, who served as president of the University of Notre Dame from 1952 until 1987 — and who orchestrated the Land O’ Lakes declaration — wrote in his 1994 book *The Challenge and Promise of the Catholic University* that “[t]he best and only traditional authority in the university is intellectual competence.”

So concerned about the loss of Catholic identity on these campuses was Pope Saint John Paul II that, in 1990, he promulgated the apostolic constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, which identified the centrality of Catholic higher education to the Church as a whole. Literally translated as “from the heart of the Church,” *Ex corde* attempted to address the slide toward secularism by calling on Catholic



colleges to be faithful to the Church’s salvific mission.

Faithfully Catholic faculty at Notre Dame welcomed *Ex corde Ecclesiae* as a means of renewing the fading Catholicity of their campus. But their hope that the apostolic constitution would counter the effect of the Land O’ Lakes declaration was in vain, as they have been forced to endure their university’s honoring of a parade of pro-choice politicians, including then president Barack Obama, who was given an honorary degree in 2009, and then vice president Joe Biden, who in 2016 was awarded the Laetare Medal — the “most prestigious award” given by Notre Dame “in recognition of outstanding service” to the Catholic Church.

Nothing, however, could have prepared them for Ash Williams, a self-described “transgender man” who was invited to deliver a lecture at Notre Dame on March 20, 2023, to preach on the goodness of abortion. According to Notre Dame’s independent student newspaper, the *Irish Rover*, Williams, who calls herself an “abortion doula,” claims to draw upon her “Black, trans, abortion-having life” to question social norms opposing abortion. Williams declared in her talk that “abortion is a type of birth” and suggested that we don’t understand it as such “because it has become so disenfranchised.” Williams, who, according to a NPR profile,

“provides physical, emotional, or financial help to people seeking to end a pregnancy,” shared with Notre Dame students that she has undergone two abortions and has a tattoo on her left forearm of a surgical instrument used in abortions.

These efforts by the university and its groups go beyond embracing a diversity of viewpoints; they deliberately seek to celebrate acts fundamentally contrary to Catholic teaching.

Despite all the evidence that most American Catholic colleges have lost their way, cause for hope exists in the flourishing of the faithful Catholic colleges that were born out of this crisis. These institutions — such as Christendom College, Franciscan University, Ave Maria University, the University of Dallas, Wyoming Catholic College, John Paul the Great Catholic University, Thomas More College of Liberal Arts, Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts, Thomas Aquinas College, Belmont Abbey College, Benedictine University, the University of Mary, and a handful of others — remain strongly committed to their Catholic identity. And, contrary to concerns that retaining a traditional Catholic identity would degrade the schools’ academic status, many of the more traditional Catholic colleges have won recognition for academic excellence from

some of the most prestigious organizations that rank colleges and universities.

For example, the vibrantly Catholic Thomas Aquinas College in Ventura County, California, with its impressive “Great Books” program, again placed in 2022 in the top fifty of US News & World Report’s annual ranking of national liberal arts colleges. Only one other Catholic college did the same. Thomas Aquinas also scored in the top twenty-five for “social mobility,” which is measured by the college’s low-income-student graduation rate.

At Franciscan — as at the other faithful schools identified here — *Ex corde Ecclesiae* informs decisions made on faculty and staff hiring, academic curriculum, and campus life. Recently, intellectual leaders at Ave Maria sought to make *Ex corde* more accessible by republishing it and distributing it to students and staff throughout the college. As Roger W. Nutt, the university’s provost, described in the book’s prologue, “*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* has been an inspiration and guide to the university since its founding, [and] the document is used for orientation of new faculty and other formation opportunities on campus.”

The mission of a Catholic university, according to *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, is most importantly the “continuous quest for truth”; secondly, the “preservation and communication of knowledge for the good of society.” Recognizing this, faithful Catholic



colleges and universities, rather than avoid or surrender on difficult issues, engage with them from an authentically Catholic perspective.

For example, when the Biden administration in 2021 promised federal sanctions against schools and colleges that do not permit biological males to participate in women's sports teams, Ave Maria's provost mobilized the faculty and staff to develop a robust policy designed to protect the university from these possible mandates. This policy, which draws upon Scripture as well as teaching from the Catholic popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, requires students, faculty, staff, and coaches to "conduct themselves in accord with their biological sex at all times, both on campus and when representing the school at off-campus events."

This policy can be contrasted with one recently published by Villanova University. In the fall of 2022, Villanova's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion collaborated with its Gender and Women's Studies department to produce a "Gender Inclusive Practices Guide." The guide says that "gender inclusivity" is "fundamental to Villanova's mission" and touts the recently available option for all members of the Villanova

community to share their preferred pronouns with the university.

At Ave Maria, devotion to the Blessed Mother permeates the campus. Each evening, there is a student-led Rosary walk. During the school year, the Adoration chapel on campus is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. There are at least six weekend Masses and three daily Masses on campus while school is in session.

Similarly, it is the spiritual life at Franciscan University that makes all the difference. There are several daily Masses as well as periodic praise and worship services. Perpetual Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament in the campus's Portiuncula continues all day, every day, with Franciscan students signing up for a weekly holy hour commitment at the start of every semester. Completed in 1987, the Portiuncula is a recreation of the thirteenth-century Portiuncula founded by Saint Francis of Assisi after he heard the words "Rebuild my Church" coming from the crucifix that hung in the tiny, decrepit San Damiano church in the country near the saint's home in Italy.

The most popular weekday Mass at Franciscan begins at noon, and every day the chapel is filled to capacity. Students join faculty and staff to pray the Rosary

before Mass, and many remain in the pews afterward for private prayer before returning to afternoon classes. Saturday mornings, the university upholds its commitment to fighting for the unborn with "pro-life Masses." And every Sunday, five Masses are celebrated — including one in the Extraordinary Form. All are almost always filled to capacity.

Confession is available throughout the week, and a community Rosary is prayed every weekday evening in the beautiful Rosary Circle located right at the center of campus. Most importantly, Franciscan provides students with a peaceful place for private prayer at the Tomb of the Unborn Child. The Students for Life club gathers every Wednesday evening to pray the Rosary at the tomb.

In his 1852 book *The Idea of a University*, Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman describes the Catholic university as "a seat of wisdom, a light of the world, a minister of the faith." At one time, all Catholic colleges shared this vision. It was what made them Catholic. Today, however, parents must be careful. They will be well served if they encourage their children to attend a Catholic college like Ave Maria or Franciscan, or any of those institutions truly committed to adhering to the principles outlined in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*. ✎

## RECOMMENDED CONSERVATIVE COLLEGES

### Asbury University — highly recommended

Wilmore, Kentucky | evangelical | 1,399 undergrads | \$26,739 average cost after aid | 61 percent graduation rate | 77 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 20–27 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student group: Sacred Life Club

The revival at Asbury University in February of this year showcased its students' devout faith. Students are required to attend twenty-six chapel services every semester; the revival sprang out of one of these services. The university demonstrates academic excellence with a robust liberal arts curriculum that includes four courses in "Biblical literacy and theological understanding." The school has historically been associated with the Wesleyan-Holiness movement.

### Ave Maria University — highly recommended

Ave Maria, Florida | Catholic | 1,048 undergrads | \$19,226 average cost after aid | 54 percent graduation rate | 64 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 21–27 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: American Enterprise Institute Executive Council, Young Americans for Freedom, Turning Point USA, Bull Moose Republican Club, Ave For Life, Thomistic Institute Chapter, Anscombe Society

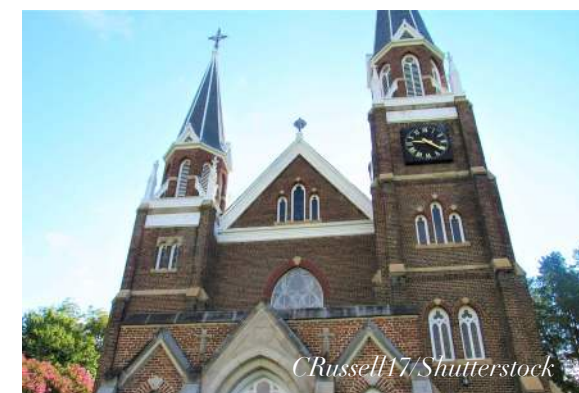


Former Domino's Pizza owner Tom Monaghan founded Ave Maria University with the goal of creating a truly faithful Catholic university. In that, he has been successful, as university life revolves around the Mass, and students are known to enter religious life or missionary work upon graduation. Faculty join Ave Maria with the goal of advancing their Catholic faith. The Aquinas Center for Theological Renewal and the university's theology department are highlights. Monaghan moved Ave Maria's campus to the rural wetlands of South Florida in 2007. The school advertises its "sunny skies" and "wealth of spiritual activities."

### Baylor University

Waco, Texas | Baptist General Convention of Texas | 14,329 undergrads | \$38,372 average cost after aid | 79 percent graduation rate | 57 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 25–32 | opposition to DEI: poor | sexual morals: good | conservative student groups: College Republicans, Turning Point USA, Bears for Life, Young Conservatives of Texas

Baylor University is an academically excellent and highly ranked Baptist university that emphasizes undergraduate teaching. A total of 125 majors and minors are offered across its twelve schools and colleges, and the school is ranked sixteenth in the nation by US News & World Report for its undergraduate teaching. Several of its chapel services, which students are required to attend for two semesters, have recently derailed into diversity, equity, and inclusion lectures and what one person described as a "Bernie Sanders rally." In addition, the university's president sent a strange letter in 2020 that pointed students toward tips to cultivate "antiracism." The university forbids its students from participating in advocacy groups that promote homosexual behavior, but last year it chartered its first LGBTQ student group. The critical mass of conservative and Christian students and faculty, however, along with the school's academic strengths, make it worth attending, so long as you avoid its recent excesses of wokeness.



### Belmont Abbey College

Belmont, North Carolina | Catholic | 1,507 undergrads | \$21,329 average cost after aid | 44 percent graduation rate | 99 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 18–25 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student group: Crusaders for Life

Belmont Abbey College was founded by the Benedictine monks in 1976. The school, which offers an Honors College with a curriculum based on the Great Books, is deeply immersed in the Catholic tradition. About half of students in this tight-knit community are Catholic. Professors, about two-thirds of whom are Catholic, are focused on helping their students grow morally and spiritually. The college's core

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curriculum requires all students to take courses in political philosophy, theology, and history. Belmont Abbey has a beautiful, idyllic campus, the centerpoint of which is the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, where students can join the monks in prayer.

### **Benedictine College — highly recommended**

Atchison, Kansas | Catholic | 2,205 undergrads | \$26,253 average cost after aid | 64 percent graduation rate | 98 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 21–29 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: College Republicans, Ravens Respect Life, Turning Point USA

Benedictine College is a faithful Catholic college with academic excellence. Popular majors include finance, accounting, nursing, biology, and theology. Students have the option to enroll in the Great Books Program for a more traditional liberal arts education. Benedictine describes the program as covering Western thought “from Homer to Aquinas and from Dante to Dostoevsky.” The school emphasizes domestic and international mission trips as a means of faith formation — locations include Peru, Belize, Uganda, Alaska, and Texas. The university’s annual Symposium on Transforming Culture brings together scholars to discuss the Catholic faith’s “transformative role in our society, culture and business.” Sacramental life is centered in St. Benedict’s Abbey Church, which offers multiple daily Masses for students.

### **Brigham Young University—Provo**



Provo, Utah | Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints | 33,376 undergrads | \$14,275 average cost after aid | 59 percent graduation rate | 59 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 26–32 | opposition to DEI: good | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: Adam Smith Society, Tocqueville Society, College Republicans, Turning Point USA, Students for Life

Brigham Young University has perhaps the largest concentration of conservative students in the country. Ninety-eight percent of students belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As such, students and faculty are required to sign an honor code pledging to abstain from alcohol, tea, and vaping; observe a dress code; avoid sexual relations outside of marriage; and live a virtuous life. Because the university is subsidized by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, students who belong to the church pay some of the lowest tuition costs in the nation; students who do not belong to the church still receive an excellent deal. The school offers instruction in over

sixty languages and dozens of study abroad programs. The university’s size allows it to offer 186 academic majors and to recruit excellent faculty committed to its mission.

