

# NEW YORK

## We All Live on Campus Now

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Over the last year, the most common rebuttal to my intermittent coverage of campus culture has been: Why does it matter? These are students, after all. They'll grow up once they leave their cloistered, neo-Marxist safe spaces. The real world isn't like that. You're exaggerating anyway. And so on. I certainly see the point. In the world beyond campus, few people use the term *microaggressions* without irony or an eye roll; claims of "white supremacy," "rape culture," or "white privilege" can seem like mere rhetorical flourishes; racial and gender segregation hasn't been perpetuated in the workplace yet; the campus Title IX sex tribunals where, under the Obama administration, the "preponderance of evidence" rather than the absence of a "reasonable doubt" could ruin a young man's life and future are just a product of a hothouse environment. And I can sometimes get carried away.

The reason I don't agree with this is because I believe ideas matter. When elite universities shift their entire worldview away from liberal education as we have long known it toward the imperatives of an identity-based "social justice" movement, the broader culture is in danger of drifting away from liberal democracy as well. If elites believe that the core truth of our society is a system of interlocking and oppressive power structures based around immutable characteristics like race or sex or sexual orientation, then sooner rather than later, this will be reflected in our culture at large. What matters most of all in these colleges — your membership in a group that is embedded in a hierarchy of oppression — will soon enough be what matters in the society as a whole.

And, sure enough, the whole concept of an individual who exists apart from group identity is slipping from the discourse. The idea of individual merit — as opposed to various forms of unearned "privilege" — is increasingly suspect. The Enlightenment principles that formed the bedrock of the American experiment — untrammelled free speech, due process, individual (rather than group) rights — are now routinely understood as mere masks for "white male" power, code words for the oppression of women and nonwhites. Any differences in outcome for various groups must always be a function of "hate," rather than a function of nature or choice or freedom or individual agency. And anyone who questions these assertions is obviously a white supremacist himself.

Polarization has made this worse — because on the left, moderation now seems like a surrender to white nationalism, and because on the right, white identity politics has overwhelmed moderate conservatism. And Trump plays a critical role. His crude, bigoted version of identity politics seems to require an equal and opposite reaction. And I completely understand this impulse. Living in this period is to experience a daily, even hourly, psychological hazing from the bigot-in-chief. And when this white straight man revels in his torment of those unlike him — and does so with utter impunity among his supporters — there’s a huge temptation to respond in kind. A president who has long treated women, in his words, “like shit,” and bragged about it, is enough to provoke rage in any decent person. But anger is rarely a good frame of mind to pursue the imperatives of reason, let alone to defend the norms of liberal democracy.

And yes, I’m not talking about formal rules — but norms of liberal behavior. One of them is a robust public debate, free from intimidation. Liberals welcome dissent because it’s our surest way to avoid error. Cultural Marxists fear dissent because they believe it can do harm to others’ feelings and help sustain existing identity-based power structures. Yes, this is not about the First Amendment. The government is not preventing anyone from speaking. But it is about the spirit of the First Amendment. One of the reasons I defended Katie Roiphe against a campaign to preemptively suppress an essay of hers (even to the point of attempting to sabotage an entire issue of *Harper’s*) is because of this spirit. She may be wrong, but that does not make her a hobgoblin whose career needs to be ended. And the impulse to intimidate, vilify, ruin, and abuse a writer for her opinions chills open debate. This is a real-world echo of the campus habit of disrupting speakers, no-platforming conservatives, and shouting people down. But now this reflexive hostility to speech is actually endorsed by writers and editors. Journalism itself has become a means of intimidating journalists.

An entirely intended byproduct of this kind of bullying — and Roiphe is just the latest victim — is silence. If voicing an “incorrect” opinion can end your career, or mark you for instant social ostracism, you tend to keep quiet. This silence on any controversial social issue is endemic on college campuses, but it’s now everywhere. Think of the wonderful SNL sketch recently, when three couples at a restaurant stumble onto the subject of Aziz Ansari. No one feels capable of saying anything in public. In the #MeToo debate, the gulf between what Twitter screams and what pops up in your private email in-box is staggering. It’s as big a gulf on the left as you find between the public statements and private views of Republicans on Trump. This is compounded by the idea that only a member of a minority group can speak about racism or homophobia, or that only women can discuss sexual harassment. The only reason this should be the case is if we think someone’s identity is more important than the argument they might want to make. And that campus orthodoxy is now the culture’s as a whole.

Microaggressions? How else do you explain how the glorious defenestration of horrific perpetrators of sexual abuse and harassment so quickly turned into a focus on an unwanted hug or an off-color remark? The whole cultural Marxist idea of a microaggression, after all, is that it’s on a spectrum with macro-aggression. Patriarchy and white supremacy — which define our world — come in micro, mini and macro forms — but it’s all connected. A bad date is just one end of a patriarchal curve that ends with rape. And that’s why left-feminists are not just

interested in exposing workplace abuse or punishing sex crimes, but in policing even consensual sex for any hint of patriarchy's omnipresent threat.

