

## MINDING THE CAMPUS.COM

*Selections from the Manhattan Institute's web magazine*

## THE "INEQUALITY" MOVEMENT—A CAMPUS PRODUCT

CHARLOTTE ALLEN | March 21, 2012

The sharp political focus on inequality, driven into the public mind by the Occupy movement and endorsed by President Obama in his State of the Union message, was born, not on the street, but on the campus. It thrives there, mostly under the aegis of elite universities such as Harvard, Princeton, and Stanford. Those universities have free-standing inequality centers bearing such titles such as Multidisciplinary Program on Inequality and Social Policy (Harvard), Global Network on Inequality (Princeton), and the Center for the Study of Poverty and Inequality (Stanford).

Most campuses play it straight, evaluating the effects of programs meant to uplift the poor and reduce poverty. Other colleges manage to combine many unlovely campus obsessions into a single curriculum: advocacy teaching, Marxism, the feeling that America is deeply unjust, race and gender theory, quota thinking, anti-male feminist analysis, and the belief that a primary job of government is to redistribute wealth.

Besides focusing on what many inequality theorists regard as the unfair accumulation of wealth, inequality studies is also a catchall for classroom treatment of a range of racial, feminist, and sexuality-related grievance-dramas in which white heterosexual males play the role of villain. At Cornell, for example, the inequality curriculum for this spring semester includes courses with such titles as "Feminism and Philosophy" and "The White Image in the Black Mind."

The core presumption is that there is something inherently wrong with all inequality, that inequality is somehow the fault of those who do better in society, and that the solution ought to be a forced leveling process via higher taxes, income redistribution, affirmative action, and other forms of government intervention. One popular economic graph is "The Robin Hood Index," which is described as "equal to the portion of the total community income that would have to be redistributed (taken from the richer half of the population and given to the poorer half) for the society to live in perfect equality."

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## THE “INEQUALITY” MOVEMENT *Continued from page 1*

Inequality courses and programs at other universities might not be quite so overtly ideological, but nearly all of them promote scholarship whose origin is a single source: a 2003 article by the French economist Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez. Some critics have disputed the Piketty-Saez reliance solely on un-nuanced data from individual tax returns to measure what the two economists claim is growing American inequality. (See, for example, Diana Furchtgott-Roth’s March 2012 report for the Manhattan Institute pointing out that inequality studies such as that of Piketty and Saez ignore non-income redistributive benefits such as food stamps and Medicaid). But what is most striking isn’t its methodology. It’s the article’s implicit assumption that when the rich get richer by earning more, something is wrong—so wrong that the only way to right the evil is to reinstitute the sky-high top-bracket taxation of the pre-Reagan era. It is clear that at many U.S. colleges and universities “inequal-

ity studies” has become a catchall category for Marxist and quasi-Marxist critiques of capitalism, sexism, heterosexism, and whatever perceived evils of hierarchy, class, and wealth happen to be in academic fashion. Those preoccupations of faculty and administrators can be written off as faddish and ephemeral. What is genuinely disturbing, however, is that those critiques have penetrated the mainstream in the Obama administration and the Democratic Party. Obama simply assumed in his State of the Union address that the super-rich, who already pay the lion’s share of income taxes in America, still aren’t paying their “fair” share at the expense of the middle class, so he called for a significant tax hike on their earnings. The underlying assumption was that when someone gets richer, someone else gets poorer—so the playing field must be leveled via confiscatory taxes so that more of the income of the rich will be paid out to the poor.

*Charlotte Allen is a Minding the Campus contributing editor.*

### HOW TO BE PRESIDENT OF YALE FOREVER (AT LEAST)

JOHN LEO | March 6, 2012

Vartan Gregorian once said the way to become a successful college president is simple: stand up, give a speech on “diversity,” then sit down. Richard Levin, president of Yale, is the longest-lasting president of an Ivy League university, and following Gregorian’s sage advice is surely one reason why. Whenever a serious incident occurs at Yale, Levin’s first instinct is to put out a resonant but off-key statement stoutly defending a point not really at issue.

- In the Patrick Witt case, how would Yale deal with the destruction of a student’s reputation, after it sponsored a leaked “secret” hearing on a rape accusation at which he wasn’t allowed to testify?

**Levin:** The Yale administration “thought it was important to provide greater transparency about the entire array of concerns—including verbal harassment and sexual assault.”

- On the decision by the Yale University Press to censor pictures of the Danish cartoons in a book on the subject.