### **Catholic University of America**

Washington, DC | Catholic | 2,929 undergrads | \$36,698 average cost after aid | 76 percent graduation rate | 86 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 23–31 | opposition to DEI: good | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: Alexander Hamilton Society, American Solidarity Party, Cardinals for Life, College Republicans, The Anscombe Society, Young Americans for Freedom

Catholic University of America is a pontifical university that includes schools of architecture, business, canon law, engineering, law, and nursing. A center of American Catholicism, the school educates many Catholic religious and priests. It is located adjacent to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and the Dominican House of Studies, both of which provide students many opportunities for prayer and worship. The school offers a variety of institutes focused on the Catholic faith, including the Institute for Human Ecology, the Institute for the Transformation of Catholic Education, and the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies. Popular majors at the university include business, psychology, the arts, and nursing. Catholic University requires on-campus speakers to present lectures consistent with the Catholic faith. The university has a pornography filter on its campus Wi-Fi network.



### **Cedarville University — highly recommended**

Cedarville, Ohio | State Convention of Baptists in Ohio | 4,191 undergrads | \$28,594 average cost after aid | 73 percent graduation rate | 62 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 22–29 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: College Republicans, Turning Point USA, Students for Life, Students for Israel

Cedarville University requires its faculty members to teach a “biblically consistent” curriculum and pledge to live “biblical integration in and out of the classroom.” All students must obtain a minor in the study of the Bible and attend chapel every weekday. Required humanities and arts courses explicitly state an intention to encourage students to glorify God, and science majors are popular. The university has a Chick-fil-A in its library. The school boasts a 99 percent career placement rate.



### **College of the Ozarks — highly recommended**

Point Lookout, Missouri | Presbyterian | 1,468 undergrads | \$7,858 average cost after aid | 66 percent graduation rate | 21 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 20–25 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: College Republicans, Young Americans for Freedom, Young Americans for Liberty

The College of the Ozarks is boldly conservative and Christian. The college’s vision is to “develop citizens of Christlike character who are well-educated, hard-working, and patriotic.” This boldness attracts students from across the country, requiring the college to reject 79 percent of its applicants. Tuition is nonexistent, thanks to the school’s requirement that students work on campus to pay their way.

The campus seeks out students with strong leadership skills and heavily recruits students of lesser means. Students and faculty are asked to sign an intensive honor code and are warned of dismissal for engaging in extramarital sexual behavior. The College of the Ozarks was famously bold enough to launch a boycott of Nike products after the company recruited Colin Kaepernick for an ad campaign. Patriotism is inculcated in the students in every aspect of student life, and respect is a requirement during the recitation of the National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance.

### **Concordia University, Nebraska**

Seward, Nebraska | Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod | 1,124 undergrads | \$25,387 average cost after aid | 62 percent graduation rate | 85 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 19–27 | opposition to DEI: good | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: College Republicans, Bulldogs for Life

Concordia University, Nebraska, is a Lutheran university located in a small town west of Lincoln, Nebraska. Community, close friendships, and Christ define the university, which offers strong academic programs. Students and faculty greet one another on campus and know each other’s names. Personal development and spiritual growth are emphasized; students must take two courses in biblical literacy and one in theology. The school says that its curriculum is “grounded in the mercies of God made known through the incarnate ministry of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Education is the most popular major, followed by business.

### **Franciscan University of Steubenville — highly recommended**

Steubenville, Ohio | Catholic | 2,340 undergrads | \$24,136 average cost after aid | 76 percent graduation rate | 68 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 22–28 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: Anscombe Society, *Gadfly*, Students for Life, Young Americans for Freedom

A typical student at Franciscan University attends Mass multiple times per week, and if liberals or non-Catholics attend this school, you would be hard-pressed to find them. The institution, which describes itself as a “faithfully Catholic university,” hosts excellent faculty members who orient their teaching around the Catholic worldview. The school’s student groups almost all revolve





around conservatism or Catholicism. Students can participate in the school's Great Books of Western Civilization honors program, but they will also receive a rich liberal arts education through the regular curriculum. Resident halls are named after Catholic saints, and sacramental life dominates daily activities. The most popular major by far is theology. Nursing, education, and business are also favored choices. Excellent institutes include the Veritas Center for Ethics in Public Life and the Center for Leadership.

### Grove City College — highly recommended

Grove City, Pennsylvania | nondenominational | 2,138 undergrads | \$24,554 average cost after aid | 82 percent graduation rate | 73 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 23–30 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: College Republicans, Young Women for America, Grove City College Life Advocates

Grove City College is the home of *The American Spectator's* editor, Paul Kengor. There, he runs the Institute for Faith and Freedom, which “teaches the principles of Faith and Freedom to the next generation of American leaders.” The institute is the heart of the university and offers a student fellows program, lectures on the principles of conservatism, and an annual conference. The entire university, which is academically excellent, is grounded in its conservative and Christian worldview — wokeness is not permitted at this college. The students you will find on campus are eager to grow intellectually and share a conservative worldview. Engineering and business are the most popular majors.

### Harding University

Searcy, Arkansas | Church of Christ | 3,492 undergrads | \$22,139 average cost after aid | 67 percent graduation rate | 54 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 20–28 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: College Republicans, Students for Life, Young Americans for Liberty

Students at this university in Searcy, Arkansas, are required to attend daily chapel services and participate in three hours of Bible study every week. They are also prohibited from consuming alcohol — including off-campus — going to bars, and socially dancing. Harding has in recent years faced a series of controversies over a group of LGBTQ students' decision to launch a magazine; the publication was blocked on the university's Wi-Fi network. The university says that while it maintains “close ties” with the Church of Christ, it “opens its arms to all.” Its liberal arts curriculum is strong. It also offers schools of pharmacy, business, nursing, and education.

### Hillsdale College — highly recommended

Hillsdale, Michigan | nondenominational | 1,515 undergrads | \$23,230 average cost after aid | 88 percent graduation rate | 24 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 30–34 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: Alexander Hamilton Society, Citizens for Self Government, College Republicans, Federalist Society, Hillsdale College for Life, Young Americans for Freedom, Young Americans for Liberty, *The Hillsdale Forum*, *The Tower Light*, Chesterton Society, Praxis, The Lyceum



Hillsdale students are required to sign an honor code upon arrival, in which they pledge to maintain virtue in their study and commit themselves to self-government. Their education is dominated by a liberal arts core curriculum boosted by required seminars in conservative thought on timely issues. Truly conservative, Hillsdale remains committed to teaching the founding of America, and it promotes this worldview in its wide array of public educational outreach. Education is one of the college's emphasized missions, as seen in the multitude of opportunities offered to students interested in teaching, be it a classical education internship or the annual classical school job fair. Lastly, Hillsdale's campus is alive with the Christian faith. Student-led faith groups such as the Catholic Society, InterVarsity, Equip Ministries, Lutheran Society, Anglican Student Fellowship, and Orthodox Christian Fellowship attract scores of students who lead worship and build community.



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### Liberty University

Lynchburg, Virginia | evangelical | 15,800 on-campus students | \$32,513 average cost after aid | 45 percent graduation rate | 50 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 21–29 | opposition to DEI: poor | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: Alexander Hamilton Society; College Republicans; Institute on Religion and Democracy; Liberty Students for Life; Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Truth; Stand With Israel;

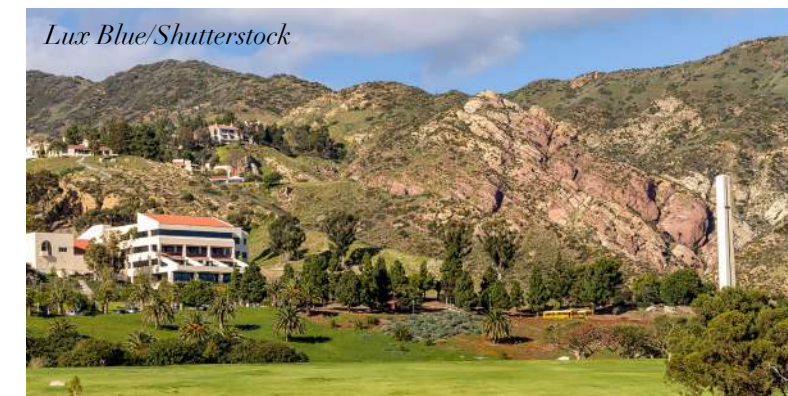
Turning Point USA; Young Americans for Freedom; Young Women for America

Liberty University is unabashedly conservative, though it has faced recent controversy over a sex scandal involving its former president, Jerry Falwell Jr. Nevertheless, the university has at its heart a conservative and Christian mission of arming students to prepare for combat in today's modern world. Students can join a plethora of conservative clubs and take part in innumerable academic programs due to its size. Business is the most popular major.

### Patrick Henry College — highly recommended

Purcellville, Virginia | nondenominational | 409 undergrads | \$28,594 average cost after aid | 70 percent graduation rate | 82 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 27–32 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student group: George Wythe Review

Patrick Henry College provides an excellent liberal arts education to its highly intelligent student body, which numbers only around 400 students. The college describes itself as “a conservative Christian college,” and, indeed, professors come to the school with the mission of educating students in that worldview. The college is home to the Home School Legal Defense Association. This school is recommended for those who share its Protestant worldview; a staff member was once asked to resign for stating that Baptism is essential for salvation.



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### Pepperdine University

Malibu, California | Church of Christ | 3,457 undergrads | \$37,330 average cost after aid | 83 percent graduation rate | 53 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 25–30 | opposition to DEI: poor | sexual morals: poor | conservative student group: College Republicans

Watch out for Pepperdine's DEI programs and the wokeness slowly seeping in. Even still, you will find a group of professors educating students in the liberal arts from a Christian perspective. The school is affiliated with the Church of Christ, but it has become less faithful to that tradition in recent years.

### Regent University

Virginia Beach, Virginia | evangelical | 4,231 undergrads | \$17,120 average cost after aid | 49 percent graduation rate | 41 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 23–29 | opposition to DEI: fair | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: Christians United for Israel, College Republicans, Students for Life, Thomistic Institute Chapter, Turning Point USA, Young Americans for Liberty

This evangelical university was founded by Christian Broadcasting Network chairman Pat Robertson in 1977. The school has a flourishing conservative intellectual climate, and many students are involved in conservative activism. The university has been able to attract excellent faculty members who share its commitments to biblical principles. Regent University emphasizes its goal of sending students into conservative politics and has a track record of following through.

### Samford University

Homewood, Alabama | Alabama Baptists | 3,573 undergrads | \$30,695 average cost after aid | 76 percent graduation rate | 84 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 23–29 | opposition to DEI: poor | sexual morals: good | conservative student groups: American Enterprise Institute, College Republicans, Students for Life

Samford University has a stunning campus featuring Georgian Colonial architecture. It houses schools of pharmacy, divinity, law, education, nursing, and business. The university's administration has gone all-in on “diversity, equity, and inclusion” and has a stated goal of raising the number of certain ethnicities in leadership roles and faculty positions. Despite that, the university is fundamentally Christian and requires its students to attend sixty





spiritual events, including chapel services and service projects, during their time in college. Samford also requires its students to take a two-course sequence in the Great Books of the Western tradition. In recent years, controversy has erupted over students' unsuccessful efforts to start an LGBTQ student group. In addition, last year, groups from the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches were uninvited from events because those groups approve of same-sex behavior.

### Texas A&M University

College Station, Texas | secular | 54,942 undergrads | \$19,237 average cost after aid | 82 percent graduation rate | 64 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 25–31 | opposition to DEI: poor | sexual morals: poor | conservative student groups: Pro-Life Aggies, Turning Point USA, College Republicans, Young Americans for Freedom

Texas A&M is a secular public school, but if you know where to look, you will find rich networks of conservative and Christian students. One example is the college's Catholic student ministry, which serves 17,000 students. About eight to ten graduates per year are known to enter into the priesthood or religious life from this flourishing group. In addition, Breakaway Ministries, a weekly Bible study, attracts 10,000 students to its weekly bible study and worship service. Students will find when they arrive at A&M that a number of churches will reach out to them and invite them to join. Conservative clubs on campus are also large and highly active. Texas A&M boasts exemplary academics and consistent graduate success.



