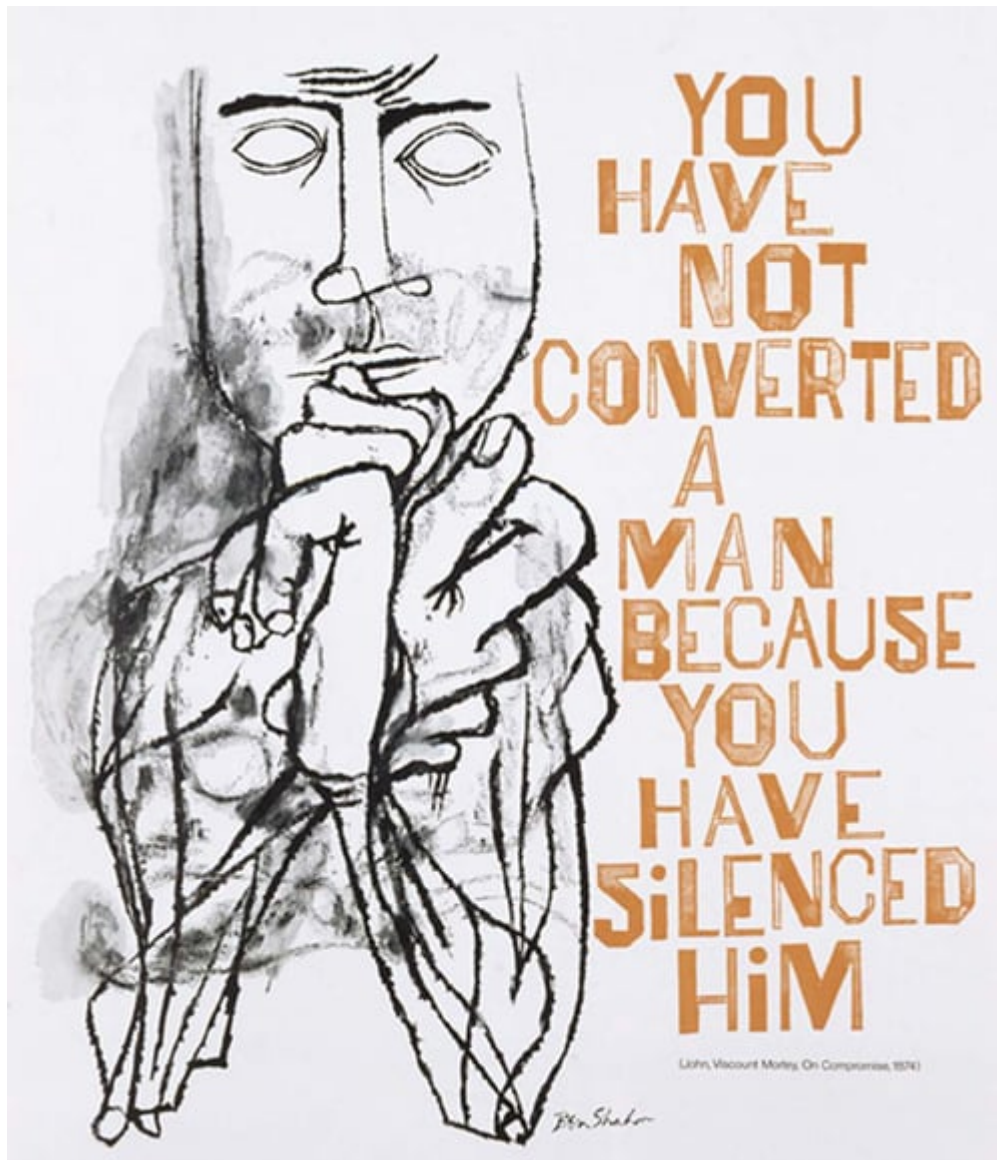


# Standing up for Good Sense: A Defense of Amy Wax

by Christopher DeGroot (October 2017)



