

The Academy at the Crossroads - Part One

by Heather MacDonald, City Journal, Dec. 13, 2023

Pro-Hamas protests have exposed anti-Western ideology as the prevailing belief system on college campuses. The question: whether disgruntled donors and alumni can overcome decades of intellectual misdirection.

University of Pennsylvania president Liz Magill would not have been forced to resign last weekend had Penn's donors and alumni not been organizing against her for two months.

The Penn rebels have now upped the ante. They have drafted a new constitution for the school that makes merit the sole criterion for student admissions and faculty hiring. The new charter requires the university to embrace institutional neutrality with regard to politics and faculty research. The rebels want candidates for Penn's presidency to embrace the new charter as a precondition for employment.

With this latest twist in the battle over university leadership, the academy stands at a crossroads. For decades, Wall Street titans funneled billions of dollars into their alma maters, even as those universities promoted ideas inimical to civilizational excellence and economic success. When students started celebrating the October 7 Hamas attacks, however, the mega-donors took note. They did not recognize their campuses, they said, though the pro-Hamas rhetoric came straight from the ethnic- and postcolonial-studies courses that had been a staple of university curricula since the 1980s. Some donors, at Penn and elsewhere, initiated funding boycotts and sought board shake-ups, hoping to pressure their alma maters to correct the anti-Semitism that they deemed responsible for the terror celebrations.

The pro-Hamas protests have exposed the anti-Western ideology that is the sole unifying belief system on college campuses. The question now

is whether disgruntled donors and alumni can overcome decades of intellectual misdirection. To do so, they first must define the problem correctly—and avoid the temptation to adopt, for their own purposes, the intersectional Left’s rhetoric about “safety” and “protection” from speech. The proposed new Penn charter is a promising start.

The donor revolt could have broken out at any number of campuses, all of which featured ignorant students cheering on the deliberate massacre of civilians, those students’ faculty enablers and bureaucratic fellow travelers, and feckless presidents. But it first erupted at the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard, perhaps because of the organization and self-confidence of their alumni.

Penn’s most generous donors were already on edge at the time of the October 7 massacre. Two weeks earlier, the university had hosted a conference on Palestinian culture, called the Palestine Writes Literature Festival. The conference speakers were predominantly anti-Zionist; some had long been accused of anti-Semitism. Prominent Jewish alumni, such as Ronald Lauder, demanded that Penn president Magill preemptively cancel the conference. Marc Rowan, chairman of the Wharton School’s Board of Advisors and a \$50 million donor to the school, circulated an open letter asking Magill to denounce the conference’s invitations to “known antisemitic speakers,” remove the Penn logo from conference materials, and implement mandatory anti-Semitism training. By September 21, more than 2,000 alumni, including several current members of Penn’s board, had signed the letter.

Conference organizer Susan Abulhawa, a firebrand Palestinian novelist, criticized “the hysterical racist conversations and panic” over the festival. “We remain proud, unbroken, defiant, honoring our ancestors, even though we are battered, colonized, exiled, raw, terrorized and demeaned wholesale,” she announced in typically florid rhetoric. The university tried to split the difference between the festival’s critics and advocates. On September 12, it put out a statement noting “deep concerns about several speakers” and “unequivocally—and emphatically—condemning antisemitism as antithetical” to Penn’s values. The

university claimed to “also fiercely support the free exchange of ideas” as central to its educational mission, even ideas “incompatible with [its] institutional values.” The conference went forward without incident, despite the occasional anti-Zionist trope such as might be found on any given day in a Penn class on “settler colonialism.”

Nevertheless, the fuse was ready to be lit. Following the October 7 massacre, Magill made the blunders that would bedevil other college presidents: she did not respond to the attacks with sufficient alacrity to satisfy her critics, and she failed to use the words “I condemn” and “terrorism” when she did respond. By the time she put out a correction on October 15, it was too late; the donor revolt was already spreading. On October 10, Rowan, said to be Penn’s wealthiest alumnus, initiated a second mass movement: a close-the-checkbooks campaign. He urged alumni to send in one dollar to Penn and explain that their ordinary contributions would be suspended until Magill and the chair of Penn’s board, investment banker CEO Scott Bok, resigned. Rowan began emailing a letter to the trustees every day, selecting from among the thousands of such letters from major donors who were closing their checkbooks.

