

Oppression Disguised as Equity

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Tomorrow is the one year anniversary of the day that 50 Evergreen students—students that I had never met—disrupted my class, accusing me of racism and demanding my resignation. I tried to reason with them. I felt no fear because I knew that, whatever my failings might be, bigotry was not among them.

At that moment, I felt sure I could reach these students. I also felt a moral obligation to try. Racism, which squanders human potential, and erodes human dignity, offends me. I am also well versed in the evolutionary logic that makes racism durable. I should have had no trouble establishing common ground.

Their response surprised me, and it would take months for me to fully understand what had happened. The protestors had no apparent interest in the very dialog they seemed to invite. I was even more surprised by the protestor's fervor in shouting down my actual students, some of whom had known me for years. The cruelty and derision reserved for students of color who spoke in my defense was particularly chilling.

If not discussion, what did they want? I was one of Evergreen's most popular professors. I had Evergreen's version of tenure. Did they really think they could force my resignation based on a meritless accusation?

They did think that. And they were right. What I had not counted on was their alliance with Evergreen's new president.

Though the protestors openly humiliated him, the president of the college partnered with the mob in private, handing them concession after concession. We know this because the rioters filmed everything and proudly uploaded it. In one particularly telling video, President Bridges calmly discusses with the leaders of the protest a demand to target STEM faculty based on the empty assertion that scientists are particularly prone to bias. In that same video the president speaks of his plan for those who resist the

new order: “Bring ‘em in. Train ‘em. And if they don’t get it, sanction ‘em.” He invites his partners to hold him to it.

On the second day of unrest, the police chief called me. Rioters were stopping traffic and searching for someone, car to car. The chief believed it was me. She was worried for my safety and helpless to protect me as the president had ordered her force to “stand down.” What would have transpired if the rioters had found me? I still don’t know, and I strongly suspect they don’t either.

The protest at my class did not emerge out of the blue in May, 2017. One year earlier I stood up and spoke in opposition to a dangerous proposal— one that threatened to establish a racial hierarchy amongst faculty.

To those who have not faced something similar, this likely sounds hyperbolic. But one can now advance such policies, and almost certainly succeed in passing them, if they are properly draped in weaponized terminology. “Equity”, for example, has taken on special properties. If a person opposes an “equity” proposal, those advancing the proposal are secure in asserting that their opponent is motivated by opposition to racial equity itself: In other words, that they are racist.

My opposition to that first “equity” proposal was voiced to my colleagues, with no students present. Demands for my resignation one year later were not the result of organic student confusion. They were payback for violating a *de facto* code of faculty conduct in which one’s right to speak is now dictated by adherence to an ascendant orthodoxy in which one’s race, gender and sexual orientation are paramount. The students were on a mission. They were unwitting tools of a witting movement.

This committee should take my tale as cautionary. Is there a free speech crisis on college campuses? One can certainly make that argument, but that portrayal is at least as misleading as it is informative. What is occurring on college campuses is about power and control—speech is impeded as a last resort, used when people fail to self-censor in response to a threat of crippling stigma and the destruction of their capacity to earn.

These tools are being used to unhook the values that bind us together as a nation—equal protection under the law, the presumption of innocence, a free marketplace of ideas, the concept that people should be judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. Yes, even that core tenet of the civil rights movement is being dismantled.

Am I alleging a conspiracy? No. What I have seen functions much more like a cult in which the purpose is only understood by the leaders, and the rest have been seduced into a carefully architected fiction. Most of the people involved in this movement earnestly believe that they are acting nobly, to end oppression. Only the leaders understand that the true goal is to turn the tables of oppression.

Weaponized “equity” is a means to an unacceptable and dangerous end, and it is already spreading from college campuses to other institutions—it happened on college campuses first because colleges are soft targets. The emergence of this mentality, and this style of argument, at the highest levels of the tech sector and the press should alarm us greatly. The courts will not be far behind.

Our country was born brilliant, but glaringly imperfect. The fact of slavery, the systematic marginalization of indigenous populations, and the disenfranchisement of women are egregious violations of the most basic principles spelled out so eloquently in the Declaration of Independence. Some believe this contradiction invalidates the American experiment. I am not among them. I believe it obligates patriotic Americans to be vigilant in working to extend full status to all citizens, not just formally, but in practice. We have made breathtaking strides, but still have a long way to go.

Something is seriously and dangerously amiss. At this moment in history, the center does not hold. Partisan polarization and political corruption have rendered government ineffective, predatory and often cruelly indifferent to the suffering of American citizens. Tribalism is a natural result.

Evergreen’s public meltdown placed me in the eye of the storm and cast me into the spotlight. As a member of the Intellectual Dark Web, I find myself at the vanguard of an emerging non-ideological, non-partisan movement. Along with Heterodox Academy and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), we are fighting to restore civility and respect for competing perspectives.

The electorate is starved for honest debate and for the good governance that follows from it. My advice to this body is to put the nation and its core values ahead of partisanship and join us in the center to end this cultish power-grab, and return us to a forward path as a nation.