**Levin:** “The Yale Press is not a platform for anyone to speak their mind...”

- Should the frat DKE be suspended for five years for a vile satiric chant by pledges?

**Levin (with Dean Mary Miller):** “Yale has policies that broadly protect freedom of expression, but we also value decency and civility.”

- What are the proper parameters of legal police monitoring of some campus Muslim groups?

**Levin:** “I am writing to state, in the strongest possible terms, that police surveillance based on religion, nationality, or peacefully expressed political opinions is antithetical to the values of Yale, the academic community, and the United States.”

Pitch-perfect PC stuff. How could he possibly lose his job?

*John Leo is editor of Minding the Campus.*

# THE RUINOUS REIGN OF RACE-AND-GENDER HISTORIANS

KC JOHNSON | January 23, 2012



In a ruling likely to be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, the Montana Supreme Court last month upheld the state constitution's prohibition on corporations directly spending on state campaigns. In a significant case involving history all the books cited were more than 35 years old. And that wasn't a coincidence.

A quick summary of the decision: the Montana court ruled that "this case concerns Montana law, Montana elections, and it arises from Montana history," requiring the justices to examine "the context of the time and place it was enacted, during the early twentieth century." To provide this necessary historical background, the Court repeatedly cited books by historians. An attorney analyzing the decision, however, probably would have been surprised to see that the works of history upon which the Montana court relied were all published before 1977. She might even have wondered whether the court's reliance on older works suggested that it had ignored newer, perhaps contradictory, publications. But for anyone familiar with how the contemporary academy approaches U.S. history, the court's inability to find recent relevant works could have come as no surprise at all.

The study of U.S. history has transformed in the last two generations, with emphasis on staffing positions in race, class, or gender leading to dramatic declines in fields viewed as more "traditional," such as U.S. political, constitutional, diplomatic, and military history. And even those latter areas have been "revised" to make their approach more accommodating to the dominant race/class/gender paradigm.

To take the nature of the U.S. history positions in one major department as an example of the new staffing patterns: the University of Michigan was a pioneer in the study of U.S. diplomatic history. Now the department's 29 professors include only one whose scholarship has focused on U.S. foreign relations. In contrast to this one-in-29 ratio, Michigan has hired ten Americanists. The department has more specialists in the history of Native Americans than U.S. foreign relations.

One-sided scholarly approaches tend to produce one-sided views on contemporary political and public policy issues. In recent years, controversies in the history departments at Duke and the University of Iowa revealed that neither department had even one registered Republican. A partisan ratio of doz-

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## THE RUINOUS REIGN

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ens-to-zero raises some troubling questions about the open-mindedness of a department's hiring process. So too did the justifications offered for the imbalance. Iowa's Sarah Hanley rationalized, "I don't think there is a downside [to having a department that, according to a survey done by the local newspaper, had 22 registered Democrats and zero registered Republicans]. If it is a downside, then it would be a downside to have states to be so-called blue or so-called red. It would be casting a pall on the democratic system where people are free to choose." The then-chairman of Duke's history department, John Thompson, dismissed findings that his department had 32 registered Democrats and zero registered Republicans, on grounds that "the interesting thing about the United States is that the political spectrum is very narrow."

This type of comment is exactly what would be expected in an environment characterized by faculty groupthink—the com-

mon assumption that all thinking people chose to be Democrats (full disclosure: I'm a registered and partisan Democrat), the law of group polarization producing extreme arguments on the merits of affiliating with the Democrats.

The increasingly one-sided conception of the profession has appeared most distinctly when national historical organizations have placed their members' partisan interests ahead of a commitment to historical ideals. There are few areas in which the groupthink academy has had a more disastrous impact than the study of U.S. history. One-sidedness has its costs, however, in terms of influence outside the Ivory Tower. Courts or politicians who rely on the opinions of professors who now qualify as "mainstream" U.S. historians do so at their own peril.

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*KC Johnson is a professor of history at Brooklyn College*

### LET THE FREE MARKET SET COLLEGE TUITION

HERBERT I. LONDON | February 16, 2012

When President Obama talked about unaffordable college tuition, he failed to point out that federal subsidies are responsible for much of the unaffordability.

Many parents are caught in an ideological dilemma. They want to reduce the size and influence of federal authority; on the other hand, they realize that without Pell grant and other federal subsidies, they may not be able to afford tuition for their children.