Despite a flurry of big-name and big-dollar defections, including Jon Huntsman (former governor of Utah and ambassador to Russia, China, and Singapore) and David Magerman (a major donor and former overseer of the engineering school), Penn’s power structure was reinforcing its defenses. Throughout October, Penn’s board of trustees put out various statements in support of Magill and Bok; the president of Penn alumni weighed in as well in favor of the status quo.

Behind the scenes, Bok asked the three trustees who had criticized him to resign and suggested that Rowan reconsider his chairmanship of the Wharton board. Leaders of the faculty senate put out a statement on October 19 denouncing “individuals outside of the University who are surveilling both faculty and students in an effort to intimidate them and inhibit their academic freedom.” The senate “tri-chairs” played the wealth card against the recalcitrant donors: academic freedom was “not

a commodity that can be bought or sold by those who seek to use their pocketbooks to shape our mission.”

The hypocrisy had reached gargantuan proportions. Even as Penn’s leadership and faculty proclaimed their devotion to free speech, law professor Amy Wax was in the dock for statements criticizing racial preferences and U.S. immigration policy. Since publishing an op-ed in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 2017 advocating the embrace of bourgeois values as a means of economic and social advancement, Wax had been under relentless attack from the law school’s leadership and faculty. The leadership had banned her from teaching first-year law courses. In 2022, Penn initiated a formal investigation to determine whether her “intentional and incessant racist, sexist, xenophobic, and homophobic actions and statements” were serious enough to require a “major sanction” that could include stripping her of tenure and firing her.

No leader of Penn’s faculty senate and no representative from its chapter of the American Association of University Professors objected to the hounding of Wax for protected speech. The board looked the other way. Yet here they all were, declaring Penn a lighthouse of free expression. In fact, the campus Left and its administrative enablers accused their *opponents* of double standards, since some donors were calling for bans on anti-Israel speech. After the Penn trustees voted to express their confidence in Magill and Bok on October 16, trustee Andy Rachleff, co-founder of Benchmark Capital, scoffed: “There are a lot of people who want free speech—except when it affects them.”

As December began, Magill was acting like a president confident in her staying power—namely, one given to announcing hollow new initiatives couched in vapid bureaucratic prose. On November 30, she released “In Principle and Practice,” a “strategic framework that emphasizes strengthening community, deepening connections, cultivating service-minded leadership, and collaborating across divisions and divides.”

The rebels were in a self-reflective mood. The damage will take generations to undo, one told me. “I hope we have the staying power.”

Another said: “I’m mad at all of us. We all kind of knew [how bad things were]. But I’ll be brutally honest: we all wanted the option of having our children and grandchildren go to Penn. If donors say that that is not part of why they donate, they are not telling the truth. We should’ve stopped years ago because we were giving them the rope to hang us with.”

This donor was under no illusion about the ruling ideology on campuses: “If you’re successful and white, you’re evil; if you’re unsuccessful and brown, you must be right.” Yet despite such knowledge, he admits that he was on contribution “autopilot.”

Then Magill and the presidents of Harvard and MIT were called to testify on campus anti-Semitism before a House committee on December 5. That hearing was itself the result of discussions between the Penn donors and committee members. All three presidents came in for a drubbing, above all for their unwillingness to agree that campuses should punish calls for the genocide of Jews. (The question itself was hypothetical; the committee’s lead prosecutor, New York representative Elise Stefanik, extrapolated from actual student chants of “intifada” to a hypothetical call for Jewish genocide.) The resulting uproar was bipartisan. Though it was the genocide question that garnered the most attention, the presidents’ shameless untruths about their campuses’ free-wheeling intellectual environments should have been the most damning.

Another petition against Magill was launched, this time on Change.org. It quickly garnered more than 12,000 signatories. On December 7, Ross Stevens, CEO of Stone Ridge Asset Management, withdrew a \$100 million gift that had funded a center for finance at the Wharton School. He would consider restoring the funding only if Magill was replaced.