John Viscount Morley poster by Ben Shahn

*The long war of words and writings will end in blows.—Erasmus*

On August 9, law professors Amy Wax and Larry Alexander published a scandalous [op-ed](#) in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, a newspaper that, like the enviable *New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, generally does its best to advance democracy's death by darkness. The safe space industry has since been in quite a tizzy, for the two heretics called for a return to the "country's bourgeois culture." In their traumatizing words, America's less progressive culture

laid out the script we all were supposed to follow: Get married before you have children and strive to stay married for their sake. Get the education you need for gainful employment, work hard, and avoid idleness. Go the extra mile for your employer or client. Be a patriot, ready to serve the country. Be neighborly, civic-minded, and charitable. Avoid coarse language in public. Be respectful of authority. Eschew substance abuse and crime.

These basic cultural precepts reigned from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s. They could be followed by people of all backgrounds and abilities, especially when backed up by almost universal endorsement. Adherence was a major contributor to the productivity, educational gains, and social coherence of that period.

Not to simplify, however; not to say everything was so much better back then. Indeed,

there was racial discrimination, limited sex roles, and pockets of anti-Semitism. However, steady improvements for women and minorities were underway even when bourgeois norms reigned. Banishing discrimination and expanding opportunity does not require the demise of bourgeois culture. Quite the opposite: The loss of bourgeois habits seriously impeded the progress of disadvantaged groups. That trend also accelerated the destructive consequences of the growing welfare state, which, by taking over

financial support of families, reduced the need for two parents. A strong pro-marriage norm might have blunted this effect. Instead, the number of single parents grew astronomically, producing children more prone to academic failure, addiction, idleness, crime, and poverty.

In view of what they believe to be significant cultural decline, the professors go on to criticize the 1960s counter culture. Led by "academics, writers, artists, actors, and journalists," it "relished liberation from conventional constraints" and promoted an "antiauthoritarian, adolescent, wish-fulfillment ideal of sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll that was unworthy of, and unworkable for, a mature, prosperous adult society." Is this a fair description of that exuberant 1960s freedom?

Well, let's look at the legacy. In 2017, our country is marked by broken families and rising illegitimacy, rampant violence, drug addiction, declining education, men dropping out of the workforce, rising depression and suicide rates (including among the young), gender confusion, a loss of civility and basic decency, a loss of historical memory, a lack of high culture, and, by way of compensating for all this, aggressive resentment that purports to instruct. In context, therefore, the op-ed expresses what is for most people outside academia and the intellectual class sheer good sense. But as with the silly [Google memo controversy](#), the reflexively angry reactions betray an unwillingness to examine an argument, the fiery heart preferring to rage resentful. Within the Penn community Amy Wax, like James Damore at Google, has been subjected to a tribunal of righteous opinion, and as in a Nathaniel Hawthorne novel, the Puritan accusers are hypocrites out for blood. It is worth examining this American-all-too-American misunderstanding at length, because it is representative of the [increasingly facile ignorance and self-righteousness](#) of our time. This is the world we live in now, and so far there's no sign that it's not going to get worse—on the contrary. We

must also understand that peoples die out when, in their [folly and weakness](#), they affirm the very behaviors that are already ruining them, behaviors whose true character many people do not recognize, as they misunderstand those rare, brave souls who alone are willing to say the unpopular truth.

For professors Wax and Alexander,

all cultures are not equal. Or at least they are not equal in preparing people to be productive in an advanced economy. The culture of the Plains Indians was designed for nomadic hunters, but is not suited to a First World, 21st-century environment. Nor are the single-parent, antisocial habits, prevalent among some working-class whites; the anti-“acting white” rap culture of inner-city blacks; the anti-assimilation ideas gaining ground among some Hispanic immigrants. These cultural orientations are not only incompatible with what an advanced free-market economy and a viable democracy require, they are also destructive of a sense of solidarity and reciprocity among Americans. If the bourgeois cultural script—which the upper-middle class still largely observes but now hesitates to preach—cannot be widely reinstated, things are likely to get worse for us all.

