

The 'Culture Wars' Reloaded: Trump, Anti-Political Correctness and the Right's 'Free Speech' Hypocrisy

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Abstract

This article explores how Donald Trump capitalized on the right's decades-long, carefully choreographed and well-financed campaign against political correctness in relation to the broader strategy of 'cultural conservatism.' It provides an historical overview of various iterations of this campaign, discusses the mainstream media's complicity in promulgating conservative talking points about higher education at the height of the 1990s 'culture wars,' examines the reconfigured anti-PC/pro-free speech crusade of recent years, its contemporary currency in the Trump era and the implications for academia and educational policy.

Keywords: *political correctness, culture wars, free speech, cultural conservatism, critical pedagogy*

Introduction

More than two years after Donald Trump's ascendancy to the White House, post-mortems of the 2016 American election continue to explore the factors that propelled him to office. Some have pointed to the spread of right-wing populism in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis that culminated in Brexit in Europe and Trump's victory (Kagarlitsky, 2017; Tufts & Thomas, 2017) while Fuchs (2018) lays bare the deleterious role of social media in facilitating the rise of authoritarianism in the U.S. and elsewhere. Other

explanations refer to deep-rooted misogyny that worked against Hillary Clinton (Wilz, 2016), a backlash against Barack Obama, sedimented racism and the demonization of diversity as a public good (Major, Blodorn and Blascovich, 2016; Shafer, 2017). And, of course, there is the matter of Russian meddling that is still under investigation.

Some media scholars credited the phenomenon of reality television for Trump's success based on the characteristics of the genre including the pedagogical role it has played in reinforcing neoliberal ideology and teaching us "how to be good (entrepreneurial and self-maximizing) citizens in tandem with free market discourses and policies" (Ouellette, 2016, p. 648) as well as its messages of promotionalism and self-branding (Hearn, 2016). Elmer and Todd (2016) contend that Trump's power "derives in large measure from the 'anointing-of-winners' persona he cultivated as an entrepreneurial guru" and on "his reality TV program *The Apprentice*" (p. 661) while Dubrofsky (2016) refers to Trump's *perceived* 'authenticity' when compared to the over-scripting typically associated with political campaigns. Others argue that profit-driven commercial media enabled Trump's rise by lavishing attention on his every utterance (Pickard, 2016).

Many of these explanations are, undoubtedly, intertwined and compelling; however, herein I focus mainly on how Trump capitalized on the right's decades-long crusade against 'political correctness' (PC). Throughout his campaign, Trump derided PC, blaming it for a vast array of perceived social ills while concomitantly deploying anti-PC rhetoric—to inoculate his own racism and sexism from criticism—which his supporters celebrated as 'telling it like it is.'. Trump positioned himself as a culture warrior rather than a politician and one of the distinguishing characteristics of his campaign was "giving the finger to 'political correctness' in the name of freedom of expression" (Williams, 2016,

p. 3). More than any other past candidate, Trump brought PC "from the university quad to the political arena" (Tumulty and Johnson, 2016, p. 3). While many accounts (Edsall, 2016; Reynolds, 2016; Tumulty and Johnson, 2016) cited PC as a factor in the election, they generally did not provide any historical background about the right's hijacking of PC, the media's role in fostering PC hysteria and anti-PC as part of the right's strategy of 'cultural conservatism.'. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge how Trump benefitted from a broader, well-orchestrated (and reinvigorated) anti-PC campaign launched decades ago by a well-financed rightist network.

Political Correctness—Then and Now

Various genealogies of PC locate its origins in everything from the Leninist left, Chairman Mao's Little Red Book, Black Power and feminist movements and the New Left (Berman, 1992; Perry, 1992; Raskin, 1992; Scatamburlo, 1998).

Until its annexation by the right, PC was used among leftists as a form of self-mockery. Many today would be surprised to hear that PC was an "epithet used by socialists and those we might today call 'liberals'" to poke fun at "Communists who were too slavishly loyal to the party line . . . and who followed official dogma . . . instead of adjusting to real-life circumstances in front of them" (Alvarez, 2016, p. 2). Others suggest that PC applied, in a delicately chastising manner, to those who confused the willingness to embrace polite language conventions (e.g. the principle of avoiding utterances that could potentially offend certain groups of people) with active political engagement (Raskin, 1992; Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 1998). However, PC underwent a discursive transformation:

In the context of the political sectarianism of the 1970s and 1980s, the term 'political correctness' was used to extend a political sect's politics to the everyday conduct of its members. It became later a left-wing insider's joke, used ironically. The right-wing

'political correctness' code . . . by contrast, is specialized to operate in the field of public, text-mediated discourse . . . rather than as a challenge to bring private behaviour into line with political principle, it operates as a category of deviance; it names the actions it is used to characterize as deviating from principles of freedom of speech. It operates to reaffirm the authority of the established and to discredit the voices of those attempting change (Smith, 1995, pp. 31-32).

Hence, the contemporary meaning of PC was not articulated by "liberals, progressives, or lefties;" rather the "repurposed 'PC' grievances" of the 1990s culture wars "were molded by right-wing intellectuals and media blowhards" (Alvarez, 2016, p. 1).

The 'Culture Wars'—Part I

During the mid-1980s conservative think tanks began to churn out articles about the decline of 'Western civilization.'. However, these were mainly confined to obscure journals with a limited audience (Wilson, 1995). Then came the 1987 publication of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, which started a trend towards corporate funded diatribes against higher education such as Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* (1990) and Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (1991). For his efforts, Bloom received more than \$3 million between 1986 and 1989 mainly from the defunct Olin Foundation that—before shuttering its doors in 2005—had bankrolled the right's 'counterintelligentsia' to the tune of almost \$400 million. Kimball and D'Souza's books were also generously funded by Olin (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 2011, p. 32).

Bloom's manifesto reflected the populist strategy of 'cultural conservatism' mapped out by Paul Weyrich, who, envisioning the denouement of the 'red threat,' suggested that rightists embrace social issues. In 1987, he commissioned a study outlining the benefits of waging a 'culture war' and found

that 'antiliberalism' was a more comprehensive theme than was 'economic conservatism' for the purpose of advancing conservative doctrine (Ibid., p. 59). Weyrich also helped to establish the Free Congress Foundation (now the American Opportunity Foundation), an organization once dedicated to educating "the American people about the real nature of 'Political Correctness'" which was "actually Marxism translated from economic to cultural terms" (Ibid). Past affiliates of the FCF include several prominent neo-Nazis (Bellant, 1988); one of FCF's former directors was Richard DeVos, father-in-law of Betsy DeVos.

As far as the "media blowhards" to which Alvarez (2016) refers, many point to the 1990 publication of Richard Bernstein's essay "The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct" as a catalyst for the wave of accounts alleging campuses were being overrun by leftist thought police (Smith, 1995; Weigel, 2016). Bernstein demonized the 'left' as a coterie of propagandists plotting to impose the edicts of curricular correctness (i.e. challenging the 'Western tradition') onto unsuspecting students while stifling 'free speech.'. Bernstein's "alarming dispatch in America's paper of record set off a chain reaction, as one mainstream publication after another rushed to denounce this new trend" (Weigel, 2016, p. 3).

Newsweek's December 24, 1990 cover was emblazoned with a warning to "Watch What You Say" and posed the question as to whether PC was "the New Enlightenment" or "the New McCarthyism?" The PC agenda was purportedly "shared by most organizations of minority students, feminists and gays" and was also "a program of a generation of campus radicals" who had grown up in the 1960s but had since achieved "positions of academic influence" (Adler, et al., 1990, p. 48). Such sentiments echoed those of Balch and London (1986) who published "The Tenured Left" in the neoconservative magazine

Commentary four years earlier. Indeed, the authors of the *Newsweek* article recycled many of the same arguments made by rightist provocateurs without acknowledging their origins and primarily sourced their article with quotes from members of the National Association of Scholars (NAS)—a conservative academic organization which, at the height of the 1990s culture wars—toiled diligently to assemble stories of alleged victims of PC (Diamond, 1992; Messer-Davidow, 1993; Weisberg, 1992).