Privacy? Forget about it. Traditionally, liberals have wanted to see politics debated without regard for the private lives of those in the fray — because personal details can distract from the cogency of the argument. But cultural Marxists see no such distinction. In the struggle against patriarchy, a distinction between the public and private makes no sense. In fact, policing private life — the personal is political, remember — is integral to advancing social justice. Ansari is a test case. I have yet to read an article that accounts for the violation of his dignity. There's a reason that totalitarian states will strip prisoners of their clothing. Left-feminists delight in doing this metaphorically to targeted men — effectively exposing them naked to public ridicule and examination because it both traumatizes the object and more importantly sits out there as a warning to others.

Due process? Real life is beginning to mimic college tribunals. When the perpetrator of an anonymous list accusing dozens of men of a whole range of sexual misdeeds is actually celebrated by much of mainstream media (see this [fawning NYT profile](#)), you realize that we are living in another age of the Scarlet Letter. Moira Donegan has yet to express misgivings about possibly smearing the innocent — because the cause is far more important than individual fairness. Besides, if they're innocent, they'll be fine! Ezra Klein has openly [endorsed](#) campus rules that could frame some innocent men. One of the tweets in response to some of my recent writing on this has stuck in my mind ever since: “can anyone justify why the POSSIBLE innocence of men is so much more important than the DEFINITE safety and comfort of women?” And yet this principle of preferring ten guilty people to go free rather than one innocent person to be found guilty was not so long ago a definition of Western civilization.

Treating people as individuals rather than representatives of designated groups? Almost every corporation now has affirmative action for every victim-group in hiring and promotion. Workplace codes today read like campus speech codes of a few years ago. Voice dissent from this worldview and you'll be designated a bigot and fired (see James Damore at Google). The media is out front on this too. Just as campuses have diversity tsars, roaming through every department to make sure they are in line, we now have a “gender editor” at the *New York Times*, Jessica Bennett. Her job is to “[curate, elevate and expand gender reporting](#)” throughout the newsroom. Among her previous work are forums on male abuse of power. “Our gender content will exist throughout *every section* of the paper and be produced in *every medium*,” Bennett [explains](#). And not just gender, of course: “I want everything we do to be intersectional in its approach — and race, class, and gender identity are an important part of that.” Does she understand that the very word *intersectional* is a function of neo-Marxist critical race theory? Is this now the guiding philosophy of the paper of record?

Many media organizations now have various private, [invitation-only Slack groups](#) among their staffers — and they are often self-segregated into various gender and racial categories along classic campus “safe space” lines. No men are allowed in women's slack; no non-p.o.c.s in the people-of-color slack; and so on. And, of course, there are no such venues for men — in this Orwellian world, some groups are more equal than others. At *The Atlantic*, the identity obsession

even requires exhaustive analyses of the identity of sources quoted in stories. Ed Yong, a science writer, keeps “a personal list of women and people of color who work in the beats that I usually cover,” so he can make sure that he advances diversity even in his quotes.

Objective truth? Ha! The culture is now saturated with the concept of “your own truth” — based usually on your experience of race and gender. In the culture, it is now highly controversial for individuals in one racial/gender group to write about or portray anyone outside it — because there is no art that isn’t rooted in identity. Movies are constantly pummeled by critics not for being bad movies but for being “problematic” on social justice. Books are censored in advance by sensitivity readers to conform with “social justice” protocols. As for objective reality, I was at an event earlier this week — not on a campus — when I made what I thought was the commonplace observation that Jim Crow laws no longer exist. Uncomprehending stares came back at me. What planet was I on? Not only does Jim Crow still exist, but slavery itself never went away! When I questioned this assertion by an African-American woman, I was told it was “not my place” to question her reality. After all, I’m white.

Look: I don’t doubt the good intentions of the new identity politics — to expand the opportunities for people previously excluded. I favor a politics that never discriminates against someone for immutable characteristics — and tries to make sure that as many people as possible feel they have access to our liberal democracy. But what we have now is far more than the liberal project of integrating minorities. It comes close to an attack on the liberal project itself. Marxism with a patina of liberalism on top is still Marxism — and it’s as hostile to the idea of a free society as white nationalism is. So if you wonder why our discourse is now so freighted with fear, why so many choose silence as the path of least resistance, or why the core concepts of a liberal society — the individual’s uniqueness, the primacy of reason, the protection of due process, an objective truth — are so besieged, this is one of the reasons.

The goal of our culture now is not the emancipation of the individual from the group, but the permanent definition of the individual by the group. We used to call this bigotry. Now we call it being woke. You see: We are all on campus now.

### **Republicans vs. Conservatism**

There was a term once critical to any understanding of conservatism as a political philosophy or temperament. It goes by the name of prudence.

You know: the prudence that worries about unintended consequences; that values thrift; that tries to insure itself against future risks; that takes the responsibility of government seriously; that worries about extreme rhetoric; that balances the budget; that insists on constantly taking pains to protect inconvenient constitutional norms; that defends existing institutions. I could go on. It all began with Burke’s recoil from the French Revolution. It’s an easily mocked political philosophy — often resisting change, fearing the worst, hoping for the best, a reluctant, hedged, sometimes crotchety disposition that prefers an imperfect status quo today to a gleaming revolutionary future tomorrow.