This is the language of conviction, and as such, it’s certain to ruffle. The next day, in an [interview](#) with *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, the Penn student newspaper, Wax, explaining the op-ed, said, “I don’t shrink from the word, ‘superior,’” because “everyone wants to come to the countries that exemplify” bourgeois values. “Everyone wants to go to countries ruled by white Europeans.” After all, “bourgeois values aren’t just for white people . . . The irony is: bourgeois values can help minorities get ahead.”

The interview continues:

Wax knows her beliefs are not typically shared with students at elite, Ivy League universities, whom she told the DP can be

“totally clueless, out of touch and oblivious.”

But to conflate her views with sweeping praise for every action taken by western, European governments would be misguided, she said.

“It’s partly what gets the left in trouble—to tar everything that’s good with some of the crimes that undoubtedly have been committed.”

As we should only expect, the frank, unapologetic Wax elicited the following [statement](#) from Graduate Employees Together–University of Pennsylvania (GET-UP), the graduate student’s Diversity Lobby. Here is their standard cant, doubtless commended by a majority of Penn students and professors:

As a diverse community, and a community that we strive to make even more diverse, we reject the premise that cultures can be neatly separated and placed into a moral pecking order, with the so-called “bourgeois culture” of the 1950s white upper middle class at the top. We are outraged that a representative of our community upholds, and published, these hateful and regressive views.

We condemn the presence of toxic racist, sexist, homophobic attitudes on campus. This is not an issue of academic freedom; we have no comment on her academic work. The superiority of one race over others is not an academic debate we have in the 21st century; it is racism masquerading as science.

The kind of hate Wax espouses is an everyday part of many

students' lives at Penn, and we can and must fight against it. For every incident like this that gains press and publicity, we must recognize that there are countless which go unmarked and unchecked. We call on President Amy Gutmann to join us in condemning this affront to both the values and the members of our community. GET-UP stands with the students attacked by Professor Wax, and against racism, xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia in all their forms.

The first clause—"as a diverse community"—gives the game away from the beginning. Unlike Wax herself, these are not disinterested, exacting thinkers. Their opinions are those of the party, that is, the good people, in contrast to those who, not being on their side, have to be wrong. In general, these days anybody whose view on things begins with "as a . . . " is almost certain to be an ideologue. His perceptions, and the judgments that follow from them, are in the service of what he *already* believes, or rather, *knows* to be the Truth. He does not inquire into matters in a context-specific fashion, because, again, he is *already* beyond ignorance and error. His is a *theological certainty*, so all he has to do is whip stubborn reality—or other people—into line.

In this statement we see the Left's curious [Puritanical sensibility](#), the professor rebuked—"called out," as people now say crudely—for her sins against political correctness. *Pace* Nietzsche, God is not dead. He abides in the form of what William Blake called the Accuser God. "For every incident like this that gains press and publicity," GET-UP declares, "we must recognize that there are countless which go unmarked and unchecked." Satan is elusive, and for every wicked Wax there are countless sins and sinners that go undetected: there can be no holiday from the witch hunt.

In essence, this is how the Leftist mind now works. The Left posits a negative—"implicit bias," say—and thereupon seeks to [project](#) that negative into contexts, a hypocrite's affair that passes for fairness.

“We have no comment on her academic work,” GET-UP says revealingly. Had they looked into it, GET-UP would have found that Wax’s rigorous, well-regarded scholarship amply supports the views expressed in the op-ed. The woman is the real thing, not some idiot who just pontificates off the cuff. But like any bully (who is weak deep down), our campus Puritans do not want to play fair. “Totally clueless, out of touch and oblivious,” they try to win by crying foul. Theirs is a cynical, loser’s game, and to that end they are most inclusive, albeit at the price of coherence. Thus, though the op-ed makes no mention of homosexuality, GET-UP makes sure to tell Wax, in so many words, that in case you have any sneaky ideas, lady, we stand up for gays too. And for dogs. And for cats. And for birds. And for insects. And . . .