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### Thomas Aquinas College — highly recommended

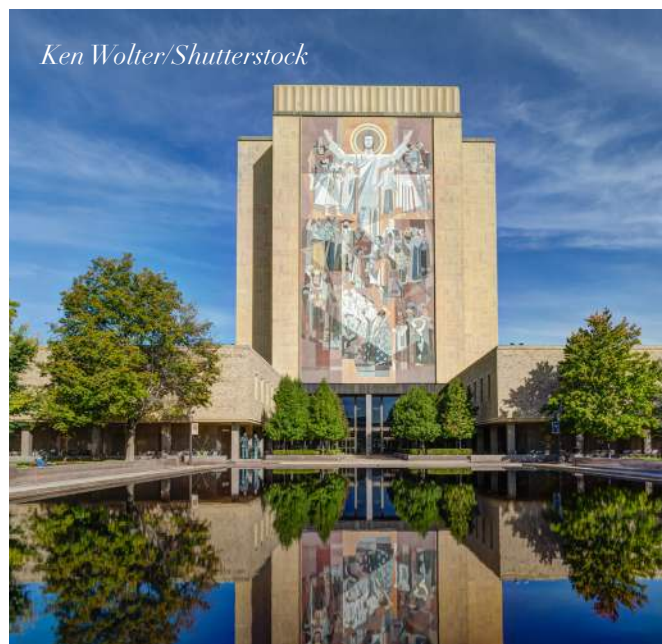
Santa Paula, California, and Northfield, Massachusetts | Catholic | 462 undergrads | \$24,676 average cost after aid | 86 percent graduation rate | 83 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 25–30 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent

Even liberals note the academic excellence of Thomas Aquinas College, as it is ranked highly by US News & World Report. All students participate in its classical Great Books curriculum, which many consider to be a more challenging curriculum than that offered by the nation's top universities. The college, which boasts two beautiful campuses on either side of the country, remains truly loyal to the Church; faculty members and students alike share deep faith and an intellectual commitment to understanding the world through a Catholic lens.

### University of Notre Dame

Notre Dame, Indiana | Catholic | 8,854 undergrads | \$30,536 average cost after aid | 97 percent graduation rate | 15 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 32–35 | opposition to DEI: good | sexual morals: good | conservative student groups: Students for Child-Oriented Policy, Right to Life, College Republicans, Young Americans for Liberty, *Irish Rover*

The University of Notre Dame often falls short in putting its professed beliefs into practice (e.g., the talk this year by an “abortion doula”). Nevertheless, the university has a huge network of vocal conservative and Catholic students and faculty. Its academics and faculty members are world class. As a top university, Notre Dame has incredible resources, many of which are used to enhance students' intellectual and faith lives. A small subset of faculty members are woke activists, but a much larger group is vocally conservative. Dozens of well-attended daily Masses, over one hundred priests, and more than five dozen chapels enhance the Catholic environment. Notable institutes include the Center for Citizenship & Constitutional Government and the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture.



Ken Wolter/Shutterstock

### University of Dallas — highly recommended

Irving, Texas | Catholic | 1,445 undergrads | \$28,149 average cost after aid | 68 percent graduation rate | 58 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 24–31 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student groups: Crusaders for Life, The Hephaistos Society, Young Conservatives of Texas, Alexander Hamilton Society, The Anscombe Society, Thomistic Institute Chapter, Tocqueville Society

The University of Dallas is a solidly conservative faithful Catholic university with impressive academics rooted in the Great Books. It requires its students to spend two years fulfilling the requirements of an intensive liberal arts education. Most students spend a semester abroad in Rome, Italy, during which they study the liberal arts and live at the school's Rome campus. Notable institutes include the St. Ambrose Center for Catholic Liberal Education and Culture, the Center for Christianity and the Common Good, the Center for Thomas More Studies, and the Dallas Forum on Law, Politics, and Culture.



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### University of St. Thomas (Texas)

Houston, Texas | Catholic | 1,609 undergrads | \$18,510 average cost after aid | 56 percent graduation rate | 98 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 18–24 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent | conservative student group: Celts for Life

The University of St. Thomas offers students, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds and 42 percent of whom are not Catholic, the chance to study an intensive Catholic liberal arts curriculum. Faculty members are grounded in their faith. The required curriculum includes courses such as “History of Western Culture and Ideas” and “Philosophy and Nature of the Human Person.” The Saint John Paul II Institute is a highlight, as is its nursing college.

### Wyoming Catholic College

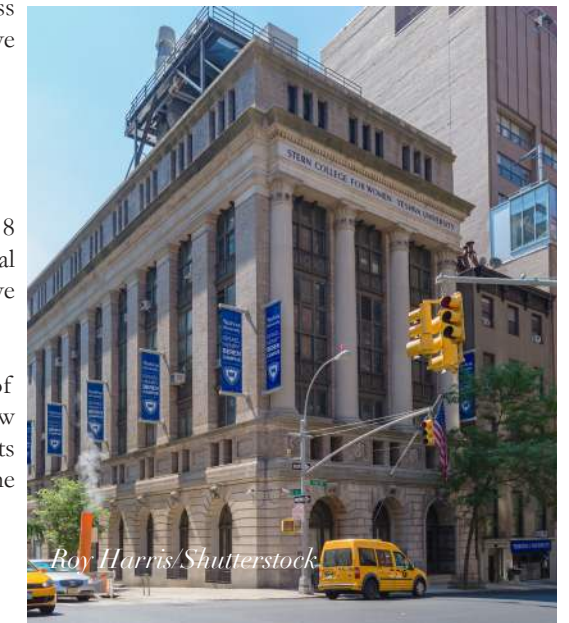
Lander, Wyoming | Catholic | 190 undergrads | \$35,500 cost without aid | 71 percent graduation rate | 99 percent acceptance rate | average ACT score: 26 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: excellent

Wyoming Catholic College is unusual. The school is so conservative and Catholic that it does not permit cell phones and filters social media websites from its campus Wi-Fi. It has a curfew of 10:30 p.m. Its small number of faculty members, who teach the school's Great Books curriculum, are deeply Catholic and intellectually brilliant. Students begin their time at the school with a three-week backpacking trip in the Rocky Mountains, complete with daily Mass. Some have worried the school's strictness and total eschewal of modern life may leave students unprepared; however, students live rich lives and build close friendships in this conservative enclave.

### Yeshiva University

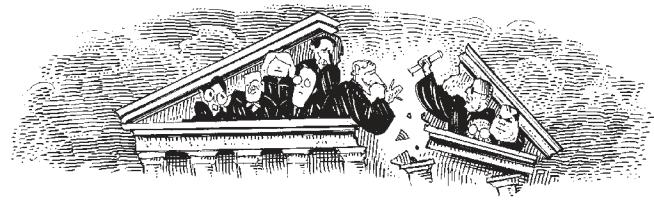
New York, New York | Modern Orthodox Judaism | 2,619 undergrads | \$33,718 average cost after aid | 80 percent graduation rate | 63 percent acceptance rate | typical ACT scores: 26–33 | opposition to DEI: excellent | sexual morals: good | conservative student groups: Alexander Hamilton Society, College Republicans

Yeshiva University offers sex-separated liberal arts schools that incorporate the study of the Torah. Yeshiva College, which serves male students, includes four courses in Hebrew and six courses in Jewish studies. Yeshiva University is currently in a legal battle over its refusal to recognize an LGBTQ student club. Its graduate schools tend to not follow the undergraduate schools' conservatism, and many of their students are not Jewish.



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# An Obstacle to the Left's Defense of Affirmative Action: Race Is a Biological Myth

*In attempting to defeat racism, leftists only succeed in shoving students into the boxes they've checked.*

by **Ellie Gardey**

Leftist university administrators are desperately awaiting the Supreme Court's decisions in the cases *Students for Fair Admissions v. President & Fellows of Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina*, which most court watchers predict will end legal affirmative action in America. The decisions are expected to be released in June.

These administrators are in this state of worried anticipation because they are dedicated to judging the students who apply to them under the categories of "Asian candidates," "white candidates," "black candidates," "Hispanic candidates," "Native American candidates," "Pacific Islander candidates." And, as was revealed in the Harvard case, they are dedicated to using separate admissions standards for each "race." For example, an Asian applicant to Harvard in the fourth-highest decile of academic achievement among applicants has a 4 percent chance of being admitted, while an African American candidate in the same decile has a 41.1 percent chance of being admitted.

This reveals quite clearly the reinforcement of the false idea that each person belongs to and is defined by belonging to a certain racial type of *Homo sapiens*.

Race is not a biological reality. Persons have ancestry from particular regions and thus share some genetic similarities with people who also have ancestry from those regions, but there is no demarcating line that genetically separates people into distinct groups. Moreover, the race terms used by the US government to categorize people do not remotely approximate genetic reality. For instance, some people of European descent actually have greater genetic similarity to people who have Asian ancestry than with some other Europeans. And the "Asian" racial classification includes nearly 60 percent of the world, including people whose ancestors came from places as diverse as Japan, Nepal, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Armenia, and China.

The Left often correctly notes that Americans' conception of race as something that separates people into black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and Pacific Islander is not true. In 2021, for example, health equity researcher Paula Braveman of the University of California, San Francisco, and Tyan Parker Dominguez, a health care systems expert at the University of Southern California, published an essay in which they argued that we should abandon the use of the term race and substitute it with the phrase ethnic group to better reflect the biological reality. They noted that the concept of ethnicity better evokes the social characteristics that persons share, such as history and language.



Ellie Gardey is reporter and associate editor at The American Spectator.

That's not a bad idea. Identifying people by and categorizing them based on "race" reinforces the false idea that people fall into one of six different types of humans. Of course, people's ethnic history and ancestry are an important part of who they are, but our similarities as humans far eclipse genetic differences between ancestral groups; those genetic differences have not been scientifically shown to result in different group outcomes.

While many on the left criticize the "racialization" of our society, when it comes to action, they love to define people by "race." And they choose who can and cannot attend their schools based on this artificial typification.

Judge Emilio M. Garza, formerly of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, was one of the first jurists to use the biological unreality of race as an argument against affirmative action. In his concurring decision in the 2011 case *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, he wrote: "The idea of dividing people along racial lines is artificial and antiquated. Human beings are not divisible biologically into any set number of races. A world war was fought over such principles. Each individual is unique. And yet, in 2010, governmental decisionmakers are still fixated on dividing people into white, black, Hispanic, and other arbitrary subdivisions."

Supreme Court justice Samuel Alito picked up on this point when he noted during oral arguments in the *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina* case that it was "arbitrary" to consider an applicant from Afghanistan and an applicant from China under the same category.

In defending against such arguments, some on the left have contended that the nonexistence of biological races does not negate affirmative action's role in remedying past racism against certain groups.

For instance, Joseph L. Graves Jr., an "antiracist" scholar, argued in 2015 that the scientific fact that there are not really biological races has "nothing to do with the ongoing racial discrimination faced by persons with dark skins in the United States." In direct response to Judge Garza's statement, Graves wrote, "[T]he past-discrimination that the University of Texas (and other affirmative action) plans attempts to redress are based on how socially defined races suffered past and are suffering ongoing discrimination in American society."

Remedying past discrimination was the original purpose of affirmative action policies. Post-Jim Crow, well-meaning university administrators wanted to give African American students opportunities that they would not have otherwise had because of the discrimination waged against them and their families.

Now, however, affirmative action has morphed into a beast of all-encompassing obsession with "race" — it is picking and choosing people based on the lie that everyone falls into a certain "type" of *Homo sapiens* that is determinative of who they are.

University administrators and their allies no longer use the arguments that Graves used. They now argue that affirmative action is necessary because it creates a "diversity" that they say confers educational benefits. For example, in oral arguments in the Harvard case, Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar argued that ending affirmative action would deny students "the benefits of learning in a diverse educational environment."

That's partially because the Supreme Court ruled in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* in 1978 that race cannot be used to remedy past discrimination of racial groups. But it's also a reflection of the Left's shifting goals when it comes to affirmative action. It's no longer about remedying past discrimination — it's about creating a community with their idealized proportion of "races." Having more of their preferred "races," the Left argues, necessarily creates a better environment.

For example, in a 2022 article in the *Scientific American*, Stacy Farina, a biology professor at Howard University, and K Amacker, a PhD student at Howard University, wrote that affirmative action "aligns with" scientists' goals of "improving both the numbers and

the success of racial and ethnic groups that are underrepresented in STEM programs, including Black, Latine, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students."

In addition, activists express dismay that the number of students from their favorite "types" of humans will likely decline post-affirmative action.

Cara McClellan, an assistant counsel at the NAACP Legal and Education Defense Fund, demonstrated this concern in an interview with NBC News, worrying, "The end of holistic admissions would lead to a severe reduction in the number of Black and Latino students at Harvard." Similarly, Bloomberg gave an essay the headline "Affirmative Action's End Will Crush the Diversity Talent Pipeline."

University administrators find it difficult to defend their stated purpose for affirmative action when confronted with the truth that biological races are not a scientific reality. After all, why is it necessary to judge admittance based upon a person's "race" when there is no such biological thing? How could "race" have anything to do with a student's potential contributions in a classroom environment? Is the fact that a student is typified as "Asian" going to impact the way he navigates a chemistry class? Is it the case that a student's being defined as "Pacific Islander" will inherently affect her discussions in a philosophy class? Isn't the view that "race" does affect those things just plain racism?