In January 1991, *New York* magazine's cover asked the question: "Are You Politically Correct?" Inside, an article included quotes comparing PC to McCarthyism (Taylor, 1991). In April, 1991, *Time* magazine ran a piece contending that a "new intolerance" was afflicting higher education. Emerging forms of thought were fostering a "decline in tolerance" and the "rise of intellectual intimidation.". As evidence of the latter, the author cited examples of "obscure" female authors being studied alongside "famous white men" in a course on 19th century writers and another that examined the "heterosexual bias" of "traditional Western literature.". The article also asserted that "taboos on fields of inquiry" were increasingly endangering "freedom of speech" (Henry, 1991, pp. 66-67).

In this regard, the right's carefully devised campaign was thrust into the media spotlight as a number of publications began parroting conservative talking points. The...

breakthrough for the conservatives came . . . when a large number of mainstream newspapers and magazines repeated the stories about political correctness that the right wing had been circulating for years. These articles were almost uniformly critical of the Left and accepted the conservatives' attacks without questioning their accuracy or their motives. By using a few anecdotes . . . conservatives created 'political correctness' in the eyes of the media, and . . . journalists raced to condemn

the 'politically correct' mob they had 'discovered' in American universities (Wilson, 1995, p. 13).

The anti-PC leitmotif received another boost after George H. W. Bush's 1991 commencement address at the University of Michigan in which he lamented PC as a "movement" that was endangering "free speech . . . across the land" (Bush, 1991, p. 227).¹ Alleged members of the PC "movement" (although it never existed as a 'movement') were demonized as enemies within. George Will suggested that Lynne Cheney, then the chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, had a more difficult job than her husband Dick Cheney, then Secretary of Defence for President Bush. He referred to Lynne Cheney as the "secretary of domestic defense" battling "domestic forces" far more dangerous than "foreign adversaries" since the former were determined to undo the nation's "common culture" (1992, p. 25). In this sense, the anti-PC frame, cultivated for years in corporate-sponsored think-tanks and sensationalized by the media, enabled the right to project itself as virtuous compared to leftists who hated 'freedom' and America itself.

It is important to note, however, that the 'rebranding' of PC was part of a broader offensive—designed to combat the perceived liberal-left stranglehold (presumably unleashed by the egalitarian impulses of the New Deal era) on the academy and American society more generally—that began long before the 'culture wars'. In 1951, William F. Buckley, Jr. published *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of "Academic Freedom"* in which he criticized the idea of academic freedom (at least for communists and liberals) and the notion of the independent academy. Buckley argued that universities should embrace one value system extolling the virtues of capitalism and Christianity and instill it in their students. Professors who deviated from this mission should simply be fired. Jacoby (2005) notes that Buckley's book "can be situated as a salvo in the

McCarthyite attack on the universities" (p. 11). Given his predilections, it was peculiar that Buckley emerged as a spokesperson condemning leftists for stifling 'free speech' at the height of the 1990s culture wars (Buckley, 1993).

Yet, it is worth noting this legacy of conservative pretence with regards to 'free speech' since it has persisted for several decades. Many have argued that the events of 9/11 allowed rightists to once again target academe (Doumani, 2006; Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 2011; Scigliano, 2001; Wilson, 2008). One of the most notorious examples was a campaign undertaken by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA)—an organization founded by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (see below for more on the ISI) with seed money from many of the right's most dependable financiers including the Olin, Bradley and Scaife Foundations—that claims its dedication to the "ideals of academic freedom and free speech" which are at the "core of the American academic tradition" (<https://www.goacta.org>). Yet, that devotion did not extend to those who criticized the Bush administration and its response to 9/11.

In the Fall 2001 edition of its journal/newsletter *Inside Academe*, ACTA resuscitated Will's characterization of Lynne Cheney as the 'secretary of domestic defense,' and called for a renewed commitment to 'Western civilization:':

It was not only America that was attacked, but civilization. We were attacked not for our vices, but for our virtues—for what we stand for. It is our principles embodying the ideals of Western civilization and of free societies everywhere, that draw the hatred of those who despise a world based on liberty and the rule of law. A people cannot be expected to defend what they do not understand. As chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Lynne Cheney championed the study of Western civilization and the American past—for which George Will called her 'the

secretary of domestic defense.' Will's point is now more urgent than ever . . . We must defend the homefront (*Inside Academe*, 2001, p. 1).

Such rhetoric was further displayed in a subsequent ACTA 'report' in which the academy was depicted as a "weak link" undercutting the resolve of a nation that responded to the attacks with "anger, patriotism, and support of military intervention;" it scolded professors for being short on patriotism and long on self-flagellation—an allegation which stemmed from ACTA's perception that some had "pointed accusatory fingers, not at the terrorists, but at America itself" (Martin and Neal, 2002, p. 1). Lapham (2002) likened it to brazen propaganda:

For the last four months the curators of the national news media have done their patriotic best to muffle objections to our worldwide crusade against terrorism . . . but I didn't think that we were well on the way to a ministry of state propaganda until I came across "Defending Civilization," a guide to the preferred forms of free speech issued . . . by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni . . . I've had occasion to read a good deal of fourth-rate agitprop over the last thirty years, but I don't remember an argument as disgraceful as the one advanced by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni under the rubric of 'academic freedom, quality, and accountability' (p. 6).

There were, of course, other efforts to stifle dissent after 9/11 including those initiated by David Horowitz who established the disingenuously named Students for Academic Freedom (SAF) in 2003 to gin up a frenzy about anti-American academics. And, his 'Academic Bill of Rights' (ABOR) essentially "urged a return to the McCarthy era" in order to purge universities of professors who were allegedly "supporting the other side in the war on terror" (Wilson, 2008, p. 5, 6).² There were also pogroms undertaken by media outlets such as Fox News that defined a "patriotic American as a person who did not question the war nor criticize the Bush administration, its motives, or its decisions" (Proffit, 2007, p. 78).

In this regard, conservatives promulgated their own form of PC—patriotic correctness—which refers to:

a multifaceted and multileveled discourse that was promoted as a form of public pedagogy after 9/11 by an ideological coalition of religious fundamentalists, militant neoconservatives and think tank mandarins. Given the enormity of the tragedy and its overwhelming impact on the collective consciousness of the country, culture war veterans, opportunistic demagogues and right-wing campus tyros worked to produce a set of unambiguous and implied rules for what constituted 'acceptable' forms of thought, speech and deed (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 2011, p. xvi).

Proponents of patriotic correctness sought to advance a specific worldview emphasizing:

notions of American 'exceptionalism' and innocence, the 'Christian' foundations of the nation, the supremacy of the American 'free market' and the perils of 'liberalism' . . . many of these ideas existed prior to 9/11 but afterwards they coalesced into a 'grand narrative' of sorts—one that was militaristic, hyper-masculinist and intensely anti-intellectual (Ibid.).

Despite some egregious attacks on the academy, these types of 'patriotic correctness' and their impact on free speech hardly every garnered the attention that PC did in the mainstream media (Wilson, 2008). Arguably, this is "because conservatives have been more effective at advancing their narrative" (Legum and Hellerstein, 2016, p. 13) while "the left isn't really organized to tell the stories of oppression on campus" because they lack the institutional infrastructure to counter the "media narrative of political correctness that's been around for 25 years now" (Wilson, cited in Legum and Hellerstein, 2016, p. 13).

Alvarez (2016) contends that the right has been "indisputably better" at the language ground game than the left:

'Political correctness,' in its current form, is just one of many stock terms and images ('food stamp nation,' 'class warfare,' 'right to work,' pro-abortion,' 'welfare queen,' 'intelligent design') that conservatives repeat in unison enough times that it sticks in political discourse, or reframes the discourse entirely, forcing the rest of us to address and argue down concepts that have often been conjured from thin, hot air. This is, after all, how conservative pollsters and 'wordsmiths' like Frank Luntz make their living (p. 2).

Accordingly, it is worth exploring how PC functions as an ideological code.