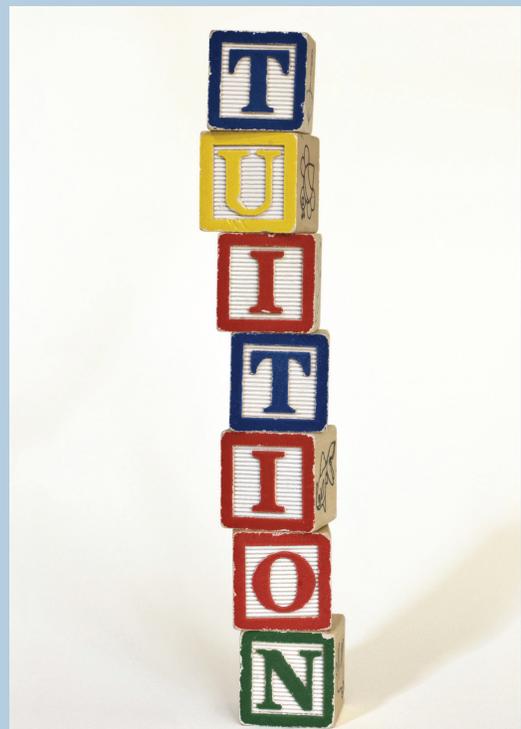
Universities should tighten their ever-loosening belts by refusing government aid. In my experience there isn't a major university in the United States that couldn't cut 10 percent of its budget without in any way adversely affecting the delivery of programs and services.

The trick is to unleash market forces. Let some universities fail—some certainly should. And let parents and students make choices based on the trade-off between taxes and tuition.

The president could make a difference if he said it is time for the federal government to get out of the way so that market forces can flourish. There was a time when tuition rates were affordable for even working class people, but that was before federal intervention. It may be time to turn the clock back.

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# UCLA: STILL OBSESSED WITH DIVERSITY

PETER WOOD | May 1, 2012



What is it with universities in California? Financially strapped, troubled by protesters making impossible demands, and worried about the declining value of their academic programs, many of the state's great universities decide to re-double their commitment to a fast-fading political ideology.

The latest example is the impending vote by the faculty of UCLA's College of Letters and Science that would add a course on diversity to the general education requirements. Only it is not called a course on diversity. Because the word "diversity" has become too obviously an enunciation of a contentious political agenda, the supporters of the new requirement have renamed it "Community and Conflict".

I'm not sure I see anything in the UCLA distinctions beyond the kind of academic wordplay that is meant to lull the unwary and exhaust critics in semantic circles. Diversity, as the man said, means "different things to different people." On one hand, "diversity" calls us to value the social and cultural good that flows from taking a positive attitude toward human variety. On the other hand, it magnifies the sense of group grievance and reduces individuals to the sum of

their ethnic affiliations. "Diversity" is a code word. It is what people who want to set racial and ethnic rules for access to public goods say when they want to make this ugly ambition sound nice.

If UCLA is momentarily in the spotlight, it is far from alone in attempting to keep this log rolling. Last summer Heather Mac Donald created a stir with her article in *City Journal*, "Less Academics, More Narcissism," in which she described the University of California at San Diego's proliferation of diversity administrators, including a new "vice chancellor for equity, diversity, and inclusion." At the moment UC San Diego created this position, it was gutting academic programs such as its master's degree in electrical and computer engineering. And like the whole UC system, it was (and is) so strapped for funds that it was effectively looking under the cushions of the sofa in the faculty lounge for loose change.

The UCLA faculty would be wise to turn out in large numbers and vote down the proposal. The new requirement would further confuse the purposes of higher education. It conflates scholarship with advocacy and it would mark another low point in the long debasement of general education.

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*Peter Wood is president of the National Association of Scholars.*

# THE TERRIBLE TEXTBOOKS OF FRESHMAN COMP

MARY GRABAR | March 9, 2012



Freshman composition class at many colleges is propaganda time, with textbooks conferring early sainthood on President Obama and lavishing attention on writers of the far left but rarely on moderates, let alone anyone right of center. Democrats do very well in these books, but Abraham Lincoln—when included—is generally the most recent Republican featured.

Take *The Norton Reader*, for instance. Someone sent it to me, presumably because I teach freshman composition myself. Much of the volume is made up of popular writing by ideological writers of the left and political speeches that strain the traditional standards of rhetorical worthiness. Topic questions are also embedded to trigger predetermined responses from students.