Penn’s board held an emergency meeting the next day, but it once again declined to oust Magill or Bok. Magill tried to stanch the bleeding by declaring on video that she now understood that some forms of anti-Israel speech must be prohibited on campus.

Magill did not survive the storm. She offered her resignation on December 9. Most surprisingly, Bok tendered his resignation as well. The rebellious donors were jubilant, since they understood that the critical lever for institutional change was boards of trustees, known heretofore only for their hands-off, see-no-evil rubberstamping of whatever direction a university might choose.

Meantime, Harvard's president Claudine Gay was facing her own crisis, albeit without the same level of organizing behind it as the crisis that had brought down Magill. Some of Harvard's wealthiest donors had also been closing their checkbooks since October 7, due to Gay's perceived foot-dragging when it came to condemning the terror attacks. Billionaire investor Bill Ackman had called for the release of the names of student signatories to an early pro-Hamas letter so that firms could avoid hiring those students. The Kennedy School lost millions of dollars in donations. Former Utah governor Mitt Romney, investor Seth Klarman, and three other Harvard Business School graduates responded to the spreading campus militancy on October 23 in an "Open Letter to Harvard Leadership Regarding Antisemitism on Campus." The letter attracted more than 2,300 alumni signatures in two weeks.

Ackman, who has taken the lead in the campaign against Harvard, had been going through a very public education about the diversity, equity, and inclusion complex. On November 6, he admitted on CNBC that until recently he had never read Harvard's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement. When he did, he was surprised to learn that the school's DEI mandate did not cover "all marginalized groups," as he put it, such as Asians and Jews. The solution, in Ackman's view, was to expand the diversity bureaucracy's client base to include the full panoply of students and faculty who were "at risk of being taken advantage of, of being harmed, of being emotionally harmed," in his words, by the "majority." This recommendation showed that Ackman, a liberal Democrat, remained naive about the university. The alleged "marginalized groups" at Harvard and elsewhere are at zero risk of being harmed by the majority; they are petted and fêted at every possible opportunity by an ever-diminishing white subset of the campus population that either

embraces its fictional role of oppressor or is dragooned into playing one. A month later, Ackman was calling for the elimination of DEI, though he rushed to deny that he meant to “suggest whatsoever that the goal of a diverse university that is welcoming for all should be abandoned.” But Harvard is already welcoming to all; its only goal should be to provide the most rigorous possible intellectual training for its students.

Harvard had lost billions of dollars in donations since October 7, according to another Ackman missive. Harvard’s overseers met over the weekend of December 9 to consider Gay’s tenure. On December 12, the fellows of the Harvard Corporation announced that Gay retained their ongoing support as the “right leader to help our community heal and to address the very serious societal issues we are facing.” Harvard’s mission, the fellows reiterated at the end of their letter, was addressing “deep societal issues.” What those deep societal issues were, the corporation failed to say—possibly anti-Semitism, but the chances were great that they meant the usual deep issue: racism.

Gay had a supreme advantage that Magill lacked: the magic amulet of race. Magill could check off just one box in the victim sweepstakes: being female. Gay was not only female but the “first black president” of Harvard, as her supporters in the media never tired of reminding us. (MIT president Sally Kornbluth also survived the House anti-Semitism hearing. But MIT’s alumni were only starting to organize against the school’s leadership and had yet to bring significant financial pressure to bear against the school.) The Harvard Corporation is itself 27 percent black (twice the percentage of blacks in the national population) and 36 percent URM (underrepresented minorities, when its Hispanic member is included).

Almost all of Harvard’s black professors wrote a letter as “Black members of the Harvard university faculty” urging Gay’s retention. Any suggestion that Gay was elevated “based on considerations of race and gender are specious and politically motivated,” the professors wrote. Never mind that the chair of the presidential search committee, senior corporation fellow Penny Pritzker, had lauded Gay’s “inclusiveness” and

deep appreciation for “diverse voices” upon announcing Gay’s selection. (That the signatories to the current letter of support were themselves all black was apparently another coincidence.) While serving as dean of the faculty of arts and sciences, Gay had released an eight-page template for updating Harvard’s anti-racism work in the aftermath of the 2020 George Floyd race riots. The document, promising an orgy of race-based hiring and curriculum changes, was an early pitch for the presidency. Gay sought, she wrote, to “challenge a status quo that is comfortable and convenient for many.” Read: for Harvard’s whites, who are presumably responsible for the university’s failure to be “truly inclusive,” and who perpetuate the “devastating legacies of slavery and white supremacy.”