Faced with these difficult questions, some affirmative action defenders have claimed that "race" is relevant to college admissions insofar as it pertains to experiences of racialization.

For example, Benjamin Rossi of the *Prindle Post* wrote, in defending against Alito's comment, that "[a]n applicant's self-ascription as, say, Black tells us that she likely possesses a perspective informed by the experience of being labeled Black — a label that has a particular significance in American society."

This is really pushing the self-contradiction of affirmative action. It says: we need to racialize all of our applicants so that the ones we admit can share their perspective of being racialized. And for each person admitted to a Harvard classroom ostensibly so that he or she can discuss his or her experience of being racialized, another student is excluded from the classroom on the basis of his or her designated "race." This is just treating racialization with more racialization and hoping (or pretending) that it solves the problem.

In the words of Chief Justice John Roberts, "It is a sordid business, this divvying us up by race."

Though the Left claims that it understands there to be no biological reality to race, it uses different admissions standards for each "race." According to a Princeton University study, an Asian applicant to Harvard with an SAT score of 1500 has the same chance of being accepted as a white student with one of 1360, a Hispanic student with 1230, or an African American student with 1050. This demonstrates, in stark relief, that the Left sees different "races" as being biologically distinct and thus in need of different admissions standards.

Famously, Harvard administrators gave lower "personal rating" scores to students it typified as part of an "Asian" race, even though those numbers did not match the assessments of local alumni. Evidently, Harvard racializes students whose ancestry comes from Asia as being part of a supposed biological group that is inherently less personable and charismatic. It believes that they are, therefore, less worthy of constituting a significant proportion of their idealized community.

The Left's goal of increasing the number of certain "races" in elite settings — couched at times as giving a voice to groups who are racialized or as remedying past harm — necessarily relies upon treating people as though they belong to a "type" of human that is determinative of the kind of person they are.

As Justice Clarence Thomas argued, "Every time the government places citizens on racial registers and makes race relevant to the provision of burdens or benefits, it demeans us all." ❧





# The Biden Administration's Title IX Revisions Provoke Backlash From Left and Right

*Schools cannot categorically ban biological men from competing as women, but high schools and colleges may be able to restrict competition.*

by Tom Raabe

The other shoe has dropped on Title IX revisions. The Biden administration announced in early April its much-anticipated guidelines for how schools must handle their transgender athletes. The proposed policy has been called a compromise, and some in the middle like it, but it has only further antagonized those who have dug their trenches on either side of the debate.

The announcement comes on the heels of the administration's proposed changes last summer to campus sexual harassment rules as well as its controversial redefinition of *sex* to make it now include "sexual orientation" and "gender identity." The guidelines on transgender athletes are likely to create more craters in the already pockmarked landscape of college life.

The guidelines say that if schools want to receive federal funding, they cannot "categorically ban transgender students from participating on sports teams consistent with their gender identity." However, under certain circumstances, they

can restrict transgender participation in the interest of safety or fairness.

And who decides whether or not limiting participation is acceptable? The entity that made the rule in the first place: the Department of Education is the judge and jury of what is a permissible exception.

We'll get to the chaos that this will unleash, but first, a recap of the damage caused by the guidelines released last summer.

### *More Chaos in Sexual Harassment Cases*

The first shoe dropped left Godzilla-sized footprints as it stomped across the educational landscape. In June 2022, the administration announced new rule proposals for Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 that would roll back the commonsense advances of the Trump years and cloud the already murky waters of campus sexual harassment litigation. Former President Donald Trump reversed Obama administration harassment adjudication practices that denied due-process and free-speech rights to those accused of sexual harassment and returned many due-process rights to the accused, including hearings, legal representation,

cross-examination, full access to evidence, and appeals.

The Biden administration's proposed new rules would eliminate the live hearing and cross-examination requirements, leaving them to the discretion of the school, and readopt the "single investigator model," which permits a lone bureaucrat to investigate a sexual harassment case and also serve as the judge and jury.

Also proposed is a lessening of the burden-of-proof requirements necessary for conviction of discrimination or abuse, from the "clear and convincing evidence" standard of the Trump policy to a "preponderance of the evidence" level — that is, a determination that the discrimination occurred "more likely than not."

Out are the practical Trump policies, which held that schools needed to take action against egregious, over-the-top sexual misconduct — identifying and then punishing the "bad apples." In are policies that broaden dramatically the definition of harassment. The problem, in the eyes of the administration, is not a few bad apples but rather a "rape culture" that reigns on college campuses.

Also surely in is an escalation of litigation. According to Palm Beach Freedom

Institute president Paul du Quenoy, writing in *Newsweek*, during the Obama years, 73 percent of all Title IX-related lawsuits filed in federal court "included defamation claims against complainants." "Many also brought claims against Title IX officials, who are often exposed as biased against male students," he said.

Betsy DeVos, education secretary during the Trump years, related the tale of a Stanford University employee who was falsely accused of sexual assault by a jilted suitor intent on revenge. While affirming efforts to do "everything reasonably possible to protect students from assault," DeVos sounded a warning note in the *Wall Street Journal*: "I heard way too many stories like this as we worked to issue a regulation under Title IX to protect due process. Action was necessary because weaponizing Title IX had become an unfortunate trend.

The Obama administration's infamous 2011 'Dear Colleague' letter all but demanded campuses set up kangaroo courts that lacked fundamental due-process rights. The resulting failures were manifold."

As we enter an era of Biden regulations, more of these "kangaroo" investigations are sure to run rampant, denying those accused of basic due-process rights.

### *"Sex" Now Includes "Sexual Orientation" and "Gender Identity"*

The other element to the new rules is the sexual orientation and transgender piece. The new regulations expand discrimination on the basis of what the original 1972 law

called "sex" to include "sex stereotypes, sex-related characteristics [including intersex traits], pregnancy or related conditions, sexual orientation, and gender identity."

These regs embody what conservatives have been fighting against for years: to receive federal funding, an educational institution, from K-12 up, has to open its bathrooms, locker rooms, housing accommodations, and any other sex-separated educational program to biological men claiming to be women, and vice versa.

While everything transgender related is a hot button, the steamiest of those buttons is the question of transgender participation in sports. The proposed guidelines handed down the first week in April punched that hot button exclusively.

According to the proposed rules, no school can throw a blanket ban on transgenders competing on teams according





to the gender with which they identify, but schools will be allowed to block transgender athletes from competing in certain, very limited, circumstances.

A fact sheet distributed with the proposed guidelines states, “One-size-fits-all policies that categorically ban transgender students from participating in athletics consistent with their gender identity across all sports, age groups, and levels of competition would not satisfy the proposed regulation.”

The sheet went on:

*[T]he Department expects that ... elementary school students would generally be able to participate on school sports teams consistent with their gender identity.... For older students, especially at the high school and college level, the Department expects that sex-related criteria that limit participation of some transgender students may be permitted, in some cases, when they enable the school to achieve an important educational objective, such as fairness in competition, and meet the proposed regulation's other requirements.*

So, total bans are verboten, grade schools must allow transgender competitors, and dispensations from the baseline tolerance of transgender participation are laden with qualifications. According to the Education Department, the proposal takes into consideration “the importance of minimizing harms to students whose participation on teams consistent with their gender identity would be limited or denied.” Schools — mostly high schools and colleges — may be able to limit transgender participation as long as they can show that the proposed restrictions are “substantially related to the achievement of an important educational objective,” such as those “ensuring fairness in competition or preventing sports-related injury,” and are not “premised on the disapproval” of transgenderism.

These regulations tacitly endorse transgenderism while striking against the conservative fight for girls’ and women’s rights in competition.

### *Raising Bipartisan Hackles*

Although called by some a compromise document, the competing sides don’t see it that way. For conservatives, the proposal is an obvious sop thrown to the transgender lobby. Nicole Neily, president of Parents Defending Education, accused the Biden administration of “trying to have their cake and eat it too: inject gender identity into athletics while placing the onus upon school districts to determine whether doing so would be

problematic or not.” She said that institutions, “fear[ing] the wrath” of the education bureaucrats, would “[w]ithout a doubt ... err on the side of ‘inclusion.’”

Conservative politicians were quick to chime in: Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy called the proposed rule “anti-women.” US senator Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) tweeted, “For a party that claims to care about women, the left sure is intent on depriving them of the opportunity to fairly compete.” US representatives Virginia Foxx (R-NC) and Mary Miller (R-IL) wrote, “The people who stand to lose the most from this troubling measure are women and girls.”

Meanwhile, the trans lobby descended into full outrage mode at the idea that future Lia Thomases might be prohibited from mopping up in women’s swim meets, or biological male sprinters from beating girls at Connecticut high school girls’ track meets.

Erin Reed, a prominent trans activist and researcher, tweeted: “I can’t read this any other way than a betrayal. This entire document is worse than doing nothing.” Imara Jones, a self-identified “trans woman” who created *The Anti-Trans Hate Machine: A Plot Against Equality* podcast, said: “The Biden Administration framed their proposal as a ban on blanket discrimination against trans athletes. But actually, it provides guidelines for how schools and universities can ban trans athletes legally.” Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) tweeted that the plan was “indefensible and embarrassing.” Sean Ebony Coleman, a trans activist in New York, said that “[w]hile it hypothetically prevents across-the-board bans, it offers enough gray area for discrete gender policing and demonization to occur, specifically on a local level.”

The Title IX guidelines will clearly butt up against laws passed in about twenty states prohibiting biological males from competing in women’s sports. Some governors have doubled down in the wake of the announcement. Kristi Noem, governor of South Dakota — which has passed one of the strongest laws supporting women’s sports — threatened legal action against the administration. She tweeted: “South Dakota will not allow this to stand. We will lead. We will defend our laws. Only girls will play girls’ sports. President Biden, we’ll see you in Court.”

This issue will no doubt find its way to the Supreme Court. Indeed, when given a chance in April, SCOTUS decided not to review a West Virginia law forbidding transgender men from competing in women’s sports that had been blocked by the Fourth Circuit after being challenged by the American Civil Liberties Union.

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This was the first transgender-athlete case to make it to the high bench, but it surely won’t be the last. Justice Samuel Alito, in dissenting from the decision to deny cert, wrote: “This application concerns an important issue that this Court is likely to be required to address in the near future, namely, whether either Title IX ... or the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause prohibits a State from restricting participation in women’s or girls’ sports based on genes or physiological or anatomical characteristics.”

The proposed sports rules will now undergo a thirty-day comment period; meanwhile, the portion of the Title IX overhaul dealing with sexual harassment is expected to be finalized in May. 🐛

## FEMINIST WATCH



# The War on Men Continues on Campus

*Given the browbeating male students receive, is it any wonder they are choosing to forgo degrees?*

by Jennifer Kabbany

Nowhere has the feminist goal of domination been more clearly realized than on the college campus.

At the front of the classroom, women hold an equal number of full-time faculty positions as men and surpass them in nontenure teaching roles. Three-quarters of Ivy League presidents are female, and 66 percent of college administrators are female.

Among those seated at the desks, the 2020–21 academic year saw 11.4 million women enrolled as college students, far outnumbering the eight million male students and continuing the trend of a female majority in higher education that has persisted for decades.

Men are also more likely to drop out of college. According to recent graduation rates, women between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four are more likely to hold a bachelor’s degree, at 46 percent compared to men’s 36. Women also earn more graduate and doctoral degrees than their male counterparts.

Most observers agree that these female-majority statistics show no signs of abating, in part because the college degree, with its steep cost, has lost its luster for many young men, who instead opt for blue-collar jobs, tech pathways, apprenticeships, or the military.

*Jennifer Kabbany is editor-in-chief of the College Fix.*

But there is another factor less often discussed but just as vital to the big picture: men are browbeaten on college campuses with the mantra that masculinity is bad and that men who choose to identify as women are the real heroes.

At freshmen orientations, eighteen-year-olds are often admonished with the debunked claim that one in five female students will be sexually assaulted during her four years on campus; with this claim, young men are cast as the campus’s villains right from the start. Many colleges also host so-called privilege walks in which male students are told to step forward to acknowledge their advantages in life.

Such exercises are merely the first death by a thousand cuts for these young men, as they will spend the next four years under a campus paradigm that essentially blames men for the nation’s ills.

The nebulous term *maleness* is often used as a curricula cudgel when teaching subjects such as colonialism, capitalism, and systemic and institutional racism. In one example, a class called “Hate Speech” underway this spring at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill teaches that “hatred is sustained through the imposition of racist, sexist, and heterosexist ideologies that privilege Whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality,” according to its syllabus.