Is there any institution in the West that is currently less conservative than the GOP?

I've been mulling this question for, well, a couple of decades now, but it snapped back into focus this past week reading [this story](#). Money quote:

The U.S. Treasury expects to borrow \$955 billion this fiscal year, according to [documents](#) released Wednesday. It's the highest amount of borrowing in six years, and a big jump from the \$519 billion the federal government borrowed last year ... this is the first time borrowing has jumped this much (as a share of GDP) in a non-recession time since Ronald Reagan was president ...

This is bigger than the stimulus that Obama managed to push through in the face of the worst recession since the 1930s — but this time during peak employment, and in the eighth year of a recovery, on top of record peacetime debt. Just to add to this, the new spending bill under negotiation would add another cool half a trillion to the debt. To call this reckless would be an understatement, and the gravity of this fiscal vandalism is now beginning to filter through the markets.

Basic solvency — something you might think an actual conservative might be concerned about — is not the only Republican assault on prudence. On the environment, you see the same immunity to worry. There's simply no question that carbon is pushing the global climate into much riskier and more volatile patterns, and that a prudent government would seek to guard against future catastrophe and help wean us toward renewable energy or more nuclear power. Again: just as insurance against the worst-case scenario. There are no real costs to this — at worst you might get some innovative technology that doesn't quite pan out. And yet the GOP is the only major party in the West to respond to climate change by choosing to make the problem worse, by empowering carbon production as much as possible, attempting to curb renewable energy — by adding tariffs to solar panels, for example — and embarking on a massive program of environmental deregulation. On health care, the goal is that least conservative of projects: sabotage. After failing to repeal a measure that gave tens of millions access to health care for the first time, the GOP is not seeking to shore the existing structure up, but to undermine it so it collapses of its own accord. They may not succeed — but it's the intention that counts: contempt for consequences.

As for protecting and guarding our system of government, the GOP now routinely treats constitutional norms as entirely dispensable if they in any way constrain partisan objectives. No institution that is integral to our liberal democracy is immune from attack. This includes law enforcement (the FBI), the Justice Department, an independent and free press, the prerogatives of the opposition party, and regular order in the Congress. It is a party that would [impeach](#) a State Supreme Court rather than give up its gerrymandered districts. It is a party that refuses to investigate a foreign government's intervention in U.S. elections, let alone take precautions against it happening in the future. In a multicultural America, its cult leader never misses an opportunity to deepen racial divides and to inflame the gender wars. He casually mocks political opponents as traitors to their country, sees the free press as an enemy of the people, and uses his office to claim that over 3 million votes in the last election were fraudulent. Faced with the highest levels of social and economic inequality in a century, the GOP has doubled down on intensifying that very inequality. Even in the area of potential nuclear war, the Republican

president issues wild threats, personally taunts and riles an unstable dictator, and starts a new nuclear arms race.

Whatever else this record is, it is an open and outright assault on any concept of prudence, responsibility, or moderation. Which is to say it is an assault on conservatism itself. If there is any future for the conservative soul and mind in America, it will have to start with the wholesale destruction of the current Republican Party. I made that case more than a decade ago now. It never ceases to shock me how inadequate my critique was, given the reckless depravity that now unfolds daily in front of our eyes.

### **A New Wave of Hate**

Are we living through a huge crisis of anti-gay prejudice in this country? Organizations whose funding depends in part on such a crisis — like GLAAD (the “LGBTQ” media watchdog) and now the NCVAP (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs) — insist there is. GLAAD’s evidence was a small shift, potentially within the margin of error, in polls measuring “LGBT” acceptance. NCVAP’s evidence is more impressive at first blush: a staggering 86 percent increase in “anti-LGBT” homicides in 2017. One commentator — unimpressed by this number — points to a number that is part of this stat: a 400 percent increase in “hate-motivated” killings of cis-gendered gay men (i.e., 5 to 20).

My friend Wally Olson alerted me to the study behind these claims. The first thing to note is that the studies are just of those murders discovered by or reported to the NCVAP — by no means a representative sample of anything. The second caveat is that the numbers do not count the 49 homicides in the Pulse nightclub killing in 2016. If you did, 2017 saw a 32 percent *decline* in such homicides, from 77 to 52. The third thing to note is that the details of only 34 of the 52 murders are known — and so we simply do not know the motive for 18 of them. Even of that 34, evidence of “hate” is very murky. I read each profile of each murder NCVAP provided and only a handful had solid evidence of bias. What we do know is that of the 34 victims, around a third were related to an online or personal ad hookup, and a third related to someone the victim knew. Maybe these were about homophobia. Maybe they were incurred during an attempted robbing or burglary. But NCVAP does not know. Murders of gay people are not the same as murders of gay people for being gay. Of the several thousand male homicides a year, wouldn’t some of them have to be of gay men?

If there is a crisis, it is a continuing one for transgender women of color. Their lives are fraught with threats and danger. A report that sought to figure out how we can improve things for these most vulnerable people would be helpful. A report that hypes largely meaningless stats to assert a wave of politically motivated murders of gay people is not.

See you next Friday.