Notwithstanding the black faculty’s claim that Gay’s race was irrelevant to her presidency, Harvard’s black alumni also felt called upon to write the fellows in support for Gay’s efforts to build, as they put it, a more “inclusive community.” Her “leadership at Harvard as a Black woman” was “critical and deserving of the opportunity to coalesce and take shape,” the alumni wrote. Gay’s status as the daughter of Haitian immigrants allows her to understand better than anyone else the need for Harvard to “stand against hate,” the black alumni argued. Gay’s rapid ascent up the academic hierarchy—as an undistinguished scholar, at best—represented a triumph over the hate directed at immigrant daughters, we are to believe, however invisible such hate might be to the untrained eye.

This is the first of a two-part article.

Part Two: Penn 2.0 and the traps awaiting reformist alumni. (below)

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The Academy at the Crossroads, Part Two

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The pro-Hamas uprising that broke out across American universities after October 7 roused once-somnolent [alumni and donors](#). That awakening has now produced a new university charter, called a “[Vision for a New Future of the University of Pennsylvania](#),” drafted by Penn professors. Penn’s most recent president, Liz Magill, had to resign on December 9, following widely mocked testimony at a congressional hearing on campus anti-Semitism. The charter’s authors, along with Penn’s rebel donors, hope to make agreement with the new constitution a requirement for Penn’s new president. If enough Penn constituents, especially faculty, endorse it, the board of trustees will be compelled to adopt such a prerequisite, their thinking goes. An ongoing donation boycott provides the financial pressure. Ultimately, alumni across the country may be inspired to seek a similar foundational shake-up in their own alma maters, the drafters hope.

The new constitution adopts the thinking behind the Kalven Report, drafted in 1967 at the University of Chicago. Penn must henceforth abstain from adopting an institutional position on political issues. Embracing an official line alienates dissenting members of the university who might want to challenge “common orthodoxies,” explains the charter. Individual members of the university, by contrast, shall be free to propose, test, and reject the “widest spectrum of perspectives.”

The university’s selection committees have one mission only: identifying excellence. Hiring non-excellent diversity candidates makes it harder to attract outstanding faculty and students. (This assertion will seem commonsensical to anyone who believes in merit. The diversity complex would respond that, to the contrary, faculty and students shun *non*-“diverse” institutions. Sadly, in some cases, especially in the case of woke students, the diversity complex is correct. That does not make Penn 2.0 wrong, however, to seek to break

the stranglehold of diversity thinking.) The new constitution posits that an unambiguous, publicly understood commitment to excellence will give Penn a competitive edge in hiring and student admissions in the decades ahead. This, too, seems commonsensical. Testing such a hypothesis is long overdue.

Penn 2.0 overcomes in one stroke a weakness bedeviling a central strategy of campus reform. Those seeking to create new universities face the challenge that no new institution can offer the prize that a legacy university confers: status and bragging rights. It is prestige that drives the ever-more frenzied torrent of college applications, rather than any promise of knowledge. The beauty of the Penn 2.0 plan is that it re-founds Penn on a new footing, while maintaining Penn's prestige-granting power.

Were Penn 2.0 to become part of the presidential hiring search, it would be clarifying to see how many university apparatchiks demurred from its principles.

Penn's temporary replacement for ousted president Magill shows how heavy a lift Penn 2.0 is going to be. Penn's trustees chose J. Larry Jameson, now dean of Penn's medical school, to serve as the university's interim president. As soon as Jameson took over the medical school in 2011, he placed diversity hiring and indoctrination at the core of his administration. He created the school's first vice dean for Inclusion and Diversity and first associate dean for Diversity and Inclusion. Naturally, an Office of Inclusion and Diversity followed, which rolled out endless diversity initiatives and mandates, including Health Equity Weeks, the [Transgender Patient Advocate program](#), and the [LGBT Student-Trainee-Faculty Mentorship](#) program. In 2021, Jameson initiated what the Penn press office called a "new institution-wide program aimed at eliminating structural racism." (Hint: There *is* no structural racism at the Penn medical school. The medical school, like the rest of the university, is desperate to admit and hire as many blacks and Hispanics as possible, often disregarding academic skills gaps to do so.) As with all such

duplicative programs, the conceit of the 2021 “institution-wide” antiracism initiative was that the school was for the first time prioritizing “diversity” at “all levels of staffing.”