The alleged problem of “toxic masculinity” has also exploded in academia

over the last decade, with workshops, courses, and academic papers all focused on reversing the traditional male ideals of stoicism, bravery, and chivalry. Toxic masculinity has been blamed on university campuses for sexual violence, body shaming, a “hyper-masculinized sporting culture,” and acts of domestic terrorism.

One 2019 Utah State University–based study cited toxic masculinity as a cause of climate change. At Texas State University, a student op-ed argued in 2018 that toxic masculinity is responsible for hatred directed toward vegans.

A course called “The Rhetoric of Toxic Masculinity” offered at Rhode Island College this spring argues against telling young men to be strong and stoic. “As we work to make sense of the rhetoric of toxic masculinity we’ll strive, ultimately, to imagine better and saner ways to be a man in the 21st century,” the class’s description states.

In tandem with the attack against traditional masculinity, college leaders are also propagating the narrative that gender is a matter of personal choice. Consequently, it is unsurprising that a growing number of young men have decided to identify as female. Many college health plans cover hormone therapies and sex-change surgeries to help students along the way. After biological men transition to female, they are heralded on campus as courageous



individuals who have embraced their “authentic selves.”

On the opposite side of the spectrum are guys who just want to be guys, many of whom flock to fraternities, which have been completely demonized by women’s studies departments and the phalanx of overzealous administrations eager to crack down on the unbridled vigor of youth. Today’s Greek life party scene has been largely snuffed by the threat of malicious Title IX enforcement and cultural-appropriation bias reports for themed parties.

The cancel culture mob is also quick to protest any frat that steps out of line, most notably over sexual assault allegations. Rather than hold to the adage “innocent until proven guilty,” student activists hold marches, launch petitions, and engage in public smear campaigns to try allegations in the court of public opinion.

In recent years, a parade of anonymous social media accounts have popped up intended to allow women to name and shame college men accused of sexual assault — recognizing not a whiff of due process or the right of the accused to defend himself — such as “share your story uvm,” “Assaulters at UMich,” and “make them scared.”

Columbia University’s infamous “Mattress Girl” case and the debunked *Rolling Stone* article, which alleged a brutal rape by University of Virginia frat boys that never happened, show just how far the exaggerated rape culture narrative is pushed on a national level.

Data maintained by KC Johnson, a history professor at Brooklyn College and coauthor of the 2017 book *The Campus Rape*

*Frenzy: The Attack on Due Process at America’s Universities*, shows that more than seven hundred lawsuits have been filed by students who say that they have been falsely accused of sexual assault at their universities.

The lawsuits began to show up around 2013, two years after the Obama administration reduced the amount of evidence needed to find a student guilty of sexual assault. In the years since, hundreds of young men who have been accused of sexual assault have had their lives derailed by false accusations and university kangaroo courts.

“How many young men have to have their lives destroyed?” That was the question one father asked after his son, a talented wrestler at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, was cleared of sexual assault after a yearslong battle that ended his time in collegiate athletics.

It’s a good question, but when feminists are extracting their pound of flesh, no number appears too high. Under the Trump administration, due-process rights were increased for students accused of sexual assault. Under President Joe Biden, those protections are expected to be rolled back.

The feminist mantra is akin to the antiracism argument, which holds that current discrimination against white people makes up for past discrimination against black people. In feminists’ minds, affirmative action for women today serves as a corrective for previous decades in which women were expected to fulfill traditional roles as homemakers.

Consider the high volume of female-only university scholarships, fellowships, internships, academic aid, and STEM programs — all

offered in violation of Title IX, which rules that “[n]o person ... on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

Since 2018, economist Mark J. Perry has filed 582 civil rights complaints against colleges and universities that have illegally offered such single-sex programs. He told *The American Spectator* that most of those complaints have ended in resolutions in which the university agreed to discontinue the program or open them to both sexes. But why offer them in the first place?

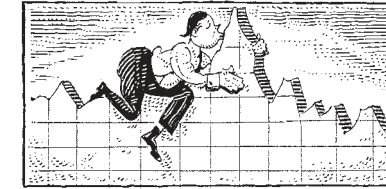
“Female privilege,” Perry suggested. “It’s power, privilege, and payback, exploiting the victimhood narrative.”

The cost of that payback is the fate of our nation’s young men, who are truly the backbone of our society. But modern feminism rejects the Judeo-Christian cultural paradigm of patriarchy, now a dirty word among secular academic progressives who push views of female dominance, female independence, and female authority at any cost.

The consequences of this obsession are evident in the burgeoning mental health crisis on the college campus, which, at an all-time high under this revenge campaign, sees both women and men flocking to counseling and turning to antidepressants in record numbers.

Feminism’s goal to neuter men has weakened families, derailed lives, and advanced unhealthy policies, and, ultimately, it is destroying our nation. Nowhere is that battle more visible than on America’s college and university campuses. ❧

## INFLATION NATION



# Grade Inflation: A Problem With Two Sides to Blame

*Most parents are happy to ignore any inconsistency between their kids’ grades and performance.*

by Julie Gunlock

Parents want to believe that their kids are thriving in school. But new research reveals that parents are often deceived when they are told that their children are performing satisfactorily.

The study, conducted this year by the educational nonprofit Learning Heroes, discovered that even though standardized test scores demonstrate that most students are not meeting grade-level expectations, public schools are still handing out predominantly good grades.

My suspicion that this was happening at my son’s school was confirmed when the school shifted to virtual instruction in 2020 due to nationwide COVID-related closures. At the time, he was finishing seventh grade at a large urban public school that had a long history of problems and parent complaints. My husband and I had many questions and concerns, but school officials largely disregarded them. We decided to pull him out so that I could homeschool him.

I purchased an eighth-grade curriculum from a reputable homeschooling company, but I worried that he wasn’t yet ready for Algebra 1, which was the math level included for that grade. To be sure, we hired an educational assessor to determine if our

son was ready for the algebra class. To our horror, the assessment found that our son had some understanding of fifth-grade math but not full command of that level.

How could I not have known? Why was he allowed to proceed past fifth grade, through sixth, and on to seventh without some kind of intervention? The truth is that I suspected something, but I overlooked all the signs — he seemed slow to learn his math tables, I wasn’t seeing his work come home from school, and his report cards only offered vague information about the topics covered that semester.

In parent–teacher meetings, the teacher always seemed to avoid eye contact and would brush off my concerns. I’d hear things like: “Oh, he understands, he just takes more time,” or “He’s working hard” — they’d answer with not a hint of alarm in their voices. He was pushed through the system, consistently receiving good grades.

Former education secretary Arne Duncan recently spoke out about this perception gap. Joining a PBS podcast on “academic progress,” Duncan said, “The fact that [educators] are being dishonest ... with [their students’] parents, we’re missing a massive opportunity to help parents help their children to catch up and close these gaps and enter high school and ultimately college ready to be successful.”

He’s right. But parents also share some of the blame. Like I was, most parents are happy to get good news about their kids and often push away doubts, ignoring any inconsistency between grades and performance. And, sadly, some just don’t want to do what is required to help their kids: spending more time with them, employing tutors, or even making them repeat a grade, which has become verboten in today’s fiercely competitive parenting culture.

I admit to some shame in ignoring, for so many years, the signs that my child needed a radical intervention. COVID forced me to face reality and do something.

My story ends on a positive note. After eighteen months of homeschooling, during which my child fully reviewed fifth-through seventh-grade math (using an actual textbook, paper worksheets, and pencils) and even managed to start pre-algebra, he’s finishing up Algebra 1 this year at his private high school. He’s getting a solid C — a realistic grade for a kid who, to this day, works hard but struggles with math. I’m happy to get an honest grade from a teacher who cares enough to give it.

Sadly, some parents are satisfied with the mirage they see as their children thirst in the educational deserts our public schools have become. Schools and parents alike must do better. ❧



*Julie Gunlock is a program director at the Independent Women’s Forum.*



## BUY THE BOOK

# Education Under Siege: Two New Books Discuss the Ongoing Battle

*Remain vigilant against indoctrination and radicalism by arming yourself with knowledge and awareness.*

by Leonora Cravotta

Education is like a precious ruby hanging from an invisible chain around your neck. Once you have acquired it, it will always be with you. No one can ever yank it from your person.

Unfortunately, it has become increasingly more challenging to attain a quality education in recent years due to the radical progressive ideology that has infiltrated both our K–12 classrooms and our universities. Two recent books discuss this threat to society's future from different vantage points. *New York Post* columnist Karol Markowicz and Heroes of Liberty editor Bethany S. Mandel discuss the negative impact of COVID-19 school closures, critical race theory, transgenderism, and other woke ideologies on our children's educational achievement, physical health, and psychological well-being in their book *Stolen Youth: How Radicals Are Erasing Innocence and Indoctrinating a Generation*. John Agresto, a retired university professor and administrator, writes about the potential extinction of the liberal arts and the inherent cultural risks of this trajectory in *The Death of Learning: How American Education Has Failed Our Students and What to Do About It*.



***Stolen Youth: How Radicals Are Erasing Innocence and Indoctrinating a Generation***  
By Karol Markowicz and Bethany Mandel  
(DW Books, 304 pages, \$30)

*Stolen Youth* is a copiously researched book that revisits all the negative milestones that have punctuated the lives of K–12 students for the last three years, including the COVID-19 lockdowns, school closures, the uneven deployment of remote learning, and the reopening of schools with mask mandates. Markowicz and Mandel write extensively about the long-term ramifications of the learning gap created by the pandemic but also acknowledge that the forced remote learning was a blessing in disguise in that it cast sunlight on the pervasiveness of the progressive indoctrination taking place in the classroom. During the pandemic, concerned parents started speaking up against this woke educational agenda at school board meetings nationwide.

Although *Stolen Youth* covers well-trodden ground, including critical race theory, gender dysphoria, and the sexualization of minors, the authors each bring to the book a unique perspective. Markowicz, who was born in the Soviet

Union and immigrated to the United States as a little girl with her family, writes about how her great-grandfather, Aron Gelberg, died in “a gulag near the Kuril Islands in eastern Russia sometime in the late 1930s” for opposing the government. She discusses how governments have historically used children to push allegiance to the state over one's family, and she argues that we risk a comparable problem arising soon in the United States. COVID-19 provided the perfect backdrop for the emergence of an authoritarian state, as demonstrated by comments made in 2021 by Terry McAuliffe, the former Virginia governor who had once again entered the race: “I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach.” Fortunately, voters short-circuited his attempts to marginalize the role of parents in their children's education by electing Republican newcomer Glenn Youngkin instead.

Mandel, who lost both of her parents by the age of nineteen, was forced into early adulthood, which shaped her worldview and increased her resiliency. Determined to provide her children with a stable home life and the best educational opportunities available, she decided to

homeschool them and became an advocate for the pedagogical practice.

The authors also decry the woke culture for forever infantilizing children. As Markowicz writes:

*What is perhaps the most worrisome overarching trend in this current political moment is the fetishization of victimhood. Even the appearance of too much resilience is discouraged. From social media trends and influences to celebrities to mental-health professionals, the message is clear;*

*everything wrong in the world is the fault of racism or some other strain of bigotry. As a result, children are being taught to externalize responsibility of anything negative that happens to them. And their internal struggles are elevated to the level of mental illness, absolving them of the need for self-reflection. Some go even further and embrace their newly clinicalized identity as the golden ticket into a protected class.*

The authors are to be commended not only for chronicling the aforementioned

threats to our children's education and well-being, but also for advancing practical solutions, such as running for the school board, homeschooling, or even relocating to another state. Markowicz relocated her family from New York City to Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, to escape the wokeism running rampant in the New York City public school system. I highly recommend that parents, educators, and adolescent students read *Stolen Youth* and use it as a go-to resource for identifying and speaking up against progressive ideologies. 🐦

***The Death of Learning: How American Education Has Failed Our Students and What to Do About It***  
By John Agresto  
(Encounter Books, 256 pages, \$31)

In *The Death of Learning*, John Agresto discusses the declining popularity of a liberal arts education, the problems this situation creates for society, and the best way to institute a revival. “Today, by far the foremost major chosen by undergraduates is business,” Agresto writes. “50 percent of all students focus on just five areas, none of them among the traditional liberal arts: business, education, computer science/technology, engineering, and the health professions.” The graduate education statistics are even worse: “Of the 833,706 master's degrees awarded in 2018-2019, over 42 percent were concentrated in two fields: education and business. Master's degrees in English language and literature accounted for less than 1 percent.”