## Lincoln, King, and Obama

With my curiosity piqued by the obvious bias, I decided to look at other textbooks. What I found was the widespread promotion of Obama, thinly disguised by claims about his rhetorical skills. Other than one or two columns, the rich array of conservative writing was ignored.

*The Norton Reader*, like most, is divided thematically. Interestingly, Obama's speech is not included in the section, "Politics and Government," where Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, and Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

appear. It shows up in the "Spoken Words" section that is made up of MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech, Eleanor Roosevelt's "On the Declaration of Human Rights," William Faulkner's "Nobel Prize Speech," and Al Gore's speech, "The Climate Emergency," that became the basis of the film and book, *An Inconvenient Truth*. While acknowledging that Gore's speech was given during the 2004 presidential campaign, the editors treat his data as undisputed scientific fact. There is no hint that there is disagreement on the issue. Similarly, Obama's claims in his Cairo speech are presented without any skepticism. Historical inaccuracies in the speech go unchallenged. And again, there is no mention of criticisms of the speech, many of them well-founded.

## Just Obey the President's Call

Usually the last topic calls for a more open, creative response. For Obama's speech we have: "Obama concludes with a call to action directed especially toward the world's youth. Write a paper in which you discuss ways you personally might respond to this call." Disguised as a question, this is a not-so-subtle request to obey the president's call.

There is not only lack of balance in terms of political representation, but also in sources of the essays. While the anthology does contain a smattering of classics, modern selections make up the bulk of the volume. It seems the editors never heard of *National Review*, the *Weekly Standard*, the *American Spectator*, or *New Criterion*. Yet, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The New York Times Magazine*, the *New York Review of Books*, and *Harper's* offer numerous excerpts each. Again, no balance is offered.

## 'Hearts Bursting with Love and Pride'

A thematic section focuses on "Barack Obama: What Does His Election Mean to America?" ("When the crowd surged forward, hearts bursting with love and pride, the lens shifted and altered the world's view of the black family," with topic questions driving home the point that racism had hitherto stymied the black family.) That this textbook is aimed at the student with a low reading level, one who would be least likely to know this information on his own, suggests a goal that has very little to do with education. Nor do the other volumes for that matter. They want to tell students what to think, not how to write.

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MARK BAUERLEIN | March 9, 2012

Kevin Carey, policy director at Education Sector, a D.C. think tank, has a commentary in this week's *Chronicle of Higher Education* that signals the kind of rhetoric we may expect from proponents of affirmative action.

Here is how it begins:

"The activist judges of the United States Supreme Court, by choosing last month to take up *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, have decided to put affirmative action back on the national agenda. The fragile five-vote coalition that upheld race-based admissions policies at the University of Michigan less than a decade ago has been dispersed by retirement. Now the court's conservative majority seems poised—*stare decisis* be damned—to upend decades of established law and prohibit colleges from creating classes as they see fit."

The moral set-up is clear. While affirmative action amounts merely to colleges "creating classes as they see fit," anti-affirmative action amounts to "activist" judging, high-handed legal machinations ("be damned"). It is hard to figure how opponents of affirmative action best respond to such charges. If you enter a debate with your adversaries offering as their first premise **your** iniquity, if they frame your evidence and arguments as expressions of evil intent, you can't win. This is how political correctness operates.

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*Mark Bauerlein is a professor of English at Emory University.*

ANDREW GILLEN | March 8, 2012

Until recently, much talk about student loans was fact-free: There simply weren't publicly available figures worth paying attention to. The official balance of student loans from the New York Fed were unreliable:

There was a bucket of random obligations called "Miscellaneous," which included things like utility bills, child support, and alimony....

Meanwhile, the official cohort default rates from the Department of Education were even more useless. So the new New York Federal Reserve analysis is well worth a read. The main headline is of course the \$870 billion outstanding balance. Also noteworthy is the \$85 billion that is held by those who are past due. But what these numbers really illustrate is the human and financial impact our bizarre student-loan system is having.

### 61 Percent Are Not Paying

As Edububble notes, 61 percent of folks with a student loan are not paying. Excluding both those in deferment or forbearance indicates that 73 percent are repaying and 27 percent are behind in their payments. To give you sense of how unhealthy this is, consider that after the worst housing price crash in our history, 28 percent of mortgages were underwater. That a comparable proportion of student loan borrowers are in a sense underwater on their loans is absolutely shocking.

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*Andrew Gillen is the senior researcher at the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.*

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