Jameson, in other words, would scorn the proposed new constitution if asked to stay in the presidential post permanently. And the trustees who put him in the interim position presumably support his diversity crusade, since it has been impossible to miss during his med-school tenure. Do the rebel donors have the financial clout to force the charter on the university anyway? They are bargaining on the fact that the Wharton School of Business, from which many of the close-the-checkbook participants graduated, contributes the lion’s share of philanthropic support to the university at large, according to their analysis. If Wharton feels seriously squeezed, the effect would cascade more widely. The gargantuan size of university endowments, including Penn’s \$21 billion, might seem to make higher education boycott-proof. But universities, though viewing themselves as unsullied by the pollution of money-grubbing, inequity-producing capitalism, are greedy bastards. They feel entitled to every last (private-sector-generated) penny that may be coming their way. Any drop-off in donations causes them teeth-gnashing agony.

It remains to be seen how much financial pain the alumni dissenters can inflict and what its effect will be. For every alumnus who now perceives his university’s intellectual betrayals, many others undoubtedly back the aims of the intersectional university. This ratio will only grow with every new generation of graduates. Any university reform movement is running a race against time.

It is not hard to imagine a counter-fundraising push from those alumni who agree with the antiracism agenda. The head of the Penn alumni association early on expressed the association’s support for the now-departed university president and chairman of the board.

While the financial battle takes shape, however, the donor rebellion needs to sharpen its positions to ensure its greatest chance of

success. First of all, the donors need to clean up their stance on free speech. They have heretofore faced two options. They could take the high road and demand free speech across the board: for opponents of preferences, say, *and* for opponents of Israel. Or they could adopt in reverse the same double standards that have been so nauseatingly on display in every pronouncement about a university's undying commitment to academic freedom. Too many alumni have taken the second course. While rebuking their school's intellectual monoculture and intolerance of dissent, they demand the silencing of anti-Zionist speech in the same breath. They may do so in the name of playing the college's own double standards against it, but the result is to legitimate those double standards all the same. They have adopted the same distinctions utilized by the campus Left: "hate speech" is not "free speech," and deserves no protections. They want college presidents to exercise a preclearance function over anti-Israel speakers and conferences, such as Penn's controversial Palestine Writes Literature Festival. Some seek to outlaw the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction movement. Some seek to enshrine the wildly overbroad definition of anti-Semitism from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

But however odious the student chants of "intifada, intifada" and "glory to our martyrs," however shocking professorial tweets calling Hamas's attacks "exhilarating" and "extraordinary," such speech should be punished only if it directly incites violence, or if the speaker physically harasses or threatens someone. Banning such utterances will not erase the beliefs behind them; it is better to have those beliefs out in the open, where they can be challenged and their sources identified.

Second, the donors must avoid the rhetoric of safetyism. Calling for the protection of "unsafe" Jewish students, when that unsafety is primarily a psychological state, will only strengthen the therapeutic academy, to the long-term detriment of free thought. Jewish students understandably feel under siege when their classmates cheer on Hamas, but such expression is protected under free-speech principles. While physical attack or incitement to imminent violence must be criminally prosecuted, and its perpetrators expelled, there have thankfully been few such incidents.

Indeed, a Harvard student organizing Jewish alumni against the school admitted to me that he feels under no physical threat walking on campus. A Jewish Princeton student said the same. As of December 14, 2023, no violence or physical confrontations had taken place at Yale involving Jewish students. Yes, some Jewish students are in fear for their lives on their campuses, but civil order will need to break down much further for that to be a realistic assessment.