Drawing on Marx and Engel's conceptualization of ideology as a form of epistemology that dis-embeds everyday ideas, events, and experiences from their originating social relations, interests and the material conditions in which they were produced, Smith (1995) contends that PC operates

in the field of discourse to structure text or talk, and each instance of its functioning is capable of generating new instances. Reproduction occurs, of course, as people 'pick up' its organization . . . and replicate it in their own talk or writing . . . Once ideological codes are established, they are self-reproducing. Thus, ideological codes operate as a free-floating form of control in the relations of public discourse . . . 'Ideological codes' may be, and perhaps, often are, components of ideological 'master frames.' They operate as 'outriders' of that frame . . . Characteristically, they operate pretty independently as devices, carrying the effects but not the body of the master frame that governed their design. This is their power as discursive devices; this is their utility to the right-wing industries of ideology . . . they become an active currency of ruling operating in the interests of those who set them afloat and may have designed them, but their provenance and ideological 'intention' are not apparent in them" (pp. 26-27).

The transformation of PC to a category of deviance and the widespread currency it obtained in the 1990s enabled it to be summoned in ways that decontextualized the practices and social relations that governed its design as a pejorative phrase. That this transformation was facilitated by a well-established right-wing network and a complicit media was rendered largely invisible.

The 'Culture Wars'—Part II

In January 2015, the same magazine that published Taylor's anti-PC jeremiad in 1991 returned to the topic in the form of Jonathan Chait's piece "Not a Very P.C. Thing to Say" in which he described a resurgence of PC culture that was more pervasive due to the ubiquity of social media:

[I]t would be a mistake to categorize today's p.c. culture as only an academic phenomenon . . . Two decades ago, the only communities where the left could exert such hegemonic control lay within academia, which gave it an influence on intellectual life far out of proportion to its numeric size. Today's political correctness flourishes most consequentially on social media, where it enjoys a frisson of cool and vast new cultural reach. And since social media is also now the milieu that hosts most political debates, the new p.c. has attained an influence over mainstream journalism and commentary beyond that of the old . . . Political correctness is . . . a system of left-wing ideological repression. Not only is it not a form of liberalism; it is antithetical to liberalism (Chait, 2015, p. 2).

Chait goes on to excoriate the "Marxist left" for undermining "liberalism's commitment to protecting the rights of its political opponents" and claims the "modern far left has borrowed the Marxist critique of liberalism and substituted race and gender identities for economic ones" (Ibid., p. 3). Remarkably, Chait echoes the aforementioned FCF's framing of PC as Marxism translated from economic to cultural terms.

Like so many liberals who have expressed what Wright (2016) calls faux-outrage on free speech, Chait misses a crucial point insofar as America "routinely violates the principle of free speech on a massive scale" (p. 1). What such critics...

seem not to recognize is that this is nothing new. It has always done so, since before the country's founding. Suppressing free speech is more American than apple pie. The aggrieved, however, have typically not been the Madeline Albrights and Donald Trumps of the world, or the white male Republicans who don't feel welcome in an anthropology department; they have been the millions of dissenters from mainstream ideologies and institutions (pp.1-2).

While Chait's anti-PC treatise was criticized by progressives in various online venues (Goldberg, 2015), it was embraced by websites such as American Renaissance (AR) which proudly reposted it. AR claims to be the "Internet's premier race-realist site" (<https://www.amren.com>) but what it is, in fact, is a magazine/website produced by the New Century Foundation (NCF)—a "self-styled think tank that promotes pseudo-scientific studies and research that purport to show the inferiority of blacks to whites—although in hifalutin language that avoids open racial slurs and attempts to portray itself as serious scholarship" (Southern Poverty Law Center). Both the magazine and website regularly "feature proponents of eugenics and blatant anti-black racists" and sponsor conferences every other year where "racist 'intellectuals' rub shoulders with Klansmen, neo-Nazis and other white supremacists" (Ibid.). The NCF is led by Jared Taylor who has been called the "cultivated, cosmopolitan face of white supremacy" (Roddy, 2005, p. 2).

Chait concludes by rebuking the 'new' political correctness for making people "afraid to disagree" instead of supporting rational discussion. The...

historical record of political movements that sought to expand freedom for the oppressed by eliminating it for their enemies is dismal. The historical record of American liberalism, which has extended social freedoms to blacks, Jews, gays, and women, is glorious. And that glory rests in its confidence in the ultimate power of reason, not coercion, to triumph (2015, p. 4).

Yet, one may be forgiven for asking whether Chait is naïve enough to believe that white supremacists who so welcomed his article could ever (reasonably or otherwise) agree with the liberal principles he cherishes.

Some of the common targets of the reinvigorated culture wars have been so-called PC concepts such as 'trigger warnings' and 'safe spaces' that appeal to the idea that "millennials are spoiled narcissists" who want to prevent anyone from "expressing opinions that they happen to find offensive" (Weigel, 2016, p. 9). This is quite evident in Lukianoff and Haidt's "The Coddling of the American Mind.". The authors begin by asserting that "something strange is happening at America's colleges and universities" insofar as an "undirected" movement, "driven largely by students" is afoot attempting to "scrub campuses clean of words, ideas, and subjects that might cause discomfort or give offense" (Lukianoff and Haidt, 2015, p. 2). Similar to previous anti-PC narratives, the authors cherry-pick anecdotes and caricature the subjects of their criticism (Weigel, 2016) but do take pains to distinguish the contemporary climate on campuses from that of an earlier generation noting that while prior iterations of PC sought to "restrict speech (specifically hate speech aimed at marginalized groups)" and challenge the "literary, philosophical, and historical canon" so as to "widen it by including more-diverse *{sic}* perspectives," the "current movement is largely about emotional well-being" and presumes "an extraordinary fragility of the collegiate psyche" therefore elevating the "goal of

protecting students from psychological harm" (Lukianoff and Haidt, 2015, p. 4).

The ultimate aim is...

to turn campuses into 'safe spaces' where young adults are shielded from words and ideas that make some uncomfortable. And more than the last, this movement seeks to punish anyone who interferes with that aim, even accidentally . . . It is creating a culture in which everyone must think twice before speaking up, lest they face charges of insensitivity, aggression, or worse (Ibid.)

The authors position themselves as 'objective' observers of the 'harm' done when students are coddled (e.g. students will never be prepared for the workplace if their unreasonable expectations of safety are carried forward). However, when we examine the vector of Lukianoff and Haidt's inquiry and consider their own political proclivities as evidenced in their prior work, it is...

clear that it is those who are decrying racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and other things are the ones being told they are being over-reactive. Nowhere is there a mention of the ways protests against the Israeli occupation are being shouted down by students who claim their feelings as Jewish students are being endangered . . . nor is there any discussion of the ways men on campus are ramping up the charges that women who are protesting sexual harassment and sexual assault are creating a 'threatening climate' for males (Palumbo-Liu, 2016, p. 6).

Their agenda is further revealed towards the end where they recite the time-worn trope of the right that campuses are "generally left-leaning" and intellectually homogenous (Lukianoff and Haidt, 2015, pp. 23-24) and that the problems they identify could be rectified by "a greater commitment . . . to the assembly of a more politically diverse faculty" (p. 26). Here we see echoes of earlier campaigns promoting 'intellectual diversity.'. This is hardly surprising given Lukianoff and Haidt's affiliations.

Lukianoff is President and CEO of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) founded in 1999 by Alan Kors and Harvey Silvergate with generous financing from an assortment of right-wing foundations including Bradley, Coors, Koch and Scaife (sourcewatch.org). Kors (who is affiliated with ACTA) and Silvergate are co-authors of *The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses* which takes aim at the usual cast of villains—sixties radicals, feminists, multiculturalists, etc.—responsible for the 'deplorable' state of higher education.

FIRE is a legal and advocacy organization whose mission is to "defend and sustain individual rights at America's colleges and universities" and challenge the "culture of censorship" wherein students are "expected to share a single viewpoint on hotly debated matters like the meaning and significance of diversity, the definition of social justice, and the impermissibility of 'hate speech.'" It opposes "mandatory 'diversity training' in which students are instructed in an officially-approved ideology" (thefire.org).

