

# WHY EVOLUTION IS TRUE

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[Scotland allows anybody's gender \(i.e., "legal sex"\) t...](#)

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## Progressive professors: the root of all evil

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December 23, 2022 • 11:00 am

. . . or so says [Russell Jacoby](#), author and Professor Emeritus, Department of History, UCLA. What seems weird to me in his [Wikipedia bio](#) is this:

In 2009, he was appointed to the Moïshe Gonzales Folding Chair of Critical Theory.

That cannot be true (I used to say that I occupied a "folding chair of biology," but Moïshe Gonzales? No way! Is that a mockery of intersectionalism?).

Anyway, folding chair or not, Jacoby has a good piece at *Tablet*, a piece that blames the woes of the world on "progressive" (i.e., woke) professors, who are no longer professors because they can't get university jobs. In a long-form piece at *Tablet*, though, Jacoby indicts them because they've created the culture-wars in which we're now embroiled.

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ARTS & LETTERS

# The Takeover

Self-righteous professors have spawned self-righteous students and unleashed them into the public square

BY RUSSELL JACOBY

Jacoby first provides a canned history of “public intellectuals,” a position that once existed outside of academia and was remunerative (e.g., Edmund Wilson and Lewis Mumford), but disappeared as inflation outpaced the fees paid to journalists. After that, intellectuals were forced to take jobs at universities. Most of them weren’t explicitly political, but by 1980 most academic “intellectuals” had not only moved to the Left, but began to write in incomprehensible prose that made their “radical” lucubrations inaccessible to the public—ergo *not* influential. Who in the public has read Judith Butler or Homi Bhabha? Jacoby reproduces the famous sentence by Butler (below) that won her a Bad Writing Award (a prize that sadly has disappeared). If you can tell me what this Butlerian sentence means, you’re a better person than I:

The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.

This is the reason why, for a long period, professors had almost no influence on public culture.

But then. . . but then Leftist professors began to metastasize into the public, and the trouble began. I’ll give a few excerpts from the piece, which is well written:

But my critics and I both missed something that might not have been obvious 30 years ago. By the late 1990s the rapid expansion of the universities came to a halt, especially in the humanities. Faculty openings slowed or stopped in many fields. Graduate enrollment cratered. In my own department in 10 years we went from accepting over a hundred students for graduate study to under 20 for a simple reason. We could not place our students. The hordes who took courses in critical pedagogy, insurgent sociology, gender studies, radical anthropology, Marxist cinema theory, and postmodernism could no longer hope for university careers.

What became of them? No single answer is possible. They joined the work force. Some became baristas, tech supporters, Amazon staffers and real estate agents. Others with intellectual ambitions found positions with the remaining newspapers and online periodicals, but most often they landed jobs as writers or researchers with liberal government agencies, foundations, or NGOs. In all these capacities they brought along the sensibilities and jargon they learned on campus.

It is the exodus from the universities that explains what is happening in the larger culture. The leftists who would have vanished as assistant professors in conferences on narratology and gender fluidity or disappeared as law professors with unreadable essays on misogynist hegemony and intersectionality have been pushed out into the larger culture. They staff the ballooning diversity and inclusion commissariats that assault us with vapid statements and inane programs couched in the language they learned in school. We are witnessing the invasion of the public square by the campus, an intrusion of academic terms and sensibilities that has leaped the ivy-covered walls aided by social media. The buzz words of the campus—diversity, inclusion, microaggression, power differential, white privilege, group safety—have become the buzz words in public life. Already confusing on campus, they become noxious

off campus. “The slovenliness of our language,” declared Orwell in his classic 1946 essay, “Politics and the English Language,” makes it “easier for us to have foolish thoughts.”

Orwell targeted language that defended “the indefensible” such as the British rule of India, Soviet purges and the bombing of Hiroshima. He offered examples of corrupt language. “The Soviet press is the freest in the world.” The use of euphemisms or lies to defend the indefensible has hardly disappeared: Putin called the invasion of Ukraine “a special military operation,” and anyone calling it a “war” or “invasion” has been arrested.