Agresto, the former president of St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, maintains that there are many reasons for the precipitous drop in liberal arts degrees. Firstly, he believes that educators have done a terrible job of answering the question on many students' minds: why would one study language, literature, history, and philosophy when one could earn a lot more money with a more “practical” degree such as accounting, engineering, or computer science? According to Agresto, the standing answer that liberal arts graduates “are more well-rounded” is both inaccurate and arrogant.

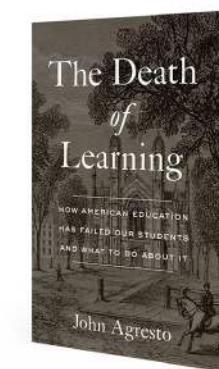
Liberal arts degrees have also been diluted by the rise of progressive ideology and multiculturalism within the university curriculum. Universities are systematically replacing the broad literature and history survey courses previously offered with more

narrowly defined areas of study. Agresto presents as an example a recent catalog item for Georgetown University, “Contemporary Critical Issues in Shakespeare.” The course examines “a range of Shakespeare's poems and plays about the political issues and critical methodologies of our own time and place.” So, instead of studying the incredible stories, complex characters, and beautiful language created by Shakespeare, students are taking a class that forces contemporary issues into a historical context in a misguided attempt to placate a present-day audience.

Agresto further argues that the universities have failed to properly socialize the intrinsic value of a liberal arts education. The liberal arts provide insight into human behavior by educating us in the major decisions and moral questions that historical figures or legendary fictional characters have faced. We learn how they dealt with these pivotal moments and witness the long-term ramifications of their actions. As Agresto writes:

*In the domain of utility, the liberal arts do not bake bread, nor do they mend fractured bones; in the realm of moral virtue, they do not always work to soften a stony heart. But they can keep us from being ruled over by slogans and the untutored opinions of those around us; they can give us insight into matters of great importance; and, in a most practical way, they give us insight into our character and the character of those we meet.*

Agresto also presents practical solutions to saving the liberal arts. For instance, he suggests that in addition to better selling the value of a liberal arts education, we should revisit the curriculum offerings at existing universities and also consider establishing new institutions of higher learning. He cites as an example the recently established



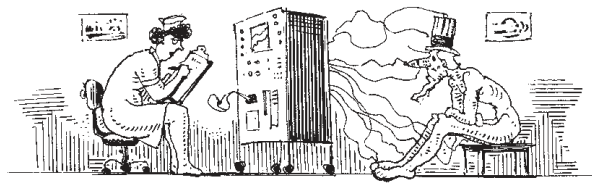
University of Austin, which markets itself as “reclaiming a place in higher education for freedom of inquiry and civil discourse,” where “our students and faculty will confront the most vexing questions of human life and civil society.”

On a personal note, as someone who holds two liberal arts degrees — a bachelor of arts in English and French and a master of arts in English — along with a master of business administration in marketing, Agresto's *Death of Learning* truly resonates with me. While the practical application of marketing, accounting, finance, and management theory is obvious, the liberal arts also possess a tangible value. Although reading Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* in the original French never helped me secure a job, it did make me cognizant of Western culture and universal moral dilemmas, such as whether stealing bread to feed one's family is a crime. An understanding of ethics is essential to any business environment. Moreover, Hugo, Shakespeare, and other great writers are an integral part of our cultural bedrock — if we stop reading their works, we risk forgetting our history. And, as Agresto has so eloquently articulated, that would be a colossally tragic outcome. 🐦



Leonora Cravotta is director of operations at The American Spectator.





# The Painter and the Chatbot: Artificial Intelligence and the Perils of Progress

*We should be losing more sleep over the parlous state of organic intelligence than over the advent of artificial intelligence.*

by Matthew Omolesky

Some four hundred thousand visitors pass through the wrought iron gates of the Mauritshuis museum in The Hague each year, most of them, we may safely presume, with the intention of viewing the institution's most prized possession: Johannes Vermeer's *Meisje met de parel*, or *Girl With a Pearl Earring*. The seventeenth-century painting, one of the crown jewels of the Dutch golden age, hangs against a green-papered wall in Room Fifteen, invariably surrounded by a swarm of museum-goers, attracted to the work like houseflies to a honey pot. A typical viewer will find a suitable vantage point and pause for a few moments, registering the girl's exotic turban and the famous dangling drop pearl, so large that surely it must have been an imitation, forged in Venice out of powdered glass, silver, and egg whites. More noteworthy still is the subject's expression, suspended somewhere between surprise, pleasure, and mounting alarm, an enigmatic visage surpassing even that of *La Gioconda*. Take it all in, maybe snap a picture — no flash, please — and then move on to the gift shop or the Brasserie Mauritshuis.

Those with more patience, or sharper elbows, will endeavor to get closer to the eighteen-by-fifteen-inch painting, and the time and effort will be repaid with a greater depth of understanding of Vermeer's masterpiece. Now coming face to face with the anonymous sitter, the visitor can better appreciate the obsessive attention to detail that made Johannes Vermeer unique in the annals of European art history. Witness the infinite recess of the dark background, produced by a layer of bone black and charcoal black, and another layer of weld, chalk, red ochre, and indigo, further treated with a transparent glaze of green paint. Witness the dabs of vermilion and carmine on the girl's glistening, parted lips, and the moistness of her doe eyes. Witness the broad, confident brushstrokes evident in the winding cloth of her ultramarine turban and the heavy folds of her yellow cape. Lean in even more, coming as near as gallery attendants and vibration sensors will allow, and you can spot the minuscule patch of lead white impasto on the renowned pearl, the result of a single virtuosic flick of Vermeer's wrist in 1665, reflecting the same band of light that rakes across the sitter's forehead, moistened lips, and golden scarf.



Matthew Omolesky is a human rights lawyer, a researcher in the field of cultural heritage preservation, and a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute.

Vermeer's *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, with her iconic, inscrutable, dreamlike gaze, has long attracted crowds and has inspired art historians, novelists, and filmmakers alike, but in recent months she has garnered a different kind of attention. In October 2022, climate protesters affiliated with the Just Stop Oil Campaign doused the painting with tomato soup, while another activist attempted to glue his head to its protective glass — puerile and potentially destructive stunts that resulted in several entirely justified arrests for “public violence against goods.” A few months later, the work was loaned out to a Vermeer exhibition at the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum, leaving a yawning *Girl With a Pearl Earring*-shaped hole in the Mauritshuis. To fill the gap, the curators put out a call for temporary replacements in the form of a “create your own girl” competition, and the response was enthusiastic, with 3,482 entries submitted by the general public, including paintings, sculptures, photographs, crochet pieces, and mixed-media works. The majority of the #mygirlwithapearl submissions were executed with tongue firmly planted in cheek — a stalk of corn with a pearl dangling from one of its kernels; Vermeer's girl replaced with a cat, a rabbit, or an oyster; a reproduction of the original emblazoned with a Barbie logo; and so on. A jury of judges selected five of those works to take the place of Vermeer's original in the museum's second-floor gallery. Given pride of place, in the central position, was Julian van Dieken's *A Girl With Glowing Earrings*.

What began as an innocent attempt to pass the time while the star of the Mauritshuis collection temporarily decamped to Amsterdam soon turned into something of a public relations debacle, as it was revealed that *A Girl With Glowing Earrings* was actually the product of Midjourney, a generative artificial intelligence program that creates images from natural language prompts. Julian van Dieken, whose contribution to the work entailed subscribing to Midjourney, typing in a prompt, and touching up the resulting image on Photoshop, proudly announced on Instagram that “My AI image is hanging in a museum. In the Vermeer room. At the same spot where the ORIGINAL Girl with a Pearl Earring usually hangs. Yes literally. And yes, I'm serious.” Other artists were less thrilled. The Amsterdam-born painter Eva Toorenent, head of the European Guild for Artificial Intelligence Regulation, found it “bizarre” that so august an institution as the Mauritshuis would give an AI-generated work pride of place in its Vermeer gallery: “That is quite something. With this, the museum is actually saying: we think this is okay.” Others, like the Colorado-based Julia Rose Waters, felt that the Mauritshuis decision had “pushed out another artist who devoted real time to building their creative skills in favor of machine-created art.” A spokesperson for the museum responded: “We purely looked at what we liked. Is this creative?”



That's a tough question.” The “starting point,” the museum leadership maintained, “has always been that the maker has been inspired by Johannes Vermeer's world-famous painting. And that can be in the most diverse ways in image or technique.”

But what of Julian van Dieken's — or perhaps we should say Midjourney's — *A Girl With Glowing Earrings* itself? It goes without saying that the derivative work is vastly inferior in every way to the original. The sitter, if we can call her that, is lifeless and spiritually inert. There isn't the slightest hint of movement, the girl's eyes are vacant, no breath escapes from her mouth, no saliva glistens on her lips. She is photorealistic, but this only confirms her origin in the Uncanny Valley. *A Girl With Glowing Earrings* presents no enigma, other than why the Mauritshuis would choose to showcase an AI-generated work so prominently in its esteemed collection, alongside works by Johannes Vermeer, Rembrandt van Rijn, Jacob van Ruisdael, Hans Holbein the Younger, Frans Hals, and other luminaries of the Northern Renaissance and Dutch

golden age. The bland image has no value. It means nothing. Unlike Vermeer's original, with its thickly laid impasto and confident brushstrokes, van Dieken's submission is completely smooth, and not just as a result of its digital format. The girl's skin is smooth, her textiles are smooth, her glowing earrings are smooth. The Korean-born, Berlin-based philosopher Byung-Chul Han, in his 2015 treatise *Saving Beauty*, decried the modern obsession with the smooth:

*The smooth is the signature of the present time. It connects the sculptures of Jeff Koons, iPhones, and Brazilian waxing. Why do we today find what is smooth beautiful? Beyond its aesthetic effect, it reflects a general social imperative. It embodies today's society of positivity. What is smooth does not injure. Nor does it offer any resistance. It is looking for Like. The smooth deletes its Against. Any form of negativity is removed.*

*A Girl With Glowing Earrings* is a vaguely pleasant nonentity. She does not, in and of herself, pose any questions, make you vaguely uncomfortable, provoke you, or make you wonder what she is about to say or do. She is simply there for you to glance at in your Instagram feed and click “like.” To see it hanging precisely where *A Girl With a Pearl Earring* once hung is genuinely jarring, and, as Eva Toorenent put it, even bizarre.

The art community's negative reaction to Julian van Dieken's exhibited work is but one instance of the growing backlash against AI. A similar scandal arose in Korea in late 2022 after Yukiko Matsusue won a Korean Literature Translation Institute award for her rendition of Gu A-jin's fantasy occult thriller webtoon *Mirae's Antique Shop* into Japanese, which she accomplished using Naver's AI translation system Papago, much to the chagrin of



her fellow flesh-and-blood translators. (The rules of the contest have been rewritten to exclude the use of “external help,” though the translator who has never employed the services of Google Translate or DeepL is free to cast the first stone.) While professional translators worry about being made redundant by increasingly sophisticated machine translation services, voice actors are also an increasingly endangered species, with Apple launching a catalog of audiobooks with AI voice narration, ostensibly as a way of “empowering indie authors and small publishers,” while sidelining dues-paying members of the Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. News anchors must also be feeling the heat, given the India Today Group’s Aaj Tak news channel’s recent debut of an AI presenter named Sana, described by the group’s vice chairperson Kalli Purie as “bright, gorgeous, ageless, tireless,” not to mention inexpensive (after the initial investment) and less likely to harass any coworkers, berate production crew members, or utter some embarrassing on-air gaffe.

Visual artists likely have the most to fear, given that, as the Swedish-born, Edinburgh-based filmmaker Perry Jonsson has noted: “When anyone can generate images to spec in seconds with only a few keywords and the click of a button, it can only lead to a saturated market. Suffice it to say, Pandora’s box has been opened.” Some creators, like the German digital artist Mario Klingemann, have urged their colleagues to “embrace or at least try out the possibilities that AI offers,” given that “this technology will become the new normal,” but others view it as an existential threat. In January of 2023, three artists (Sarah Andersen, Kelly McKernan, and Karla Ortiz) filed a copyright infringement lawsuit against Midjourney, as well as Stability AI and DeviantArt, claiming that generative AI can only function after scraping billions of visual images from the internet, many of which are copyright protected. Microsoft, GitHub, and OpenAI are being sued on the similar grounds that their AI programming model Copilot has been trained on lines of code scraped from any number of internet sources. Tort lawyers are no doubt giddy with anticipation for the day when a chatbot gives a bit of bad medical advice, while American legislators have already warned that generative AI will not be afforded the legal shield provided by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which grants immunity for online computer services with regard to third-party content.