Although the FIRE has, in the past, taken up cases on behalf of some who are not white conservatives "under Lukianoff" those examples "have served increasingly as protective coloration for a 'free speech' crusade claiming that it's mainly liberal coddling and progressive cry-bullying that are chilling individual rights." Lukianoff "has been a tactically brilliant point man for a larger, conservative campus campaign of which the FIRE is decidedly a part by virtue of its funding, many of its personnel, and most importantly, its strategy and tactics" (Sleeper, 2016, p. 10, 2). The majority of FIRE's interventions to protect 'free speech' have involved "campus organizations that use hateful rhetoric or seek to exclude potential group members based on sexual orientation" (Vogel, 2017). For example, FIRE has partnered on some cases with the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a "Christian-right powerhouse" founded more than

two decades ago to challenge the "homosexual agenda" which "threatens religious freedom" (Posner, 2018, p. 13). In addition to acting as a primary driver of various 'bathroom bills,' ADF has promoted state 'religious freedom' legislation seeking to enshrine the right to discriminate against people based on sexual orientation. ADF has received substantial funding from the family of Betsy DeVos as well the Edgar and Elsa Prince Foundation which identifies DeVos as its vice-president in its tax filings (Israel, 2014). The latter entity has donated "more than \$1 million to ADF since 2002" (Posner, 2018, p. 15).

In the article, Haidt is identified as a "social psychologist who studies the American culture wars" (Lukianoff and Haidt, 2015, p. 5). Yet, this is misleading as he has been much more than an observer by contributing to "a body of work that underlies the narrative that academe suffers from a leftist ideological uniformity that conflicts with free speech" (Stanley, 2016, p. 2). Haidt is a founder of *Heterodox Academy (HxA)* established in 2015 to support "viewpoint diversity—particularly political and ideological diversity—on university and college campuses" (heterodoxacademy.org). The organization explains its inspiration thusly:

There is a strong consensus in the academic world that many forms of diversity are important. Thinking and scholarship are enhanced when we bring diverse viewpoints to bear on our most pressing issues. Heterodox Academy has made this the core of its mission and motivation. The academic world must welcome and celebrate viewpoint diversity . . . (heterodoxacademy.org).

However, what most concerns *HxA* is the alleged lack of conservative worldviews. Viewpoint diversity appears to be nothing more than a Trojan horse for conservative doctrine. Rightists adroitly appropriate various liberal/left touchstones such as 'diversity' to advance their agenda while

couching it in the progressive language of academia. Similar to predecessors such as ABOR and ACTA, *HxA* evokes the concept of 'intellectual diversity' that is clearly intended to sound benign. In constructing the issue as one of diversity, *HxA* and similar entities make it difficult for critics to mount a successful rebuttal—objections to their proposals could easily be interpreted as endorsements for intellectual homogeneity. And since the concept is based on other kinds of diversity principles such as those related to ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, etc., historically championed by progressives, Haidt, Horowitz and their acolytes can claim that critics of 'viewpoint diversity' are hypocrites. Stanley (2016), however, identifies the faulty logic behind such efforts:

Haidt . . . describes 'left-leaning' institutions as 'cut off' from the moral vocabulary required to defend freedom of speech, and led by social-justice concerns that chill free speech . . . The goal of the Heterodox Academy is to persuade universities to hire scholars who question this narrative, thereby restoring free speech . . . The political diversity at issue in the writings of Heterodox Academy members is the narrow spectrum between liberals and conservatives. These categories are occasionally used as if they naturally corresponded to 'Democrat' and 'Republican'. This bizarrely narrow view of political diversity conveniently fits into an argument to hire conservatives, but not Marxists or critical race theorists. 'Liberal' and 'leftist' are used interchangeably throughout their writings, as if there isn't a feminist critique of liberalism. Where are the Marxists or feminists in economics, a discipline that is, according to Haidt, 'the only social science that has some real diversity'"? (pp. 2-3)

The ultimate aim of the *HxA* sounds much like earlier rightist efforts that equate 'diversity' with 'balance'—particularly political balance. Yet in doing so, they conflate the ideas of academic freedom with freedom of speech and undermine standards of disciplinary competence and professorial authority. Scott (2017) distinguishes between "academic freedom—a protection of faculty rights based

on disciplinary competence—and freedom of speech—the right to express one's ideas, however true or false they may be" (p. 1). The right's reference to free speech...

sweeps away the guarantees of academic freedom, dismissing as so many violations of the constitution the thoughtful, critical articulation of ideas, the demonstration of proof based on rigorous examination of evidence, the distinction between true and false, between careful and sloppy work, the exercise of reasoned judgment. Their free speech means the right to one's opinion, however unfounded, however ungrounded, and it extends to every venue, every institution" (Scott, 2017, p. 4).

Ideological diversity schemes recognize no authority in the classroom.

Professors and students, as bearers of beliefs, are placed on equal footing despite the obvious disparities in academic training while education is reduced to a self-designed laundry list of personal student preferences.

For example, Scott (2017) refers to the "Campus Free Speech Act" crafted by the Goldwater Institute and taken up by various states and the NAS that "calls on professors to present both sides of an issue in the classroom in order to protect the students' right of free speech" (p. 4). Students are "allowed to say anything they want, removing intellectual authority from the professor" (Ibid.). Similar to previous efforts, such proposed practices, by their very nature, seek to "undermine the concept of informed authority, teacher expertise, and professional academic standards" (Giroux, 2006, p. 24). Merely because students may disagree with an "unsettling idea" does "not mean that they have the authority, expertise, education, or power to dictate for all their classmates what should be stated, discussed, or taught in a classroom" (Ibid.).

Students, undoubtedly, have the right to express opinions and one of the central tenets of a critical pedagogical approach is to value the experiences they bring

to the classroom. However, that does not negate the fact that faculty are members of the scholarly community whereas students are not. Entry into a learned discourse includes lengthy, rigorous training premised upon a scholar's acknowledged contributions to their discipline based on peer-reviewed processes—on arguments rooted in certain forms of reason and certain kinds of evidence. The

scope of academic freedom is not determined by First Amendment principles of freedom of speech, but by the metrics of professional competence . . . [d]isciplines are grounded on the premise that some ideas are better than others; disciplinary communities claim the prerogative to discriminate between competent and incompetent work (Post, cited in Scott, 2017, p. 4).

Disciplinary associations "train and certify this competence, a form of expert knowledge we depend on for the advancement of knowledge in all fields" (Scott, 2017, p. 4). Whereas "free speech makes no distinction about quality; academic freedom does" (Ibid). Beyond acknowledging this important distinction, there are two additional points worth mentioning for they again illustrate the forked tongue with which conservatives often speak.

First, conservatives have long chastised notions of 'big government' as paternalistic—contra to their mantra of 'personal responsibility'. Yet, intellectual diversity initiatives basically invite governmental policing of campus activities including hiring processes so as to ensure—as Lukianoff and Haidt's call for—a more 'politically' diverse faculty. Second, when the initial assault on PC reached a fever pitch in the late 1980s and early 1990s, authors including D'Souza (1991) and Kimball (1990) were railing against disciplines such as women's studies, racial and ethnic studies as illegitimate because they were rooted in the 'feel-good' culture ostensibly catalyzed by the 1960s. And,

Horowitz made a career, particularly in the 1990s, from disparaging the narratives of 'victimology' that presumably provided the scaffolding upon which those disciplines were built. The pages of Horowitz's defunct journal *Heterodoxy* were routinely crammed with complaints about how demands for representation (of women and minorities) were based on ideological rather than scholarly consideration.³ Yet, supporters of intellectual/viewpoint diversity are promoting the same 'feel-good' sensibility with proposed models that assert the rights of conservative students to feel 'comfortable' about what they are learning regardless of evidentiary and intellectual standards. As Scott notes, are we to assume that creationism should "trump science in the biology curriculum" merely because some students may believe in it?" Are professors "being 'ideological' when they refuse to accept biblical accounts as scientific evidence?" (2017, p. 6).

Secondly, many advocates of intellectual/viewpoint diversity encourage conservative students to embrace the mantle of victimhood and insist upon inclusion and representation of their views *solely on the basis of political ideology*. The right has simply redefined the victim; conservative students are cast as hapless dupes who need legislative muscle to defend them from the forces of leftist iniquity. Who then is seeking to coddle whom?

There is no mistaking that *HxA's* mission is about advancing rightist ideology. Indeed, prior to developing its own guide to colleges that best provide 'diverse' perspectives, *HxA* recommended that students and parents consult "Choosing the Right College"—a publication of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI). It is worth a detour, for the purposes of elucidation, to briefly explore the ISI for it has been integral to the rightist network supporting the anti-PC campaign.