Wax believes certain “cultural orientations are . . . incompatible with what an advanced free-market economy and a viable democracy require.” While this may hurt some feelings, it is not therefore wrong. What’s the problem here? There is a weird denialism in America today, especially on the decadent coasts. Anyone who watches the news, or looks around in a big city sees all manner of self-destructive behavior, wherein, as in so much else, there are some racial disparities, and yet it’s an unspeakable crime for a person to say, what could hardly be more manifest, that regardless of your race, some ways of living are better than others, more compatible “with what an advanced free-market economy and a viable democracy require.” It is true that “the upper-middle class still largely observes but now hesitates to preach” the better sort of life, and the reason for this hesitance is clear: to talk it like you walk it is to be painted a boogieman by the ever indignant and resentful. Our social betters used to think they had an obligation to both set and preach a good example. How can they do so today? Wisdom is intolerable.

GET-UP finds Wax’s views “regressive.” The dogmatic assumption here is that progressivism is true, progressivism which eschews all value judgments save the [incoherent, self-defeating](#) one that all value judgments are equal. Progressivism may or may not be true, so far as GET-UP gives us to understand: they make no argument. Of course, just



because a person thinks a certain culture, or form of life, is better than another, he need not be “racist, sexist, homophobic,” or what you will. To say otherwise is like believing I am “sexist” because I think William Hazlitt is a greater writer than J.K. Rowling. The conclusion does not follow. It is possible to make value judgments—which, as a matter of sheer logic, are necessarily exclusive—without being a bad human being. Though Wax’s candid language is offensive to many, it remains true that nobody in the liberal West wants to move to Afghanistan or Darfur. Western exceptionalism is real, and if you have any doubts, watch this [video](#). Or you might ask any woman whether she’d rather be born in the US or Iran.

Although Wax uses the term “bourgeois script,” the conduct to which that phrase refers is an equally accurate descriptor of the lifestyle of many Asians and Jewish persons in our country, whose relatively more traditional way of life—and concomitant superior achievements—is hardly reducible to the “‘bourgeois culture’ of the 1950s white upper middle class at the top.” Groups like GET-UP tend to be hostile toward the traditional family, it being all “bourgeois values,” and yet, ironically, we notice that in proportion as the traditional family erodes, a process that now occurs alongside the decline of [inherently meaningful work](#), people turn with greater fervor to identity politics, whose intense feeling of solidarity in opposition functions as something like a family, albeit quite queer, indeed perverse.

“The bourgeois cultural script” really is better than the incoherent postmodern belief that all cultures and values are equal. As Wax puts it,

among those who currently follow the old precepts, regardless of their level of education or affluence, the homicide rate is tiny, opioid addiction is rare, and poverty rates are low. Those who live by the simple rules that most people used to accept may not end up rich or hold elite jobs, but their lives will go far better than they do now.



We could give plenty of statistical evidence to support this claim, as Wax herself does throughout her prolific writings, but there is no need to. *GET-UP's sensibility fails on the level of basic logic; it fails by its own lights*, because what GET-UP seems not to understand (or at least, to take seriously) *is that all value is intrinsically comparative: if all ideas about how we should live are equal, then all such ideas are meaningless*, and there's no argument against might makes right. An unhappy thing for postmodernists, but dispatching a bias response team cannot change this.

We can perceive a generational change—and it is not one for the better—in the way that GET-UP responded to Wax. Until fairly recently, it would have been unthinkable for a group of graduate students to be so irresponsibly uncritical of such a distinguished person, for again, GET-UP does not even bother to make an argument: it merely asserts its righteousness. Though it is good news for mankind that this sort of thing is still uncommon in much of the world, the assumption that palpably ignorant youth has something to teach a figure such as Amy Wax is now quite common on our campuses; it is, I say, American-all-too-American.

For we are blinded more and more by a sentimentalism that, however well-intentioned, does a lot more harm than good. At her [controversial lecture](#) on affirmative action at [Middlebury College](#) on November 21, 2013, Wax lamented, “we are so committed to tolerance and non-judgmentalism [sic] that we tolerate things that maybe we shouldn't tolerate . . . Not by making them illegal or throwing people in jail, but by just even saying ‘you shouldn't do that’ or ‘that isn't good.’” About two years later, she gave a [speech](#) at Yale in which she criticized affirmative action. According to the *Yale Daily News*, “during Wax's speech, about a dozen members of the YPU, including the two who had asked to postpone the debate and members of the political left, rose and walked to the back of the room, where they turned their backs on Wax and raised their fists in the air. Several students cried during her speech.” What do we have here? A pathetic refusal to grow

up, and a people that does not admonish such behavior necessarily produces a culture of quitters. Whether it's in the workplace or in a marriage, it won't do to just raise your fists in the air or cry. As [Christina Hoff-Summers](#) once said, life does not come with a trigger warning. Like the Western reluctance to face Islam, the sentimental fear of value-judgment is a symptom of decline, a weakness of will that is not just a [problem](#) in the United States.