Yes, this is correct, and I’ve recently discussed the euphemisms that are afflicting everything, with an example from Stanford University’s IT group. Now, of course, we know what the “takeover is”: it’s what happens when “progressive” academics who have taught or taken “studies” courses moves out into society and ensure that we can’t have nice things:

When employees protest that they feel unsafe because their company is publishing an offensive article or book, we know what university courses they have taken. When the ACLU drops any mention of the First Amendment from its annual reports; when one of its directors declares, “First Amendment protections are disproportionately enjoyed by people of power and privilege”; and when its counsels its own lawyers to balance free speech and “offense to marginalized groups,” we know they studied critical race theory. When women are dropped from Planned Parenthood literature with the explanation, “It’s time to retire the terms ‘women’s health care’ and ‘a woman’s right to choose’ ... these phrases erase the trans and non-binary people who have abortions.” Or when the NARL (National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws) announces it is replacing the phrase pregnant women with “birthing people” and declares, “We use gender neutral language when talking about pregnancy, because it is not just cis-gender women who get pregnant”; we know those who authored these changes majored in gender studies and critical blather.

We know this, but we have to suffer the consequences. The self-righteous professors have spawned self-righteous students who filter into the public square. The former prospered in their campus enclaves by plumping each other’s brilliance, but they left the rest of us alone. The latter, their students, however, constitute an unmitigated disaster, intellectually and politically, as they enter the workforce. They might be the American version of the old Soviet apparatchiks, functionaries who carry out party policies. Intellectually, they fetishize buzz words (diversity, marginality, power differential, white privilege, group safety, hegemony, gender fluidity and the rest) that they plaster over everything.

Politically, they mark a self-immolation of progressives; they flaunt their exquisite sensibilities and openness, and display exquisite narcissism and insularity. Once upon a time leftists sought to enlarge their constituency by reaching out to the uninitiated. This characterized a left during its most salient phase of popular front politics. No longer. With a credo of group safety the newest generation of leftists does not reach out but reaches in. It operates more like a club for members only than a politics for everyone.

One of the reason Jacoby mentions “harm” and “safety” is because when the NYT published **an op-ed by Republican Senator Tom Cotton** saying that perhaps the military should intervene if protestors started creating damage, the paper’s staffers said they felt that the piece put them “in danger”. (It still baffles me that nobody laughed out loud at this ludicrous claim. Did they think that Cotton would come to New York and start shooting at them?) And the op-ed editor, James Bennett, was fired.

Jacoby gives several similar examples, but it's Christmas and you have time to read the piece for yourself. It has a fair amount of good snark, too, including this slap at law professor Catharine MacKinnon, a feminist who became famous for opposing pornography. And again this rings true, and also underscores Jacoby's point that opposition to freedom of speech now comes almost exclusively from the Left. That is shameful given that free expression was once a hallmark of that shade of the political spectrum.

The first sentence of an article by Catharine A. MacKinnon, a chaired professor at the University of Michigan and Harvard Law schools, who is the leading anti-pornography feminist, runs: "The First Amendment over the last hundred years has mainly become a weapon of the powerful." She specifies: "A First Amendment appeal is often used to support dominant status and power, backing white supremacy and masculinist misogynistic attacks." It is a means for "dominant groups to impose and exploit their hegemony." Note all the buzz words: dominant power, white supremacy, hegemony. The position marks a sharp shift from the traditional civil libertarians, who prized free speech as protection for dissenters. These civil libertarians are now dismissed as misguided First Amendment absolutists or worse, right-wingers, even Fox viewers.

A problem emerges from the half-baked Marxism of the law professors and their students, who toil and tweet in NGO land. Marx did declare that the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas, but qualified that both cleavages exist in the ruling class and that a new revolutionary class challenges the dominant ideas. Perhaps he was wrong, but at least he posited movement and conflict. It could also be noted that the term "hegemony," a favorite of campus leftists, derives from the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. For all his subtlety and inconsistencies, the imprisoned Gramsci saw social antagonisms as ever-present. As one commentator has put it, "Gramsci's concept of hegemony" provides the basis for an intellectual elite to engage in a "war of position" that will prepare the way "to overthrow the existing order."

War of position? Nothing could be further from the minds of these professors, who portray power as omnipresent and static. That the First Amendment is a tool of the powerful, professor MacKinnon's pathbreaking insight, comes right out of hackneyed Marxism; it could be said with equal truth about any sector of society. "Housing is a weapon of the powerful." "The media is a weapon of the powerful." "Education is a weapon of the powerful." For that matter professor MacKinnon, who teaches to the most privileged at the most elite schools, is a weapon of the powerful.

There's no solution offered by Jacoby, just a big kvetch about how things are. And, indeed, given that the "studies mills" are still grinding out students who can't get academic jobs and will thus infest university administrations and the media for years to come, I'll have been long underground when and if this movement dies out. But before we become one with the clay, we can at least laugh at the people who call us out for saying words like "Hispanic" or "American," or tell us that free speech causes them "harm" and makes them "unsafe."

h/t: Barry

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