ISI (formerly named the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists) was established in 1953 by Frank Chodorov to counter the "progressive ideology" that was "taking over American colleges". Leading the charge was William F. Buckley, Jr. who served as its first president (<https://home.isi.org/about/about/isi>). It is the oldest national college conservative organization in the U.S. and it has been bountifully funded by monies from the Scaife, Olin and Bradley foundations over the years; its assets as of June 30, 2016 amounted to more than \$11 million. The ISI is dedicated to teaching students ideas that are "rarely" taught in the classroom—the virtues of "the free market, the American founding and, Western civilization". It promotes the six pillars of a "free society"—limited government, individual liberty, personal responsibility, the rule of law (particularly the U.S. Constitution), a free market economy and traditional values—specifically the "customs, conventions and norms of the Judeo-Christian tradition" (www.isi.org).

Its list of Emeritus Trustees reflects a who's who of the right, including Richard DeVos; among its "prominent alumni" are the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, current Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito as well as media firebrands Ann Coulter and Laura Ingraham. It has sponsored various 'educational' events including speeches by leading lights such as D'Souza, Kimball and Horowitz. One of its journals, *The Intercollegiate Review*, frequently prints harangues that play to cultural animosities against women, racial and sexual minorities.⁴ In its first issue after 9/11 an essay by Donald Kagan, "Terrorism and the Intellectuals," castigated left academics who questioned the dominant storyline that hatred of the U.S. stemmed from the nation's commitment to free, open, democratic and tolerant forms of governance. From Kagan's perspective, it was unfathomable for rational individuals to argue that a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of

international relations, American complicity in arming tyrannical regimes, its flouting of international laws, and its dominance of the world economy was needed to fully comprehend acts of terrorism. Given, *HxA's* previous endorsement of the ISI's guide to colleges, one is left to wonder how such examples of ISI's 'scholarly' offerings align with its stated goal of supporting "thinking and scholarship" that bring "diverse viewpoints to bear on our most pressing issues."

I have offered examples of the right's hypocrisy not merely to demonstrate the depth of their duplicity but also to illustrate the interconnections between those supposed champions of free speech and their ideological affiliations which place them clearly within a coordinated network of organizations whose mission is to advance rightist ideology on campuses and beyond. In 1984, Saloma described this as a "labyrinth" that, if left unchecked, would push the Republican party sharply to right. Today, we are witnessing how this network has moved its ideas "from the fringes of the conservative movement into the heart of the nation's government" (O'Harrow & Boburg, 2017, p. 1) on the coattails of its decades-long anti-PC campaign.

Education and Equity Under Siege

Betsy DeVos—the Anti-Public Education Secretary of Education

Veterans of the 'culture wars' now occupy several key posts in the Trump administration. The most obvious is Betsy DeVos who, like Trump, "celebrates being 'politically incorrect'" and who once claimed at a 2015 conference that "government really sucks" (People for the American Way, 2017, p. 2). At the Conservative Political Action Conference in 2017, she invited the audience to "fight against the education establishment" before deriding faculty members at the nation's colleges and universities for allegedly telling students:

what to do, what to say, and more ominously, what to think. They say that if you voted for Donald Trump, you're a threat to the university community. But the real threat is silencing the First Amendment rights of people with who you disagree (DeVos, cited in Gasman, 2017, p. 2).

Before exploring DeVos' place in the rightist labyrinth, it is worth noting the sheer insincerity of her First Amendment remarks given that she and Trump nominated Kenneth Marcus to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the Department of Education (DOE). Marcus is a member of the Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies; the organization is an associate member of the right-wing State Policy Network (SPN), a web of 'think tanks' and tax-exempt organizations bankrolled to the tune of more than \$80 million (as of 2011) by the Bradley, Olin, Scaife and Koch Foundations (Center for Media and Democracy, 2013). He is also the founder and president of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law where he has:

made a practice . . . of targeting the First Amendment rights of students who are critical of Israeli policies and advocate for Palestinian rights. He has lobbied for federal and state legislation that would impose on the DOE and universities a redefinition of anti-Semitism so vague and broad that it would encompass virtually any criticism of Israel and classify advocacy for Palestinian rights as inherently anti-Semitic (Khalidi, 2018, p. 5).

Although his various legislative attempts (funded, in part, by David Horowitz) previously failed based on widespread concerns they would infringe on free speech rights, after being confirmed by the U.S. Senate in June 2018, Marcus continued the fight for the aforementioned redefinition. In September 2018, without any public consultation, the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) adapted his controversial stance which essentially classifies all criticism of the Israeli government as inherently anti-Semitic.

Marcus' initiative was heralded by right-wing, pro-Israel entities but raised red flags amongst free speech advocacy groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which contends that the "overbroad definition" risks "incorrectly equating constitutionally protected criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, making it likely that free speech will be chilled on campus" (ACLU, 2018).

Marcus is well-known for his public attacks on students and academics who support Palestinian rights and a recent documentary series convincingly suggests the Israeli government has actively funded and guided concerted campaigns on American soil to spy on, smear and sabotage critics of the Israeli nation-state (The Lobby-USA).⁵ Such activities do not seem to be considered problematical by the right's free speech 'champions.'

As well, given Marcus' affiliations with the hard-right, there are serious doubts about his ability to carry out the mission of the OCR which is to "ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation through vigorous enforcement of civil rights" (Ayoub, Agnew and Tobin, 2018, p. 1). The concerns are based on his "extensive history of targeting constitutionally protected speech, of hostility towards affirmative action and civil rights, of anti-LGBTQ positions, and of lobbying for discrimination in university funding based on political viewpoints" (Ibid., p. 1-2).

Like Trump, DeVos has positioned herself as a culture warrior and has broken with the tradition of previous occupants of her office (Jaschik, 2017), arguably making her "the most ideological and anti-public-education secretary in the more than 40 years of the department's history" (Strauss, 2017b, p. 1). Despite being unqualified for the position and despite an unprecedented backlash against her nomination, DeVos capitalized on her extended families' ties to the

right and the Trump administration to assume the role of Secretary of Education after a contentious confirmation process that required Vice President Mike Pence to cast the first tiebreaking vote in American history in order to confirm a Cabinet nominee.⁶

Betsy DeVos is situated at the intersection of two powerful, billionaire families that helped to build the Christian right (Stewart, 2016). She is the daughter of the late wealthy industrialist Edgar Prince who made his fortune in auto-parts manufacturing. Her father-in-law, Richard DeVos, Sr., whose estimated worth is \$5.1 billion according to Forbes, is a co-founder of Amway, a multilevel marketing empire that some have likened to a pyramid scheme (Stanton, 2017; Stewart, 2016). Both Prince and DeVos, Sr. come from the "very heart" of a "small circle of conservative billionaires" (including the notorious Koch brothers) who have played a central role in bankrolling "the rightward march of the Republican Party" (Mayer, 2016, p. 6) much like Saloma predicted. Both were founding members of the Council for National Policy (CNP)—a secretive organization established in 1981 as a "counterweight against liberal domination of the American agenda" (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 2011, p. 72) and which, according to Zirin, "makes the Masons look like paparazzi-hungry starlets" (2010, p. 2). The CNP, often referred to as a "little-known club of a few hundred of the most powerful conservatives in the country" (Mayer, 2016, p. 3) was formed by the elite of the far-right John Birch Society, an organization that believes liberals are seeking to replace the nations of 'Western civilization' with a one-world socialist government (Berlet and Lyons, 2000).

CNP meets clandestinely three times a year and brings together powerful evangelical activists, wealthy donors and Republican politicians whose intent is to pull the United States even further to the right. Although it enjoys tax-exempt status as an 'educational' foundation, it is shrouded in mystery. Its

members, who pay thousands in annual dues, and its invited guests are forbidden to discuss what happens at their meetings with the press or the public (Conason, 2007; Goldberg, 2006). The secrecy may have something to do with CNP's theocratic intentions—the imposition of fundamentalist Christian ideology onto all aspects of public life, including education. Indeed, speakers at CNP events have called for the overthrow of the National Education Association because it allegedly demands "allegiance to a central atheistic uniformity" (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 2011, p. 73).