Donors and alumni should remember that it was in the name of fighting “hate” and protecting student “safety” that the campus diversity bureaucracy reached its present proportions and power. Absent a transformation in campus personnel, bolstering the authority to quell alleged hate and safeguard intellectual and psychological “safety” will be used overwhelmingly against views and speakers deemed conservative.

Alumni might also want to tone down their own rhetoric regarding campus anti-Semitism just a bit. Rowan suggested that Penn’s hosting of the Palestine Writes Literature Festival legitimated the “horrible attacks in Israel.” David Magerman, a former overseer of the Penn engineering school, wrote then-president Magill on October 15, criticizing what he called her “fierce support for the Hamas-affiliated speakers at the Palestine Writes festival.” Magill had never supported the “Hamas-affiliated speakers,” however, only the (belatedly discovered) principle of free speech. Magerman accused her of being “ambivalent to the unprecedented evil” that Hamas’s terror attacks on Israel represented. By the end of his letter, Magill had gone from being ambivalent about evil to supporting it, and the speakers at the festival had gone from being “affiliated” with Hamas—even that a stretch—to being Hamas members themselves. By virtue of “hosting Hamas on campus, and . . . failing to call Hamas evil,” Penn “supports evil,” in Magerman’s analysis. Such language is undoubtedly heartfelt, but it risks painting its users, in the eyes of the opposition, as blinded by emotion.

The biggest course correction is to broaden the diagnosis of the university’s current pathology. By psychologizing the pathology as one

of anti-Semitism, and by demanding that the university fight this psychological problem, the alumni are walking into a trap. Asking college bureaucrats to protect Jewish students from anti-Semitism is like threatening to throw Br'er Rabbit into the briar patch. The bureaucrats are only too happy to comply. They have been busily adding new modules on anti-Semitism to existing diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings, all in the name of fighting hate. Of course, they immediately add that they must also fight Islamophobia, so the diversocrats get a twofer increase to their administrative remit. Rebellious donors may be placated by seeing their campus's sudden commitment to anti-Semitism task forces and diversity trainings and conclude that the crisis is on the way to being solved. But the problem is much deeper than anti-Semitism. And the college administrators are outfoxing the rebel alumni by adopting the rebels' definition of the issue.

The problem is an entire anti-Western ethos that now dominates most of the humanities and social sciences and that in STEM is corroding excellence and meritocracy. Jews are today seen as the embodiment of that reviled Western civilization, rather than, as in the past, a threat to it. What is today labelled anti-Semitism on college campuses has no connection to the genteel anti-Semitism of the early twentieth century. And yet, college presidents are insisting on just such a lineage.

On October 27, Harvard president Claudine Gay addressed a Shabbat dinner organized by Harvard's Hillel chapter. She drew a continuous line between Harvard's previous treatment of Jews and what is visible on Harvard Yard today. "Antisemitism has a very long and shameful history at Harvard," she said. "For years, this University has done too little to confront its continuing presence. No longer." This statement is entirely wrong. In the 1920s and 1930s, Harvard's WASPs established admissions ceilings to prevent Harvard from becoming Judaicized by Semitic outsiders. But the barriers eventually fell, and Jews became a dominant presence on campus, thanks to their intellectual accomplishments. No one at Harvard today advocates excluding Jews because they don't fit into Harvard's cozy Protestant brotherhood. To the extent that Jews are excluded, it is to make room for academically

noncompetitive black and Hispanic students. Such displacement *is* occurring, but it is not the result of anti-Jewish animus per se.

The majority of today's anti-Semitism comes from a different source than the one Gay alluded to. That source is the intersectional Left, composed of self-proclaimed marginalized groups pretending to be oppressed by phantom white supremacy. The intersectional Left hates the West, and it hates Jews because they represent the West. If the essence of the West is what is called in ethnic and postcolonial studies departments "settler colonialism"—which effaces virtuous, ecologically sensitive native peoples of color—then Israel exemplifies a settler colonialist, genocidal state.