Consider again the sentence: "We call on President Amy Gutmann to join us in condemning this affront to both the values and the members of our community." Like querulous children, GET-UP tattles to the university president, and in their hearts what they desire is not fairness but punishment. For the American academy—and that temple of learned ignorance known as the Ivy League in particular—is like a Nathaniel Hawthorne novel: it is the righteous accusers who are the most wicked, so much so that, like the borderline personality, they reflexively equate anything that disturbs their worldview with evil. "It is amazing," says Thomas Sowell, "how many people think they can answer an argument by attributing bad motives to those who disagree with them. Using this kind of reasoning, you can believe or not believe anything about anything, without having to bother to deal with facts or logic."

Leftists do so naturally; because their worldview is all illusion, it follows that they must zealously oppose anything that might threaten their comforting chimeras. These are propagated in order to show others *they* are on the right side: that is to say, *against other people*, whoever those persons happen to be: for the logic at work here is by no means fine; though there must be an enemy, virtually *any* enemy will do: all that affects need is a powerful feeling of opposition. This feeling the Left *must* maintain, like an anguished mother who can go on only by believing her dead son awaits her in heaven. That is why the Left's Foucaultian sensibility distrusts power and authority by definition. For the Leftist mind, behind power's every nook and authority's every cranny there lurks some monster from the deep. Behind every truth there lies white privilege, or the

patriarchy, or heteronormativity, or the corporations, or God-knows-what. So thinks the Left, and in so thinking it operates on a metaphysical plane: its dogmas cannot be disproven, because they rest on negative premises whose veracity is unquestionable, lest the myriad illusions be dispelled, and weak, dishonest, fearful *types* (in contrast to developed *individuals*) have to take responsibility for their fate. But that is the last thing the Left wants to do: it longs for [righteousness on the cheap](#), for evil and what it calls “inequality” to be explained away by social constructionism, that is to say, by what is *outside the self*. We see this neurotic sensibility, this underlying, almost masochistic craving for Victimhood in the Left’s language. Thus, “we are outraged”—GET-UP’s predictable language—is now a kind of national refrain, given the growing number of people who, when they don’t get what they want, invariably believe they are victims. As with the rest of our biggest problems, it is the intellectuals who are leading this rapid slide into Victimhood. Most intellectuals are now miserably touchy, and instead of living the life of the mind, for which their slavish natures are not at all suited, they would do better to spend their time at those safe and comfortable Tupperware parties which are so popular in America’s yuppified suburbs.

In “[Higher Education vs. Competency and Diversity: An Afterword](#) (2017),” the late Peter Lawler cogently describes the destructive approach to education and the hypocrisy that continues to disfigure so many young American minds, the very persons who end up running, or rather, ruining the nation:

Diversity—as the only part of higher education that is not a technique or method—becomes the whole of morality, and it requires the silencing of controversy or criticism. It becomes wrapped up in the extreme consumer-sensitivity of today’s residential college; every claim for dignity or autonomy must be affirmed or beyond criticism. Students have the right not to hear viewpoints that assault their dignity, because the student-customer is always right.

Having imbibed in a pseudo-moral manner the deep resentment of the academic Left, “students,” as Peter Lawler says, “have the right not to hear viewpoints that assault their dignity,” where assault may mean mere disagreement. That is the irony of the insidious American university; these little monsters, apes of learned ignorance, are what it has made. The American university now manufactures inadequate citizens by definition, though no mass recall is possible. The “student-customer” becomes the citizen-customer, the state consisting of stunted individuals who demand that reality conform to their expectations *as such*. Such citizens, being so little in themselves, are hardly capable of [self-reliance](#), life’s most essential virtue, because in the face of hardship their propensity is to turn to an external authority: from parents to university president, from human resources to administrative state, from divorce lawyer to therapist, it is a life not of adult independence but of childish dependence.

