

# The New Criterion

Notes & Comments December 2015

## More mush from the wimp

*On the president of Yale's response to recent protests at the college.*

One morning in March 1980, a select group of readers in Boston woke to find an editorial in *The Boston Globe* about one of Jimmy Carter's hectoring speeches. It bore the headline "More Mush from the Wimp." That working title wasn't meant to see publication, and only 160,000 copies of the paper escaped into the wild with that comic but illuminating and accurate rubric. We thought about that delicious story when casting our eyes over the long email that Yale's president Peter Salovey broadcast in response to the protests that had gripped the campus in early November. Those protests, along with similar outbreaks at institutions from Amherst and Dartmouth to Claremont McKenna College and the University of Missouri, captured the nation's attention for their exhibition of juvenile showboating on the part of students and craven capitulation on the part of professors and administrators. As Allan Bloom put it, writing about the radical protests of the 1960s and '70s in *The Closing of the American Mind*, "A few students discovered that pompous teachers who catechized them about academic free speech could, with a little shove, be made into dancing bears." At Yale, the ursine circus culminated (as of this writing) in a late-night march to Salovey's house where "traumatized" students presented a long list of demands, including abolition of the title "Master" for the heads of Yale's residential colleges, the erection of a monument in a prominent public space acknowledging that Yale had been built on land "stolen" from "indigenous peoples," renaming Calhoun College because its namesake, the Congressman, Senator, Vice President, and Secretary of War, had also been a strong advocate of slavery, a mandatory "ethnic studies" requirement for all students, and more attention, money, and privileges for Yale's "students of color."

Salovey's response to outrageous demands presented in an outrageous manner (they were read aloud to him by histrionic students near midnight) was the wimpiest mush we've seen from a college administrator since James Perkins soiled himself by capitulating to gun-toting radicals at Cornell in 1969. "I have heard the expressions of those who do not feel fully included at Yale," Salovey began (and you can almost hear a sorrowful violin crying in the background), "many of whom have described experiences of isolation, and even of hostility, during their time here." What can one say? Yale is one of the richest and most privileged educational environments in the world.

Any student—white, black, red, yellow, or ultramarine—should thank his lucky stars to be there. Salovey grandly spoke of reaffirming Yale’s “commitment to a campus where hatred and discrimination have no place.” He also promised to spread around lavish dollops of Yale’s \$26 billion endowment to sooth the pain, doubling the budgets of various ethnic centers and initiatives and otherwise applying the salve of money to quiet the protests. But Yale, a model left-liberal institution whose allegiance to politically correct sentimentality on all issues is cloyingly palpable, needs to worry not about the oh-so-delicate feelings of pampered students but liberal intolerance and the insidious freedom-blighting imperatives that flow from the pathetic culture of “trigger warnings,” “micro-aggressions,” and “safe spaces” (Beirut is an unsafe space, but Yale?).

Peter Salovey is a Janus-faced character. On the one hand, he has been a staunch defender of free speech. On the other, he has embraced the whole politically correct menu of imaginary grievances and the noxious, discriminatory rhetoric it relies upon. Martin Luther King dreamt of a world where the “content of our character” not the color of our skin was what mattered. The whole idea that black or biracial students should get special status as “students of color” is a repellent reversal of King’s vision. The same can be said for special status claimed by Indians as “native-American” or blacks as “African-American.” As Teddy Roosevelt noted long ago, the whole idea of “hyphenated Americans” is anathema to the ideal of the American dream in which we are all Americans, period, no matter whence we or our families ultimately hail.

That is an ideal that Salovey’s agenda of capitulation does not acknowledge. It is the same with all the feminist rhetoric and the obsession with sex that permeates college campuses today. Back in the 1970s, Irving Kristol observed that “ ‘Sexual liberation’ is always near the top of a countercultural agenda—though just what form the liberation takes can and does vary, sometimes quite widely.” I doubt that he envisioned the minatory alphabet soup of grievance that is these days packed into initiatives beginning lgbt. . . , but the fact that students are able in effect to major in their sex lives or at least achieve protected states for their idiosyncratic glandular proclivities would be comic if it were not so intellectually and morally disfiguring. Peter Salovey wants to square a circle: he wants free speech, but he also wants a pampered, politically correct environment where “people of color” and sexual exotics can disport themselves in their chosen playpens and demand a respect that only real academic achievement can yield. It’s an impossible project, and a mushy one at that.

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This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 34 Number 4 , on page 2

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