To test Gay's assertion of an unbroken connection between Harvard's past and present anti-Semitism, imagine that Harvard still discriminates against Jews because they are not clubbable, yet Harvard has no academic departments promoting the idea that the West is responsible for the world's injustices, and no diversity bureaucracy telling students of color that they are victims of Harvard's racism. Would students still be screaming "From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will be Free!" and "Long Live Our Martyrs?" They would not. Conversely, if Harvard had no history of genteel WASP anti-Semitism but had its present full complement of anti-Western courses, faculty, and fellow-travelling administrators, students would still be channeling Hamas in their banners and chants.

The closest thing on campuses today to traditional anti-Semitism comes from Muslim students and faculty, many of whom have imbibed classic anti-Jewish topoi from birth. They are joined by "allies" innocent of such propaganda but well-versed in every left-wing indictment against their own civilization. (Those Muslim carriers of the traditional anti-Semitism virus are out of sight in the current discussion of campus anti-Semitism, lest anyone face charges of Islamophobia or a Trumpian lack of appreciation for immigrants. Officially invisible, too, are black anti-Semites, whose century-long strain of anti-Semitism has been unbroken.) By asserting a genealogy linking historic mainstream anti-

Semitism to contemporary academic anti-Semitism, Gay subtly reinforces the unspoken assumption that conservative whites pose the main threat to American Jews—traditionally an article of faith among mainstream Jewish advocacy groups such as the Anti-Defamation League and among liberal Jews themselves. At the same time, Gay diverts attention from the actual sources of anti-Jewish agitation: the faculty, the curriculum, and Muslims.

The dissident donors need to home in on those sources. To take just one example: In 2015, Yale president Peter Salovey promised to pour even more funding into Yale's Ethnicity, Race, and Migration program. This largesse was part of Salovey's personal crusade against Yale's alleged racism. The ERM program is emblematic of every such "ethnic" and "postcolonial studies" program across the U.S. According to its course-catalogue description, it "draws from the long-standing fields of U.S. ethnic and Native studies, postcolonial, and subaltern studies but also represents emergent areas like queer of color critique, comparative diaspora studies, critical Muslim and critical refugee studies, race and media studies, feminist science studies, and the environmental humanities." Adumbrated in that roll call are the student coalitions "from the Rockies to the Smokies," to adopt a phrase, that celebrated the Hamas attacks.

Like every ethnic studies program, Yale's ERM concentration unabashedly declares its political nature: "We actively support public-facing and socially engaged scholarship and cultural work," an activist mission that the pro-Hamas demonstrators saw themselves as furthering. As a lecturer at Harvard's Graduate School of Education told the Harvard Crimson earlier this year: "If it is not focused on the project of decolonization, if it is not rooted directly in communities, if it is not intersectional," then it's not Ethnic Studies. And if it *is* focused on the project of decolonization as an active "community" participant, it belongs nowhere within a university.

Yale professor Zareena Grewal, a documentary filmmaker who teaches in the ERM program, is an embodiment of the ethnic- and post-colonial

studies establishment. Grewal's second film for television, *Swahili Fighting Words*, "traces the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and diasporic identity politics" through Tanzanian rap music. Predictably, she defended the October 7 attacks since, as she put it, "settlers are not civilians. This is not hard." She added: "My heart is in my throat. Prayers for Palestinians. Israel is a murderous, genocidal settler state and Palestinians have every right to resist through armed struggle, solidarity #FreePalestine."

Such rhetoric is everywhere. Penn English professor Ania Loomba is another quintessence of the pro-Hamas campus left. Loomba teaches histories of race and colonialism, postcolonial studies, and feminist theory. Her 2021 English class "Can the Subaltern Speak? Identity, Politics and Life-Writing," assigned such pro-revolutionary writers as Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon, and Paulo Freire. Other readings attacked mass incarceration and "race and class in the age of Trump"—because, you know, this was an English class.

Loomba chairs doctoral dissertations on such topics as "The Nation and its Deviants: Global Sexology and the Racial Grammar of Sex in Colonial India, 1870-1950," thus ensuring an unbroken line of identity-based, victim-celebrating academics and a steady stream of students proclaiming their own victimhood or, as a second best alternative, solidarity with local nonwhite victims.