Members of the Prince and DeVos families have long been funders of the religious right and cultural conservatism—from 2000-2014 they collectively spent nearly \$170 million with the bulk of it going to fund "Christian schools, evangelical missions, and conservative, free-market think tanks" (Rizga, 2017, p. 5). They have been staunch supporters of anti-affirmative action initiatives, anti-LGBT, anti-gay marriage and anti-union policies. Betsy DeVos served for a decade on the board of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty which endorses an amalgam of religious conservatism and unrestrained capitalism and provides religious rationales for right-wing economic policies. The DeVoses were instrumental in turning their home turf of Michigan into a right-to-work state and they have been ardent opponents of campaign finance reform measures. They have also munificently financed right-wing think tanks and advocacy organizations including, but not limited to, the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, Federalist Society, the Traditional Values Coalition, the ISI and Michigan's Center for Public Policy which has championed the privatization of the education system (Docksai, 2016; Mayer, 2016; Rizga, 2017).

The DeVoses have played a pivotal role in education 'reform', specifically school 'choice.'. Supporters of choice were "practically a fringe movement circa

2000" before three DeVos family philanthropic foundations began pouring millions into mainstreaming the idea and encouraging others to do the same (Docksai, 2016, p. 2). Choice emphasizes individual family preferences in how students and funding are distributed but it is essentially a euphemism for privatization that squares "neatly with the neoliberal reform agenda of pushing public education into the realm of private business" (Chen, 2017, p. 2) and with Milton Friedman's vision of completely privatizing public education and leaving it to the whims of the free-market (People for the American Way, 2017).

For DeVos, however, there is also a religious component involved as most of her familial philanthropy has demonstrated a "clear preference for Christian private schools"—a "reflection of the DeVoses' lifelong dedication to building 'God's kingdom' through education" (Rizga, 2017, p. 5). In May 2018, she proposed eliminating constitutional restrictions on spending public tax dollars for religious education, expressing her disdain for "sycophants of the system" and "powerful interests that want to deprive families of their God-given freedom" to choose private, religious schools (DeVos cited in Otterman, 2018, p. 1). In a speech after the tour, she claimed that such restrictions should be "assigned to the ash heap of history" (DeVos, cited in Klein, 2018, p.1). In keeping with her theocratic worldview what she is, effectively, advocating is that the separation of church and state be relegated to the dustbin of history.

Together, Trump and DeVos have a "radical transformation in mind" for the educational system (May, 2018). They have proposed devastating cuts to existing programs and unprecedented amounts of public money (more than \$1 billion) to expand school choice which includes \$500 million in federal incentives for school districts willing to experiment with a variety of privatization initiatives. Market-based processes such as choice and vouchers not only "undercut public education" but also "increase racial and economic

segregation" as a "pretense of educational opportunity" (Green and Castro, 2017, p. 913). Moreover, the push for more choice comes despite an abysmal record in DeVos' home state of Michigan. The Detroit, Flint and Grand Rapids school districts have among the largest share of students in charter schools and as Michigan expanded them, its rank has fallen with most charters performing well below the state average (People for the American Way, 2017).

Recently, DeVos recommended to slash the Department of Education's budget by 5 percent (\$3.6 billion), eliminate funding for after-school programs for impoverished youth and a grant program that provides assistance to low-income students for college in favour of spending more to promote charter schools, magnet schools and private school vouchers. In March 2018, in a rare display of bipartisanship, the U.S. Congress rejected Trump and DeVos' agenda—at least in terms of school choice proposals. However, DeVos has already done considerable damage on other fronts. She cancelled an Obama administration program called 'Opening Doors, Expanding Opportunity' designed to help communities desegregate schools and overhauled the rules for investigating discrimination in ways that have undermined the enforcement of civil rights, particularly for transgender students. DeVos formally rescinded Obama-era guidance on how schools should handle sexual assaults under Title IX law based on her claims that they "enable 'kangaroo courts'" and deny due process for the accused (Adetiba, 2017, p. 2).⁷

DeVos has also been a gift to the for-profit education industry, hiring staff and attorneys who have worked in that sector, including individuals from institutions that have been "fined repeatedly by state and federal regulators for misleading students through deceptive marketing and false statistics" (Dayen, 2017, p. 5). She has moved to weaken and/or rewrite policies implemented to protect students—most significantly the Borrower Defense and Gainful

Employment rules. The former rule was designed to safeguard student loan borrowers by enabling them to cancel debt if they were defrauded by predatory institutions. The latter measured debt to income ratios of students and established checks and balances for colleges and universities, essentially compelling for-profits to make good on their promises of helping students pursue a viable career path by requiring them to assess and report on after-graduation results. Taken together, the actions taken by DeVos thus far reflect the desire to advance a host of religious and economic causes her family has supported for decades: dismantling public education because it is believed to be a mechanism for brainwashing children into "Godless secularism" (Stewart, 2016, p. A31) and promoting the other object of the right's worship—an unfettered free market.

It should be noted, however, that DeVos did not singlehandedly develop these radical proposals. On that front, there was another significant player involved—David Horowitz—who took advantage of his ties to the Trump campaign (vis-à-vis Stephen Miller) to provide a plan that Miller ensured became part of Trump's education platform (O'Harrow and Boburg, 2017; Horowitz, 2017). Indeed, Horowitz has emerged as quite an influential behind-the-scenes figure in the Trump administration.

The Ties that Bind: David Horowitz, Jeff Sessions and Stephen Miller

At an event shortly after the 2016 election, Horowitz read out a list of people his Freedom Center (hereafter DHFC) had supported over the years who had come to occupy positions (some since departed) in the Trump administration. It included Steve Bannon, Kellyanne Conway, Vice-President Mike Pence, Reince Preibus, Jeff Sessions, Stephen Miller and at least six others (O'Harrow and Boburg, 2017, p.14).⁸ In many respects, Trump's ascendancy to the White House was a crowning achievement for the DHFC, a self-described "school for

political warfare" that has, for decades, sought to cultivate a more combative type of conservative leadership (Ibid, p. 2).

As previously noted, Horowitz is a veteran of the 1990s culture wars and was at the forefront of a post-9/11 crusade against the 'left' academy. In addition to his ABOR, the creation of SAF and other efforts to discredit higher education, Horowitz sought to stifle the free speech of those who criticized George W. Bush's 'war on terror'. While the rubble was still smoldering at Ground Zero, Horowitz used the DHFC to garner support for the 'National Campaign to Take Back our Campuses' which would battle the "left's conversion of universities into little more than huge megaphones for anti-American rhetoric" (Horowitz, cited in Durham, 2004, p. 18). In addition to his blatant exploitation of 9/11, Horowitz also utilized a super-patriotic theme—his adversaries were anti-American—that constituted a "recycled denunciation" which worked "wonders during the McCarthy period" (Brodsky, 2005, p. 4).

Horowitz is also one of the key architects of the 'Islamophobia industry' which has sought to define Muslims as the enemy and universities as terrorist enablers. Under the rubric of his "Terrorism Awareness Project" (TAP), Horowitz initiated "Islamofascism Awareness Week" (IFAW)—a weeklong series of workshops and speeches that took place from October 22-26, 2007. The purpose of the inaugural IFAW was to refute the "two big lies of the political left"—that Bush "created the war on terror" and that global warming posed a "greater danger to Americans than the terrorist threat" and to challenge academics who were creating "sympathy for the enemy" (Horowitz, cited in Jaschik, 2007, p. 1).