GET-UP’s misunderstanding was soon followed by IDEAL Council’s, which, with its naiveté-betraying name, represents Penn’s long list of terribly marginalized groups. Judging from *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, you might think the Penn campus was more dangerous than North Philly. On August 17, IDEAL Council issued “[An Open Letter to the University of Pennsylvania Regarding Hate Speech in Our Community.](#)” Here is some of the confused document:

Prior to teaching at Penn, Wax was a professor at the University of Virginia Law School. On August 12th, White supremacists marched through the University of Virginia carrying torches, chanting “You will not replace us,” and yelling racial and anti-semitic slurs. White Nationalist Richard Spencer initiated the march with the statement “What brings us together is that we are white, we are a people, we will not be replaced.” Spencer’s incitement of moral panic can find its intellectual home in the kind of falsely “objective” rhetoric in Amy Wax’s statement, which positions

(white) bourgeois culture as not only objectively superior, but also under incursion from lesser cultures and races.

The University of Pennsylvania is at...[a] crossroads . . . With white supremacist rallies proliferating rapidly across the country, Penn's lack of transparent and concrete policies regarding discrimination enables the intimidation of its students of color, including by their own professors. We do not wish to prolong this process until the metastasizing KKK chapters of Pennsylvania march boldly across our campus.

We are not satisfied that we should wait until one of these incidents occurs again. We are not satisfied that all reasonable preventative action has been taken to protect the free speech, wellbeing, and physical safety of students at Penn who are not White.

We demand:

A statement from the university specifically designating racist, homophobic, sexist, transphobic speech as hate speech.

1. The convening of a committee with student representatives to develop a formal policy for censuring hate speech and a schedule of community-based consequences for discriminatory acts against marginalized groups. [Edit: The original draft contained a typo where 'censuring' was autocorrected to 'censoring.' This mistake has been corrected as of Saturday, August 19th]
2. A public, step-by-step outline of the current grievance procedure provided for the university, if any, as well as formal workshops on utilizing the grievance procedure for all Penn community members.
3. An addition to the student honor policy that condemns, in writing, racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia.

4. A digital grievance submission form specifically for racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, which would protect the anonymity of student submissions.
5. A policy in place to ensure that tenured faculty with a record of discrimination do not sit on hiring, tenure, or student admissions committees.
6. A formal, centralized Diversity & Inclusion office with staff that are charged directly with improving the overall culture of inclusion at Penn and providing resources for students experiencing marginalized or discrimination at Penn.
7. Additionally, the IDEAL Council declares its intention to henceforth provide public minutes to our membership of all meetings concerning said issues with the student body.

Quite a list! I should hate to travel with these persons. In response, Dr. Wax might wish to appropriate Dr. Johnson: "I have found you an argument, IDEAL Council, but I am not obliged to find you an understanding." Odd to see the scholar mentioned in the same breath with Richard Spencer. Her University of Virginia professorship was evidently in the wrong place at the wrong time, like anyone now alive who is intelligent enough to fathom all this distinctly academic folly. And what are we to make of the phrase "falsely objective rhetoric"? How does this relate, in a logical sense, to the converse, truly objective rhetoric? Why not just say false rhetoric, or false claims, or fallacies, or some such plain, straightforward thing? The awkward language belies the amateurishness of the writers: they know not what they do. A shame how they trouble themselves. It's still a nice time of year here in Philly. Why not a stroll along Kelley Drive, or a trip out to Longwood Gardens?

If IDEAL Council were serious they'd make an argument, and their language would reflect that seriousness. And as Wax, who, unlike most academics, does not lack a sense of humor, put it wittily in an email to the [Washington Beacon](#),

if, indeed, bourgeois values are so racist, the progressive critics should be out there in the street demonstrating against them, stripping them from their own lives, and forbidding their children to practice them. They should be chanting, 'No more work, more crime, more out of wedlock babies, forget thrift, let's get high!' . . . Of course, there's little chance we're going to see anything like that, which shows the hollowness, indeed the silliness, of the critiques.