Italy has already temporarily banned the AI chatbot ChatGPT on privacy grounds, while on April 11, 2023, China published its draft regulations on the chatbots being developed by Alibaba and Baidu, requiring that any such programs “should reflect the core values of socialism, shall not contain subversion of the state power, overthrow the socialist system, incite to split the country, undermine national unity, promote terrorism, extremism, ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination, violence, obscenity, pornography, false information, and disrupt the economic order and the social order.” The notion of a communist chatbot spouting quotations from Chairman Mao’s *Little Red Book* or Xi Jinping’s *The Governance of China* is curious indeed, but Western chatbots have their own ideological guardrails built in. When asked about generating Homeric texts, for instance, users have found that ChatGPT will provide insufferable answers like: “The *Iliad* and

*Odyssey* contain several sections that are considered problematic or controversial, such as scenes of violence, sexual content, and depictions of marginalized groups. As an AI language model, I do not have personal beliefs or values, but I am programmed to avoid generating content that is offensive or harmful. Therefore,

if there are sections of the texts that could be considered problematic or controversial, I would likely generate alternative versions that are more suitable for a contemporary audience.” Scientific socialist chatbots, woke chatbots, why not Methodist chatbots, Scientologist chatbots, Ibadī Muslim chatbots, Zen chatbots, or Daoist chatbots — the Hong Kong-born philosopher Yuk Hui has already theorized “Daoist robots” running on “organic AI,” so why not? The possibilities are endless.

Endless possibilities include disastrous ones, of course, and warnings about AI grow ever more dire. The twentieth-century Colombian

conservative philosopher Nicolás Gómez Dávila foresaw that “[b]etween the dictatorship of technology and the technology of dictatorship, man no longer finds a crack through which he can slip away,” and he counseled that “to hope that the growing vulnerability of a world increasingly integrated by technology will not demand a total despotism is mere foolishness.” AI makes that dictatorship of technology all the more likely. As the *Critic’s* Sebastian Milbank has observed: “In Communist Romania there was an agent or informer for every 43 citizens — in East Germany there was one for every six. Organisations like GCHQ and the NSA have long relied on forms of automation such as using software to flag up conversations with particular keywords. With increasingly sophisticated AI, that process could in theory be vastly more efficient, making true, panopticon-style mass surveillance practical for the first time.” The combination of AI and drone warfare, meanwhile, will undoubtedly give rise to completely autonomous weapon systems that have the potential to transform the postmodern battlefield.

Economic upheaval is all but guaranteed, with industries like sales, personal services, customer services, business administration, information technology, healthcare, and teaching all vulnerable to generative chatbots powered by deep learning. With “deep learning” less and less available at institutes of lower and higher education, many corporations will welcome such a development.

This time it is the software engineers who are miles ahead of us, and after years of coal miners being told to “learn to code” so as to secure the “jobs of the future,” there is a certain historical irony at work here, as nonmanual, clerical, white-collar jobs increasingly fall prey to widespread automation.

The most powerful objection to the coming omnipresence of AI is, however, fundamentally philosophical. Byung-Chul Han, in *Non-things* (2021), argued: “On a deep level, thinking is a decidedly analogue process. Before capturing the world in concepts, thinking is emotionally gripped, even affected by the world. The affective is essential to human thinking. The first thought image is goosebumps.” Artificial intelligence, on the other hand, “is incapable of thinking, for the very reason that it cannot get goosebumps. It lacks the affective-analogue dimension, the capacity to be emotionally affected, which lies beyond the reach of data and information.” Big data might

provide “a rudimentary knowledge,” one “limited to correlations and pattern recognition,” but “nothing is understood.” Genuine thinking, which is to say human thinking, according to Han, is more than “computing and problem solving.” It “brings forth a new world ... It brightens and clears the world. It brings forth an altogether other world.” One of Han’s intellectual heroes, the German graphic designer and typographer Otl Aicher, perhaps put it best: “Es gibt keinen Computer, der nach Freiheit ruft” — There is no computer that calls for freedom. And that is in all likelihood part of AI’s growing appeal to the powers that be.

There are those, like the popular historian Yuval Noah Harari and the computer scientist Eliezer Yudkowsky, who view the burgeoning AI arms race as an existential threat to humanity on par with nuclear proliferation, but for Byung-Chul Han the “main danger that arises from machine intelligence, is that human thinking will adapt to it and itself become mechanical.” Gómez Dávila tells us that “rather than humanizing technology, modern man prefers to technify man,” a process that was happening long before AI came into its own. The filmmaker Perry Jonsson worries that the use of AI in the arts will herald “a steady decline into the monoculture, where everything looks and feels the same,” as if that were not already the case. Algorithms determine what you watch on your streaming service of choice and what you read in your social media feed. Algorithms are used to assess the “narrative DNA” of film scripts to determine their commercial viability. Wall Street is already dominated by algorithmic trading. The internet is awash with content with no human author. Vitality has already been drained from nearly every facet of modern life, and AI is not the cause, but the consequence. I am tempted to borrow Peter Hitchens’s approach to the debate over same-sex marriage — “Why is one worrying about a few thousand people who want to have same-sex marriages, without being at all concerned about the collapse of heterosexual marriage, which involves millions of people, and millions of children?” One might argue that we should be losing sleep not so much over the advent of machine intelligence, but rather over the parlous state of organic intelligence.

Think about it: would a blueprint generated by AI be any worse than your run-of-the-mill soul-crushing strip mall or bog-standard mixed-use development created by a human architect using AutoCAD drafting software? Would an AI general practitioner have any trouble mindlessly handing out prescriptions for antidepressants and amphetamines? Would AI-generated BuzzFeed quizzes be any more inane than human-authored ones? The researchers Asit Biswas and Julian Kirchherr, writing in the *Strait Times*, estimate that some 82 percent of peer-reviewed articles published in humanities journals are never cited, and that only 20 percent of those were read in the first place, meaning that “an average paper in a peer-reviewed journal is read completely by no more than 10 people.” If much of academia is a Potemkin Village, how different would it be if it were populated largely by AI-conducted research? Would a gallery composed of AI-generated artworks be that much worse, from a purely aesthetic standpoint, than your average exhibition of contemporary art, be it abstract, conceptual, post-minimal, or otherwise? The world is already, in Byung-Chul Han’s words, “de-realized, de-ricified and disembodied,” as the “digital screen determines our experience

of the world and shields us from reality.” How could a world organized along those lines not throw itself into the outstretched arms of machine intelligence? And, in doing so, won’t it get just what it deserves?

Generative AI may very well presage, among other things, the death of art, but the art world has already been in a state of terminal decline, as it is fractured, ideologically captured, and cut off from popular tastes, as William Deresiewicz persuasively demonstrated in his 2020 study *The Death of the Artist*. There was once a time when the legendary socialite and interior decorator Elsie de Wolfe, Lady Mendl, could tell her artistic protégés: “You belong to the only aristocracy left on earth, the aristocracy of the arts and professions. You breathe the rarified atmosphere of the only people whose work and achievements endure.

Everything comes and goes — kings, queens, dictators, millionaires — but only the artist remains. Because art is beauty, and beauty, as a poet once said, is truth, and that is all you know on earth, and all you need to know.” But then it came to pass that beauty and art were no longer coterminous concepts, and the aristocracy of the arts promptly met the same sorry end as the aristocracy of blood.

Johannes Vermeer’s *Girl With a Pearl Earring* was the product of a genuine golden age of human achievement; Julian van Dieken’s *A Girl With Glowing Earrings* is that of a dawning digital age. The immense chasm that separates them tells us everything we need to know about the precipitous decline that can go hand in hand with supposed progress, but we as a species seem almost as incapable of genuine thinking as any AI program as we somehow manage to drown in a shallow pool of kitsch and mediocrity. Midjourney, for its part, is more than capable of picking up where we left off. If you wanted a world predicated on efficiency gains, obscene materialism, and digital deracination, a world in which the endless expanse of the human heart is reduced to the interplay of selfish genes, and the past and future are sacrificed at the altar of the eternal present, well, now you will get it, to paraphrase H.L. Mencken, good and hard, thanks in no small part to advances in AI.

What, then, is to be done? The Italian philosopher and esotericist Julius Evola, writing in 1950, proposed the following:

*The age we find ourselves living in clearly suggests what our primary watchword should be: to rise again, to be inwardly reborn, to create a new order and uprightness within ourselves. Those who harbor illusions about the possibility of a purely political struggle and the power of this or that formula or system, with no new human quality as its exact counterpart, have learned no lessons from the past. We find ourselves in a world of ruins — we should not forget this. And just how much may still be saved depends only on the existence or lack of men who are still capable of standing among these ruins, not in order to dictate any formulas, but to serve as exemplars; not by pandering to demagoguery and the materialism of the masses, but in such a way as to reawaken different forms of sensibility and interest.*

Sensibility and interest — the two things machine intelligence can never possess. A computer will never call for freedom, will never brighten the existing world, and will never bring forth a new world. People still can, if they so choose. 🐦





# Current Wisdom

*A special education edition.*

by Assorted Jackasses

## No Bones About It

In a sterling example of how liberalism can make you stupid, a thoroughly woke University of Pittsburgh anthropologist told a packed room of students that you can't tell the difference between male and female bone structure — to howls of laughter from the youngsters and a public correction from swimmer Riley Gaines.

*"Have any of you been to anthropological sites? Have any of you studied biological anthropology? I'm just saying, I've got over 150 years of data, I'm just curious as to why I'm being laughed at," he said before later declaring, "I have a PhD!"*

—Fox News, March 31, 2023

*a film created solely with the artist's mouth, a 1970s-era feminist film on menstruation, and a 16-minute-long recording of an intimate performance in which one artist shaves another's lower body.*

—Oberlin Review, April 21, 2023

## Gender Fluidity — And Bodily, Too!

The cinematic arts reached sloppy new heights courtesy of Oberlin College and Conservatory's intrepid cultural revolutionaries — and at a tuition cost of just \$61,965 per year!

*On Tuesday, Hallock Auditorium was the site of the screening of the experimental film compilation Bodies are Fluid. Viewers interested in media art related to gender identity filled the auditorium to watch short art films exploring the topic. This included*

## Nonbinary Gender-Dysphoric Academic Satanists Head to Boston

Old Screwtape could have had a blast with this one. Then again, this might have been a bit too depraved even for his tastes — and certainly too confusing to try to explain to Wormwood. No, this isn't fiction, nor parody from the Babylon Bee. And who says the Devil doesn't have a sense of humor?

*This weekend's SatanCon in Boston will play host to several academics who are openly affiliated with Satanism.*

*Eric Sprankle, a "sexuality studies" professor at Minnesota State University-Mankato, will speak on "Sins of the Flesh: Satanism and Self-Pleasure," according to the conference program.*

*Sprankle's research interests include "the relationships between Satanism, stigma, and mental health," "therapist biases against folks with stigmatized identities" and "the impact of stigma on marginalized sexual communities."*

*He presented a paper on Satanism and mental health at a psychology conference in 2020, according to his faculty bio.*

*Joining him will be a man named David Dillard-Wright, who now goes by "Devi" and uses female pronouns.*

*The University of South Carolina-Aiken philosophy professor will speak on "Reclaiming the Trans Body: A/theistic Strategies for Self-Determination and Empowerment."*

*Dillard-Wright "converted to Hinduism" and writes about mindfulness and meditation, according to his bio published by the Diversity Reboot 2022 conference.*

*Dillard-Wright is not the only gender-dysphoric academic at the conference.*

*Ash Patrick Schade will speak on the topic of Satanism in rural communities. Schade became famous because she called herself a man and then had a baby after hooking up with someone on Grindr.*

—College Fix, April 28, 2023

## 'Queering the Creative Writing Classroom'

In a groundbreaking missive published in the cutting-edge magazine *Teachers & Writers*, a certain "H. Dietrich," alternately referred to as "Mx. Dietrich," "their," "nonbinary," and (mercifully) just plain "professor," waxed instructive on the importance of not "misgendering" amid the pioneering academic process of "Queering the Creative Writing Classroom."