Of course, Islamofascism was a "highly emotional propaganda term intended to conflate a variety of groups . . . into one big murderball" by "evoking the clash

of civilizations, religious apocalypse, implacable enemies, the folly of compromise and Hitler" (Pollitt, 2007, p. 1). The term subsequently became a staple of right-wing commentary designed to rally foot soldiers—hard-core racists, anti-immigrant nativists, Christian fundamentalists and culture war veterans—to the cause of American imperialism post-9/11 and to foment hostility toward Muslims. Indeed, the Southern Poverty Law center has called Horowitz "the godfather of the modern anti-Muslim movement" (cited in Seidman, 2017, p. 2). One of Horowitz's comrades on the "extremist Islamophobic right" (Seidman, 2017, p. 2) is (now former) Attorney General Jeff Sessions whose racism and nativism made him a darling of the hard right and a frequent speaker/attendee at retreats organized by Horowitz. In 2014, while accepting DHFC's 'Annie Taylor Award for Courage,' Sessions praised Horowitz as someone he greatly admired (Seidman, 2017).⁹

Like Horowitz, DeVos, and other members of the Trump administration, Sessions has a history of decrying PC and has weighed in on recent 'free speech' controversies. In a September 2017 address at Georgetown University, he criticized college campuses for becoming "an echo chamber of political correctness and homogenous thought, a shelter for fragile egos" (Sessions, cited in Harris, 2017, p. 1). Channeling the 'coddling' rhetoric, Sessions chastised "safe spaces" in what was one, among many, incongruities in a speech surrounded by "billowing clouds of hypocrisy" (Sullivan, 2017, p. 1). His talk took place in a safe space of its own, with an invitation-only crowd and pre-screened students who asked pre-screened questions while protesters were penned off in 'free speech' zones (Stern, 2017). Citing a 2017 FIRE report, Sessions lamented that "freedom of thought and speech" were "under attack" on American campuses and vowed to "enforce federal law, defend free speech, and protect students' free expression from whatever end of the political spectrum it may come" (Sullivan, 2016, p. 1). Yet, one might be sceptical given his past

imbroglios, particularly a 1996 (unsuccessful) attempt to prevent the Fifth Annual Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Conference of the Southeastern United States from meeting at the University of Alabama (Stern, 2017). In his pleas to the university, Sessions complained the school should have been "more aggressive" in halting the event "before it was scheduled" and that it was "bending too far" in the direction of "political correctness" (Merlan, 2016, p. 2).

Despite vowing to protect all expression regardless of where it falls on the political spectrum, Sessions mainly focused on the 'suffering' of provocateurs such as Ben Shapiro and Milo Yiannopoulos (both of whom have been promoted on Horowitz's website) who have experienced pushback on campuses and the plight of students such as Chike Uzuegbunam who filed a lawsuit against Georgia Gwinnett College after he was asked to restrict his proselytizing to one of the campus's designated free speech zones. Uzuegbunam was prone to telling others they would burn in hell if they did not accept Christ as their saviour. The aforementioned ADF is representing him (Kelderman, 2017).

Sessions has, so far, failed to weigh in on racist, misogynist attacks aimed at leftists who have had to cancel public speaking events because of credible threats to their lives and other instances when professors critical of the Trump administration have been subjected to harassment campaigns (Harris, 2017). Nor has he engaged in campus free speech fights involving students kneeling during the national anthem to protest police brutality and racial inequality (Holden, 2017). Rather, he has concentrated mainly on supporting those who are 'threatened' by coddled, politically correct snowflakes. Predictably, FIRE has lauded his efforts.

Ioffe (2016) points to Horowitz and Sessions' long-time friendship as a major factor which led the former to recommend his young mentee, Stephen Miller, as

a political aide to Sessions in 2009. Horowitz explains how his post-9/11 campaign found a following among younger conservatives "who had been schooled by their leftist antagonists in the art of political warfare" (2017, p. 2). In an obsequious tribute Horowitz recounts his first encounter with Miller in 2001 when the latter was a student at Santa Monica High School (Ibid.). Miller grew disenchanted with what he perceived to be his school's insufficient post-9/11 patriotism and became embroiled in a dispute with administrators. To express his outrage, Miller launched a public campaign (initiated on right-wing talk radio) that Horowitz vigorously supported on his Frontpagemag.com website. Miller subsequently formed a chapter of SAF and invited Horowitz to speak at his school.

Since his teenage years, Miller has earned a reputation as a rabble-rouser penning incendiary tracts such as "Political Correctness Out of Control" in which he inveighed against Hispanic students for lacking basic English skills, castigated Santa Monica High's practice of making announcements in both English and Spanish, decried the school's policy of providing condoms to students (because he believed it promoted sexual promiscuity), lambasted educators for discussing American imperialism and claimed that "Osama Bin Laden would feel very welcome at Santa Monica High School" (Miller, 2002, p. 2). The thread that connects many of his writings is one of conservative, white male victimhood coupled with an affinity for right-wing nationalism (Cohan, 2017; Ioffe, 2016; Parton, 2017). Before his high school graduation, Miller had appeared on conservative talk radio 70 times upbraiding political correctness, multiculturalism and immigration.

Miller continued on a similar path at Duke University where he joined the Conservative Union, became head of SAF's campus chapter and invited Horowitz to speak on numerous occasions (Cohan, 2017). He was the first

national coordinator of Horowitz's TAP and was instrumental in organizing IFAW while at Duke. Publicity for IFAW-related events included advertisements featuring the tagline "What Americans Need to Know about Jihad.". The author of the jihad advertisement was Richard Spencer who was then a Ph.D. candidate in Duke's history department but left before completing his degree to "become the founder of the National Policy Institute, a white-nationalist think tank and one of the intellectual leaders of the so-called alt-right movement, which gained potency during the 2016 presidential campaign" (Cohan, 2017, p. 13). Spencer, a featured speaker at the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia—whose audiences often respond to him with Nazi salutes—claims he mentored Miller after they met in 2006 (Ibid., p. 14).

While Miller and others affiliated with the current White House have identified PC as a danger to free speech, Loomis (2016) contends that Trumpism poses a more dire threat through vehicles such as the Professor Watchlist (PWL). PWL, the brainchild of Turning Point USA (TPUSA) founder Charlie Kirk was launched two weeks after Trump's election to "expose and document college professors who discriminate against conservative students and advance leftist propaganda in the classroom" ([professorwatchlist.org/About Us](http://professorwatchlist.org/About%20Us)). Established in 2012, TPUSA (whose mantra is "Big Government Sucks") deems itself the "largest and fastest growing youth organization in America" (tpusa.com). It is heavily funded by the usual assortment of right-wing sugar daddies including the Bradley and Richard and Helen DeVos Foundations. Its mission is to "identify, educate, train, and organize students to promote the principles of freedom, free markets and limited government" (tpusa.com) but whose practical goal is to antagonize as "many of those students' liberal peers as possible" (Feinberg, 2018, p. 1).

TPUSA hosts an annual 'retreat' that, in 2016, was sponsored by a dozen rightist entities including FreedomWorks which originated from a radical group founded by the billionaire Koch brothers. It has also partnered with the ISI and the DHFC; FIRE has supported TPUSA events. In 2017, Kirk spoke at Horowitz's "Restoration Weekend" where he described the DHFC as a "cornerstone of the growth of Turning Point USA" (desmogblog.com). Indeed, the "central Turning Point USA strategy" borrows heavily from the "playbooks of older conservative campus groups" such as the DHFC (Guinto, 2018, p. 6).

TPUSA has close ties to the Trump administration. Kirk worked as a youth outreach specialist for Trump's campaign and Trump family members have been frequent speakers at TPUSA forums. In 2017, Trump lavished praise on Kirk amidst a controversy enveloping his organization—the tweet appeared one day after an investigation by *The New Yorker* uncovered racist text messages sent by Crystal Clanton, a former top official in TPUSA.¹⁰ And, in March 2018, Trump referred to Kirk as "a great warrior" (Ibid., p. 3) while Kirk interviewed him at a White House youth forum.

The PWL has been rightfully compared to McCarthyism; yet there is something different and frightening about an age of emboldened white nationalists and others on what used to be the fringe of the far right using various platforms to silence voices they do not agree with. Hence, while academics may be inclined to dismiss the PWL as the "amateurish rantings of a few extreme conservatives, we cannot ignore its potential as a harbinger of efforts by Donald Trump and his ilk to suppress free speech and dissent" (Dreier, 2016, p. 6-7).

The hypocrisy of rightists who claim the mantle of 'free speech' must be exposed and challenged. Free speech is not something they cherish, rather, they have cleverly weaponized it to their advantage. Progressives must also be

vigilant about uncovering the well-financed, right-wing network that supports 'free speech' campaigns, revealing its underlying aims and opposing its regressive agenda. As Sleeper (2017) notes, the "real threat is a powerful current in our national life" that conservatives refuse to name: "the lavishly funded, brilliantly orchestrated 'free speech on campus' campaign to vindicate 'market forces'" (p.2).