If her critics were serious, they might see that Wax addresses the changes in American ideology from the mid-1960s to the present. Like that great man of the Left Christopher Lasch, she emphasizes the [abandonment of \*noblesse oblige\*](#). For Wax, things took a bad turn when "those adults with influence over the culture, for a variety of reasons, abandoned their role as advocates for respectability, civility, and adult values." She does not say "white culture was under incursion from lesser races," though, unlike opportunists such as Hilary Clinton, she sensibly deplores the divisive "identity politics that inverted the color-blind aspirations of civil rights leaders like the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. into an obsession with race, ethnicity, gender, and now sexual preference." Again, Wax is interested in ideas, values, beliefs; here race is incidental, although it's true, to be sure, that far more black children are born out of wedlock than Asian children, to note which fact hardly makes one racist.

And how did it not occur to her critics that a *Jewish* woman (the Jews who might be called the people of persecution no less accurately than the people of the Book) is rather unlikely to make common cause with a man like Richard Spencer? And as for her co-author, Larry Alexander, as he said in his e-mail to the [Washington Beacon](#), "the charges of racism, white supremacy, etc. are . . . laughable, given that I was a civil rights marcher and have a multi-racial family. But, of course, when you don't have the facts on your side, you resort to calling



names. Pathetic!" One hopes these students are in one of the studies disciplines—women's, gender, queer, or whatever backwater—and are not future doctors and lawyers.

Having lumped the bewildered woman together with a number of truly racist persons, IDEAL Council provides more good news: that there is "ample space within the construct of free speech for a forceful condemnation of racist, classist, and queerphobic rhetoric." Queer query: what is the criterion for that rhetoric, the condemnation of which is so sublimely inclusive? Why, whatever the collection of twenty-five year olds determines in its profound sagacity! And pay heed, *locus parentis* (we are paying you, after all), because "the failure to use this power to condemn hate speech constitutes a position of its own—a position of indifference and complicity." In other words, do what we say—satisfy our "demands"—or else you are on the side of the wicked white people, and indeed the KKK itself is sure to "march boldly across our campus," nor can the linebacker-like feminists avail against such a terror. Since "Penn does not empower all students" to be safe from disagreement, IDEAL Council turns with its list of demands to President Amy Guttmann: crack the whip, *Herr* Professor! A bigger, emboldened bureaucracy is to save the young progressives from the burden of debate, indeed from democracy itself, argument being superfluous on account of IDEAL Council's wisdom. As with rape culture, or rather, [dating and having sex](#), the uni-bureaucracy is to steward those challengingly adult activates, thinking, speaking, and writing.

Penn has made quite a caricature of itself. Anyone who, like me, is from Philly has no choice, unless he is an idiot, but to chuckle at Penn's schoolmarm manner, because nothing could be more unlike the city of Philadelphia, which, from Pennsport out to Germantown, is as gritty and real as life gets in America. Nor did the Founding Fathers, when, about 240 years ago, they declared their national independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain, or when they designed much of the legal framework of this great country here in this splendid historical city, believe their lofty legacy would fall into

the hands of experts scared of their own shadow. Penn is, in fact, the laughingstock of Philadelphia. Even the animals at the Philadelphia Zoo are embarrassed by it, and the baboon exhibit shows a better understanding of foreign policy than Penn President Amy Gutmann, the ever sunny, smiling defender of a [sanctuary campus](#) in a sanctuary city.

