



Not on My Dime

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At the University of Missouri, feminist professor Melissa Click cried out “I need some muscle over here!” to expel a reporter from the Concerned Student 1950 protest in a public quad. A more apt encapsulation of what conservatives feel ails academia—identity obsession, rights-curbing, self-righteous bullying—can scarcely be imagined. It’s exactly the kind of thing that might make them cry out for some muscle of their own: someone to force intellectual diversity. Indeed, Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson has said he would punish “extreme bias” by cutting off a school’s access to federal money.

Dr. Carson is right and wrong. Kill the funding, by all means, but not to engineer balance conservatives would deem acceptable.

The Click incident isn’t isolated, with campuses nationwide seeing Missouri-inspired protests and some troubling behavior and demands. Perhaps the most striking has been at Amherst College, where the group Amherst Uprising, in addition to publishing an exhaustive list of peoples it demands school officials apologize to for historical injustices, declared:

President Martin must issue a statement . . . that states we do not tolerate the actions of student(s) who posted the “All Lives Matter” posters, and the “Free Speech” posters that stated . . . “in memoriam of the true victim of the Missouri Protests: Free Speech.” Also let the student body know that it was racially insensitive to the students of color on our college campus and beyond who are victim to racial harassment and death threats; alert them that Student Affairs may require them to go through the Disciplinary Process if a formal complaint is filed, and that they will be required to attend extensive training for racial and cultural competency.

While the stridency of activism may seem to have reached new highs—or lows—it is hardly a recent arrival. You could go at least as far back as William F. Buckley’s *God and Man at Yale* to behold the leftward lean of America’s ivory tower. Academia did not become an almost wholly owned subsidiary of the left—63 percent of professors self-identify as “far left” or “liberal,” only 12 percent “conservative” or “far right”—overnight.

The questions we should be asking are where the injustice is in this, and what should be done about it. Of course, threatening to physically expel a reporter, as Professor Click did, is illegal. But what about incidents that are legal, but also sheer bullying?

The latter would include Amherst Uprising's demand that school officials not "tolerate" free speech defending, well, free speech, and at Yale, the public berating of the master of Silliman College over an email from his wife defending the right of students to wear culturally "appropriating" Halloween costumes. Berating is not illegal, nor is a private college censoring speech, but both shatter the free exchange of ideas universities are supposed to enshrine.

One problem for conservatives is that while they may recoil at politically correct power plays, there is no unanimously agreed-upon line demarcating "extreme bias." And if conservatives ask themselves who should get to set that line for everyone, their answer should be "no one. That would be tyranny."

And are conservatives prepared to say that student actions are absolutely baseless? Is it not possible that there is racial inequity at the University of Missouri? Or that it is dispiriting to see buildings named after slaveholders, as students on several campuses have complained? And isn't it conceivably valuable to prohibit inflammatory speech lest exchanging ideas devolve into *The Jerry Springer Show*?

A good example of how valid values may clash is the drive to remove memorials to Woodrow Wilson at Princeton University, where Wilson was president from 1902 to 1910. Some conservatives may cheer the effort because Wilson was a political progressive and equal condemnation seems fair, but others may have qualms condemning someone for views considered far more odious today than in his time.

Given the inherent injustice of dictatorial punishment for "extreme" views, and the possibility of all sides having legitimate positions, the only remedy fair to both conservatives and those with whom they disagree is to phase out higher education subsidies: You may say what you please, but not on my dime. Indeed, no matter who is subsidized, it is simply unjust to force one person to fund the speech of another.

Of course, we cannot end subsidies—from all levels of government, currently around \$250 billion annually—overnight. It would have to be done over a long enough period for both schools and students to adjust.

The best starting point would be to turn state higher education funding into grants, connecting it explicitly to student choices rather than allocating it to institutions. At least then what policies and people are punished or rewarded would be based on individual, not government, decisions. Colorado started such funding for undergraduates in 2004, creating what it calls College Opportunity Fund stipends.

That said, there is ultimately little justification for forcing taxpayers to hand out money to students. Not only does the average college graduate see a huge profit, earning roughly \$1

million more over a lifetime than someone with only a high school diploma, but grants force taxpayers to subsidize the student's collegiate political activities.

Loans are preferable because borrowers are expected eventually to make taxpayers whole. Still, taxpayers have no say in funding them, and the federal government runs several forgiveness programs. Even tax credits and deductions involve coercion, putting the government thumb on the scale to send money to colleges. They are the less odious end of the compelled-support spectrum, but are de facto subsidies nonetheless.

Eventually, conservatives should want fully private funding of higher education, often deemed unrealistic but hardly so. The \$1 million payoff would be a huge inducement for private lenders or investors to work with even very low-income students who are ready to study in-demand fields, and ending subsidies would deflate rampant tuition inflation, alone a huge benefit.

Conservatives are rightly aggravated by college craziness and brazen political bullying. But they have no right not to be aggravated—only not to pay for it.

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