Conclusion

Ruth Levitas (1986) long ago argued that the right's attempt to control the cultural sphere was largely motivated by economic imperatives. For rightists, culture and economics are intertwined, since their correlation is necessary for both the efficient functioning of capitalism and the hegemony of White, patriarchal ideology. However, the architects of cultural conservatism consciously moved away from an exclusive emphasis on economics, noting in 1987, that the politics that would carry them into the future would be based on culture. For several decades, considerable financial resources have been poured into constructing an infrastructure to extol the 'virtues' of the free market. At times, these virtues are unashamedly championed (as with ISI and TPUSA) but most often they are shrouded in moralistic sermons about 'Western civilization', liberty and free speech. Regardless of the vocabulary used, the network of foundations, policy institutes and campus organizations that helped propel Trump to the White House share that basic goal. To paraphrase Frank (2004), the leaders of the anti-PC backlash may talk culture, but they walk corporate. They have become adept at marshalling cultural anger to achieve economic ends; it is those achievements—including rolling back many of the democratic gains dating back to the New Deal—that are the conservative movement's proudest successes.

Undoubtedly, anti-PC in the Trump era has taken on a much more overtly racist, xenophobic tenor—opening the floodgates for white supremacists to let it 'all hang out' under the guise of free speech. Values such as openness, inclusivity and respect for difference are increasingly under siege as Trumpites seek to vilify them as antithetical to the splendor of a once 'great' America. However, the sentiments that rouse Trump's base have always been there, percolating within the cauldron of cultural conservatism.

Nonetheless, we must not lose sight of the anti-PC brigade's real target: left progressivism which has historically animated various struggles for workers' and civil rights, environmental protections, access to decent education and other public goods. Contrary to the mantra 'Big Government Sucks,' progressivism is rooted in the idea that governments have a role to play in restraining the excesses of big business, providing some semblance of a safety net, advancing the cause of equality, and promoting the common good rather than narrow corporate interests. It is precisely those ideas—even in their most liberal diluted versions—that the right seeks to disembowel. And, decade after decade, it has been persistent in this pursuit.

Opposition to the 'left' academy has never been a mere passing fancy for conservatives; it has been a centerpiece of their agenda for decades. Despite the fact that the academy is circumscribed by its socio-economic context, the neoliberal ideology that has infected it, and that it often contributes to the manufacturing of an intelligentsia which produces knowledge conducive to the status quo, it is viewed as an obstacle to the complete triumph of conservative (and corporate) hegemony. Rightists wish to 'take back' the academy because it remains one of the principal locations in advanced capitalist society for the articulation of radically oppositional views. Much to the chagrin of conservatives, campuses have long been incubators for dissident thought and

movements for social change. Mass mobilizations against imperial wars, repressive regimes, racial, gender and sexual oppression, environmental degradation and other forms of social injustice have often been nurtured by faculty and students who had the temerity to speak truth to power.

But more threatening to the big-moneyed interests behind the anti-PC campaign is that campuses *have*, on occasion, been breeding grounds for active resistance to the destructive dynamics of their beloved free market fundamentalism. For those who fancy a return to the robber baron era—and let us be clear that the most recent Republican tax bill is a throwback to the Gilded Age (Burmila, 2017)—the academy is, indeed, a dangerous place. Rightists fear the power of critical discourses that interrogate the legitimacy of corporate rule, facile justifications for elite control and social as well as economic inequality. As Gramsci (1971) observed many years ago, education is a crucial site; the battle over what is taught, how knowledge is produced and for what purpose, is both—at the symbolic and political levels—a battle for the hegemony of society at large. This is something that conservatives and corporatists have long understood.

In order to confront the virulent fundamentalist nationalism and fascistic tendencies currently engulfing the U.S. (and other countries) and beat back the armies of the right shepherded by dyspeptic demagogues who are only too willing to accord blame for the real problems in our nations on scapegoats including immigrants, racial, ethnic and sexual minorities, feminists, and leftists in general, educators would do well to accept McLaren's (2016) invitation to "rethink the nature and purpose of teaching in Trumpland," rebuild the ranks of "critical educators" and take our "fight to new levels of struggle" (p. 5). To this end, there is a pressing urgency to revisit critical pedagogy—a pedagogy dedicated to social and economic justice—and resurrect the radicalism which

birthed it, but which has—to a large extent—been domesticated by liberal education.

In an era where spectacle and 'alternative facts' have been elevated to dizzying heights, where media outlets (except Fox News) are routinely castigated as 'enemies' of the people and disparaged for seeking the truth with hyperbolic catchphrases such as 'fake news,', where critical thought is under assault, where what little democracy remains is being systematically dismantled, educational spaces must be engaged, urgently and unrelentingly. As the moneyed manacles of conservatism seek to further the rightward drift of our body politic, progressive pedagogues must be diligent in protecting spaces where the 'ruthless criticism' of all that exists is possible. We must use them to confront the myths—those that dullen critical sensibilities and promote a perpetual state of historical amnesia—propagated by the Tweeter-in-Chief and his band of "Make American Great Again" quislings. But we must also simultaneously develop a discourse of hope—critique and hope must be engaged dialectically. Critique, however necessary, is not enough and if severed from hope can easily result in despondency or worse, cynicism. Following Freire, we need to make clear that "the absence of hope" is not normal; nor should it be 'normalized' (1998, p. 69). As we interrogate 'common sense' perceptions that rationalize social injustices, we must also articulate a pedagogy of possibility and advance an alternative social vision of what the world might look like if freed from the mind-numbing ideologies that buttress the social universe of capital. We must demonstrate, in very practical and actionable ways, how the quality of our lives may be improved; how struggles for social justice—that are not antiseptically cleaved from those for economic justice—can be forged through careful analysis and oppositional work.

We must be guided by the Freirean notion that "there is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process" (Shaul, 1970, p. 15). Rather,

education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring conformity to it, *or* it becomes . . . the means by men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Ibid.).

At this time in Trumplandia, marked as it is by authoritarianism, white supremacy, homophobia and misogyny as well as policies blatantly designed to further entrench corporate rule and redistribute wealth upward, abdicating our pedagogical role in challenging *what is* and envisioning *what could be* must not be an option.

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¹ The irony of Bush emerging as a defender of free speech only months after he and Pentagon had staged one of the most abominable campaigns against freedom of information in American history was not lost on critics at the time.

² More on David Horowitz's prominent role in the rise of Trump is subsequently discussed.

³ All back issues of *Heterodoxy* are available on Horowitz's Front Page Magazine website—<https://www.frontpagemag.com/point>

⁴ Journal archives available on ISI's website provide numerous examples.

⁵ *The Lobby-USA*, is a four-part undercover investigation into the Israeli government's covert influence campaign in the United States. The series which was produced by al-Jazeera, but initially censored after intensive Israel lobby pressure not to air the film, is now available on-line.

⁶ DeVos's youngest brother Erik was a key figure on Trump's transition team and is currently being investigated (as of this writing) by Special Counsel Robert Mueller as part of his ongoing probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 election. Before his affiliation with Trump, Erik Prince was best known for founding Blackwater (now Academi), a private security (mercenary) firm that was awarded hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. government contracts in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—two-thirds of which were of the no-bid variety—and their employees made more than 100 times the pay of an average U.S. soldier (Zirin, 2010). The company, however, became embroiled in some of the more notorious episodes of the American occupation of Iraq including the Nisour Square massacre in which Blackwater employees killed 17 unarmed Iraqi civilians. Blackwater admitted to key facts supporting 17 federal criminal charges, including illegal exports and unauthorized possession of automatic weapons. In addition to paying a \$7.5 million fine for its illicit activities, the company also paid a \$42 million settlement for a variety of criminal violations. DeVos was barely confirmed needing Vice-President Mike Pence to cast a tie-breaking vote in her favour but it is worth noting that of the 50 senators who voted to confirm her, almost half had received money from DeVos and/or her family.

⁷ Title IX is a federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sex in schools and programs that receive federal funding, including protection from sexual harassment.

⁸ For purposes in this context, I focus mainly on Sessions and Miller given their history of anti-PC rhetoric.

⁹ When this article was originally written and submitted, Jeff Sessions was still the Attorney General. He resigned that position, at Trump's request, in November 2018.

¹⁰ In the messages, Clanton expressed her hatred of black people stating: "I HATE BLACK PEOPLE. Like fuck them all . . . I hate blacks. End of story." After Clanton left TPUSA amidst controversy, she was replaced by another woman who appears to share her racist views (Feinberg, 2018).