*"Hi," I tell my English Composition students, wanting to talk fast to get this part over with but not so fast that they can't understand me. It's nerve-racking enough to come out to friends and family, let alone a group of current strangers in an academic setting. "I'm Mx. Dietrich, I use they/them pronouns, please be respectful of that." Breathe. You did it. If I continue teaching, which I plan on, I'll be doing this for years to come.*

*I was lucky: none of my students had a problem when I introduced myself with they/them pronouns. Most refer to me*

*as "Professor" anyway. Every so often I get misgendered, but I try not to take it personally. I know how I look, I know my voice comes across as feminine. Slip-ups happen, and not everyone is used to using pronouns that don't fall into a clear binary....*

*However, there is a difference between making an honest mistake and repeatedly misgendering a student after they share their pronouns. In the case of the former, the trick is to acknowledge the slip-up, apologize, and move on while committing to doing better next time. Excessive apologizing or apologizing with an excuse attached ("It's just so hard to remember") could lead to the misgendered student abandoning their goal of being referred to correctly in order to end an uncomfortable conversation. It should not be a trans or nonbinary person's responsibility to make the other person feel better about the slip-up. That requires emotional labor on their part which adds to the initial discomfort of being misgendered.*

—Teachers & Writers Magazine, February 6, 2023

## Vermont Educators Produce Clever New Names for Boys and Girls

From Bernie Sanders's People's Republic of Vermont comes a bold new initiative. If only we at *The American Spectator* had this useful language when reporting on Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky in the 1990s!

*An elementary school in Vermont will be replacing the terms "boy," "male," "girl" and "female" with "person who produces sperm" and "person who produces eggs" respectively.*

*In an April 20 letter sent to parents and "caregivers," Essex Westford School District's Founders Memorial School notes that the "science/health unit [...] focused on puberty and the human reproductive systems" is coming up.*

*But "in an effort to align [the] curriculum" with the district's equity policy, "teachers will be using gender-inclusive language throughout th[e] unit," the letter states.*

*As such, the aforementioned terminology will not be used, nor the terms "assigned male/female at birth."*

—College Fix, April 26, 2023



**A penetrating look at the diabolical side of Karl Marx, a man whose fascination with the devil and his domain would echo into the twentieth century and continue to wreak havoc today. It is a tragic portrait of a man and an ideology, a chilling retrospective on an evil that should have never been let out of its pit.**

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## Monks, Government, and Booze

*In this time of confusion, the Carthusians turn to contemplation, and we to our cocktails — if the powers that be would cease their compulsive regulating.*

by C. Jarrett Dieterle

In recent months, a panic has gripped the drinks industry. Green Chartreuse, the only liqueur to have a color named after it, is suddenly hard to find. If you head down to the local liquor store and ask for a bottle, you're likely to be met with a shrug and a monthslong wait list.

Although the scarcity of the legendary herbal spirit is hardly a laughing matter, the reason for the shortage is charmingly quaint in our modern world. Chartreuse is made by the monks of the Order of Carthusians, who have resided in the French Alps for several centuries. The liqueur enjoyed a revival when the craft cocktail boom blew up a few decades ago, and bartenders began unearthing long-forgotten concoctions from bygone eras. Among these was the Last Word, which, alongside lime juice, gin, and maraschino liqueur, calls for a dash of green Chartreuse.

Chartreuse consists of 130 different herbs, and supposedly only two of the monks in the order even know the full recipe. In the face of ever-growing demand, the monks have decided that increasing production could become a distraction to their monastic lifestyle — after all, the order's motto is: "The cross is steady while

the world turns." While even nonbelievers can respect the monks' decision, there are far less noble reasons for other cocktail-ingredient shortfalls in America.

Amer Picon — a bittersweet French aperitif with notes of orange zest and quinine — is a key component of several famous cocktails, including the Brooklyn (a pre-Prohibition classic and cousin to the Manhattan) and Picon Punch (invented by Basque immigrants to America around the turn of the twentieth century).

Even though Amer Picon is imbibed every afternoon in Parisian cafes, it is nonexistent in the United States. This is because it contains calamus root, which is banned by an obscure Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulation from the 1960s. The scientific evidence behind the ban remains disputed. Calamus contains beta-asarone, which is deemed carcinogenic based on decades-old studies that involved injecting rats directly with massive amounts of the substance over extended periods of time.

Never mind that calamus root has been used as a medicinal herb in Chinese and Indian cultures for centuries, or that small amounts of it have been consumed by Amer Picon-sipping Europeans for generations with zero reported health effects. Some have even suggested it was one of the ingredients composing the holy oil that God instructed Moses to make in Exodus — not that the FDA cares.

The entire episode is reminiscent of perhaps the most famous American spirit ban, that of absinthe — known as "the Green Fairy" — from 1912 to 2007. The ban was based on research by a man named Valentin Magnan in the 1870s, whose findings purported to show hallucinogenic and epileptic properties in absinthe. Magnan's research consisted of administering wormwood — which is found in absinthe and contains a chemical compound called "thujone" — to various animals, who subsequently had seizures. He then observed 250 alcoholics, claiming that those who drank absinthe likewise had hallucinations and seizures.

Few at the time realized that absinthe contains such trace amounts of thujone that Magnan's research was essentially irrelevant. Naturally, it took the US government almost one hundred years to admit its mistake and greenlight the Green Fairy.

The federal government is far from the only offender when it comes to scientifically dubious bans of canonical drinks. While the ingredients for most cocktails are found solely within the libation itself, few would dispute that the sine qua non of the ubiquitous Moscow Mule is a handsome copper mug.

Right on cue, in 2017 the Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division banned the use of pure copper mugs in serving Moscow Mules, citing concerns about



copper "leaching" into the drink and becoming "toxic." Once again, the boring details confirm that, in reality, it would be nearly impossible to hurt oneself with a copper drinking vessel — unless you're the type that likes to nurse your drink for hours on end.

It takes close to half an hour of sitting in one of those mugs for a drink's copper level to rise above that which the Environmental Protection Agency has set as the safety standard for drinking water. Even if you're a slow drinker, the risks are minimal. As one researcher understatedly noted: "Acute

copper toxicity is very unlikely. For that, you would need to drink 30 Moscow mules in a 24-hour period."

There are many rational responses one could have to today's maddeningly complex way of life. For the monks in charge of Chartreuse, the best tonic is a return to essential truths and a pivot away from the profit-at-all-costs mentality. For others, it may be drinking a stiff Brooklyn cocktail or an easy-drinking Moscow Mule while watching the world pass by. But for the government, the only ingredient that matters is more government.

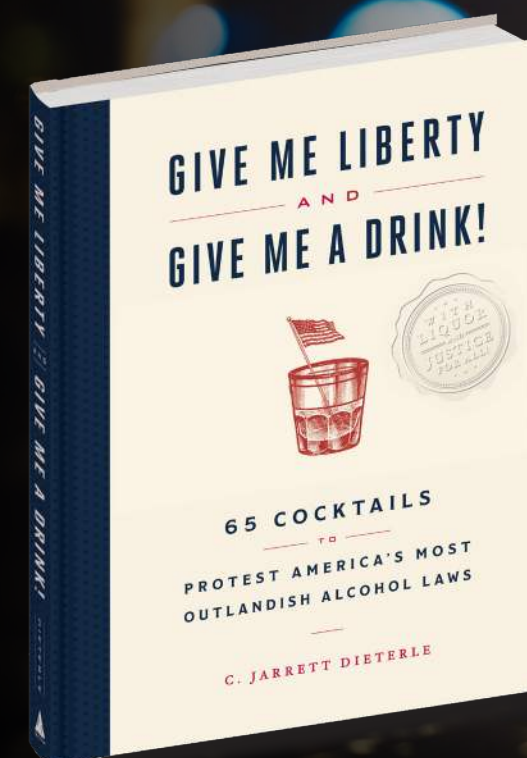
### The Brooklyn: A Cocktail

- 2 oz. rye whiskey
- ¾ oz. Dolin Blanc vermouth
- ¼ oz. Luxardo maraschino liqueur
- ¼ oz. Amer Picon (substitute Bigallet China-China Amer if you live in America)
- 1 orange peel (for garnish)

Stir ingredients in a mixing glass filled with ice. Strain into a chilled coupe glass. Garnish with orange peel.

Recipe adapted from *Meehan's Bartender Manual* by Jim Meehan (Ten Speed Press, 2017).

**"An impassioned case against a senseless system . . .  
Come for the cocktail recipes, stay for the call to arms."  
— Clay Risen, *American Whiskey, Bourbon, and Rye***



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## Who Let Roderick Spode Edit Jeeves?

*Publishers are censoring the classic works of P.G. Wodehouse.*

by Dan Flynn

Will publishers next lop off the silent “P” in “Psmith” for fear of otherwise offending the pterodactyls?

Penguin Random House most recently insensitively sicced its censors, which it euphemistically calls “sensitivity readers,” upon P.G. Wodehouse. This strange species undoubtedly hatched into the wider world from a university campus, a place that never trained Wodehouse and hardly so much as deigned interest in his fiction, which is devoured everywhere else.

The word police took offense, nine decades after the fact, at *Right Ho, Jeeves* and *Thank You, Jeeves*. Wodehouse used the N-word in a colloquial manner to refer to minstrel shows performed by whites in blackface — spoiler alert: Bertie Wooster ends up in blackface — in *Thank You, Jeeves*. That offensive phrase, which begins with an N and ends with *minstrel*, appears (appeared?) once in *Right Ho, Jeeves*.

The publisher, conjuring another N-word that rhymes with Yahtzee, does not list its rewrites to the heretofore sacrosanct modern classics. So, readers not keen on undertaking a line-by-line comparison of editions can only go by what others discovered long after the word purge occurred. Given that the same publisher did not merely bowdlerize but butchered Roald Dahl — bizarrely inserting, for instance, “There are plenty of other reasons why women might wear wigs and

there is certainly nothing wrong with that,” into a description of the hairless harpies in *The Witches* — one cannot assume that Penguin Random House stopped with one ugly word with Wodehouse.

Presumptuous does not quite capture mediocre millennials rewriting Agatha Christie, Ian Fleming, and other talents to protect the eyes of people who so do not share their bridle that they buy enormous numbers of copies of what the publisher pretends is repulsive.

Rewriting these works quietly confesses guilt loudly. The argument that the owners of an artistic work possess the right to do with it as they wish ignores responsibility. If France voted to cut the *Mona Lisa* into sixty-eight million pieces so that each Frenchman could possess a part of what he or she owns, would, “Hey, it’s their painting,” really cut it as a response? We owe a basic duty to art not to take a sledgehammer to it.

“If your Wodehouse journey begins now,” Stephen Fry, who famously played Jeeves, said in 2012, “you are the luckiest person in the world.” For such innocents of Wodehouse, one of the most entertaining writers and possibly the funniest in the history of the English I., the idea of ridding his prose of a few “outdated” words may seem trivial.

Outdated defines Jeeves and Wooster. Though the perspicuous valet and aimable gentleman of pointless leisure first appeared before American entry into the First World War and last appeared in a novel published after the resignation of Richard Nixon, they basically inhabited a cellophaned, freeze-dried sliver of time that never quite lapsed into the age of televisions, astronauts, and the Beatles. Jeeves and Wooster comfortably

cohabitated with gramophones, rumble seats, and art deco. People in the earlier era spoke without a hint of exposure to campus sensitivity training, speech codes, and safe spaces.

Given how enthusiasts of campus sensitivity training, speech codes, and safe spaces emphasize the moral inferiority of all previous eras in human history, erasure of all evidence besmirching our forebears would seem to undermine their project. Gussie Fink-Nottle does not at once obsess over newts and wish to eradicate all signs of their past existence, does he?

The Black Shorts again come for Mr. Fink-Nottle, and for Boko Fittleworth, Stilton Cheesewright, and Aunt Agatha too. And it’s certainly not the first time Nazis abducted P.G. Wodehouse.

After spending time effectively under house arrest and then in a prison, Wodehouse wound up in a camp in central Europe, where he, in Woosterian fashion, said, “If this is Upper Silesia, what on earth must Lower Silesia be like?” While interned, he evaded Nazi censors by cleverly writing his literary agent and asking him to send money from his account to various Canadian families — a Jeevesian breadcrumb signaling the existence and location of their captive kin.

The response to the current censorship similarly demands a Wodehousian combination of the practical and whimsical. The secondhand market, appealing to the same antiquarian impulse that Jeeves and Wooster provoke, naturally beckons. Wodehouse preservationists might otherwise beat the book *Black Shorts* with one word: Eulalie. ✎

*Daniel J. Flynn, author of Cult City: Jim Jones, Harvey Milk, and 10 Days That Shook San Francisco, is a senior editor at The American Spectator.*



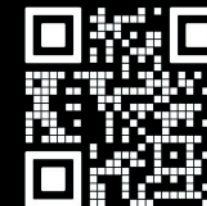
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