Some donors have convinced themselves that the problem with universities lies with the students and with the admission process, rather than with the faculty, curriculum, and administrators. A nascent Jewish alumni group at MIT will demand that the school screen out anti-Semites—something that would embroil a school in a host of legal complications, if it were even possible. But though a few freshmen may arrive at first-year orientation already able to ape the formulae of ethnic and postcolonial studies, most of them pick up those verbal gestures and concomitant political attitudes from their courses and from legacy campus political groups.

The exquisitely grandiose rhetoric in a Cornell University student manifesto drafted after the Hamas attacks was learned on-site: “We begin fully cognizant that power concedes nothing without demand, and thus we refuse any longer to beg this institution for concessions—instead, we issue undeniable ultimatums,” began Cornell’s Coalition for Mutual Liberation on November 9, recalling the Black Panther Party’s shaky command of the English idiom. The Coalition for Mutual Liberation and its ally, Black Students United, were “united in solidarity for Palestine in order to reject imperialism and white supremacy everywhere,” they wrote. “We believe that the Palestinian struggle is part of intersecting efforts to achieve the complete liberation of all colonized and oppressed peoples.” Leave the academic roots of such student posturing unchallenged, and nothing will change.

There is one benefit to keeping the alumni revolt focused on eradicating alleged campus anti-Semitism, however. Any university’s gestures toward doing so will crack the intersectional university apart. What the university mainstream, such as it is, is now calling “anti-Semitism” is for the university Left expressions of simple fact. What, then, will the forthcoming sensitivity training modules on “anti-Semitism” look like? No more “River to Sea” chants? No more accusations of settler colonialism? No more divestment calls (even if such calls are not banned)? How will the DEI trainers take up their new task, since many of them are part of the anti-Zionist coalition?

For now, the campus Left is sitting on its hands and staying silent as its core beliefs are reviled by campus administrators and by the Democratic Party establishment. But it is hard to imagine such self-discipline lasting. And when that self-control finally breaks down, the results will be enthralling to watch.

Focus on alleged campus anti-Semitism has been a valuable organizing tool. The charge of anti-Semitism caught the attention above all of the Jewish donors whose support over the decades has been central to the ballooning of university endowments. Those few faculty members who have steadfastly opposed the politicization of the university are less

than impressed by their newfound allies. A Penn professor told me: The “handful of outraged trustees [and donors] should have understood everything dumb, dysfunctional, politicized, and discriminatory at Penn thirty years ago. They lavished love, approval, and mountains of money on the administration. Nowhere have trustees honored their primary fiduciary obligation to pass on a free, fair, and rigorous university to posterity.” This professor, Jewish himself, concludes: “If I had to bet, the liberal Jews will be lured back into the fold, since they object *only* to anti-Semitism and they love the prestige of having buildings named after them.”

There are signs that this pessimistic prediction may not be borne out, even if GOP politicians intend to keep their focus on easily graspable anti-Semitism. In a December 12 letter to Penn’s board of trustees, Rowan wrote that anti-Semitism “is just a symptom of a larger problem: culture.” His definition of that culture is vague (or euphemistic): it has “allowed for preferred versus free speech” and has distracted from the university’s core mission of excellence. Rowan is being too accommodationist. The larger problem is ideological. Universities are waging a war on the West. Israel is just its current manifestation.

Any optimism about the current moment must be tempered. There have been other efforts, most notably by journalist and activist David Horowitz, to make universities honor their obligation to pass on a civilizational inheritance with love and gratitude. They all failed. But this time feels different. The sheer scope of attention that has been focused on the university, the array of powerful individuals who are mobilized, the daily revelations about conflicts of interest and shameless double standards, provide momentum that, if maintained, could result in actual change. To be sure, the beneficiaries and perpetrators of the intersectional status quo outnumber the rebels; they make up the vast majority of the administration, the majority of professors and vast majority of graduate students in non-STEM fields, and a growing number of faculty and administrators even in STEM. Trustees are either deliberately oblivious to this reality or agents of it. Nevertheless, as one rebel donor told me, all it takes on corporate boards sometimes is one or

two determined trustees to turn around a company. With the Penn 2.0 charter as a template and with enough persistence on the part of the rebels, the next generation of college students may have real opportunities, beyond today's handful of contrarian colleges, to immerse themselves in beauty, sublimity, and the wonder of knowledge.

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