On August 21, the indefatigable *Daily Pennsylvanian*, as if trying to outdo the *National Inquirer* in tastelessness, elected to publish a "[Statement on Amy Wax and Charlottesville](#)," this the work of a rabblement fifty-four strong, all Penn students and alumni. Here's some of their predictably generic thought:

History teaches us that these hateful ideas about racial superiority have been embedded in many of our social institutions. They crawl through the hallways of our most prestigious universities, promoting hate and bigotry under the guise of "intellectual debate." Indeed, just days before Charlottesville, Penn Law School professor Amy Wax, co-wrote an op-ed piece with Larry Alexander, a law professor at the University of San Diego, claiming that not "all cultures are created equal" and extolling the virtues of white cultural practices of the '50s that, if understood within their sociocultural context, stem from the very same malignant logic of hetero-patriarchal, class-based, white supremacy that plagues our country today. These cultural values and logics are steeped in anti-blackness and white hetero-patriarchal respectability, i.e. two-hetero-parent homes, divorce is a vice and the denouncement of all groups perceived as not acting white enough i.e. black Americans, Latino communities and immigrants in particular.

Wax's and Alexander's claims rely on a simplistic, bigoted and archaic notion of culture; a concept purported to be bounded and discrete, a postulate which anthropologists "dismantled" decades

ago by showing how such formulations of culture are embedded in systems of political, economic and social oppression. We know that these claims are based on culturally-situated values of purity that safely legitimate one group's superiority over Others: values which, in this case, are easily discernible as those associated with Anglo-whiteness. But these professors are allowed to speak because they hold markers of white respectability. They are well-educated, and use appropriately respectable (white) diction and dress.

Once again, there is the assumption that bourgeois values are just a species of racism. Once again, it is implied that ideas have no intrinsic or independent worth: that is determined by skin pigment, gender, how you part your hair, etc. Indeed, per the criterion of resentment, even Standard English and wearing a suit and tie are nothing but "appropriately respectable (white) diction and dress." Once again—inevitably—we get Charlottesville, to which professors Wax and Alexander are violently yoked. The diction reveals the paranoia: unprogressive views "crawl through the hallways . . . promoting hate and bigotry under the guise of 'intellectual debate.'" The snide scare quotes provide unintended comedy, as if the critics had any interest in coherent discussion of any kind.

The most disturbing sentence is the exceedingly strained: "These cultural values and logics are steeped in anti-blackness and white hetero-patriarchal respectability, i.e. two-hetero-parent homes, divorce is a vice and the denouncement of all groups perceived as not acting white enough . . . " The traditional family, by this logic of disapproval, is leveled down to being no better than, say, Caitlyn Jenner and one of her (his?) daughters having a child: for if all values are equal, why should they not? The belief that it is desirable for children to have two parents—a truth that anybody who has been around children can see in an instant, children themselves *wanting* two parents—is reduced to prejudice. Nor is divorce a vice. For there is no human nature; we are not endowed with, we ourselves are not

something in virtue of which certain ways of living are better—healthier—than others. We are not answerable to any standard save that which we choose to recognize. Just as I have a right to subsist on a diet of nails and glass if I please, so I might as well have a love affair with a mouse, nobly above and beyond any “hetero-patriarchal respectability.” Reading this statement, I was reminded of an acute aphorism by G.K. Chesterton: “The most dangerous criminal now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher.” Wax’s critics are so many lawless modern philosophers. They believe they are fighting for liberation, but the actual consequence of such people, if they are successful, shall be more cultural chaos.

This is the time for members of the University of Pennsylvania community who claim to fight systemic inequality to speak up, especially those anthropologists and scholars who claim an understanding of culture and who recognize culture talk’s deleterious potential as a vehicle for racism and sexism.

How shall Penn “fight systemic inequality”? Why, every teacher is to proselytize, of course.

Scholars at Penn, especially those in the social sciences and humanities [being the vanguard of enlightenment], are to make the question of white supremacy a constitutive part of their syllabi and discussions, centering it in the first few weeks of their classes. Faculty should be supported in this, for instance, through a syllabus workshop for people who are unsure how to do this work but would like to learn more. There is a need more than ever to educate ourselves and our students in order to expunge the anti-intellectual values that continue to uphold white supremacy.

Nor is this all. Justice demands more.

We call for the denunciation, not of racism as some abstract concept “out there” – in Charlottesville, in America, by the poor uneducated white or by an individual racist ideologue – but for a denunciation of racism at the University of Pennsylvania. In particular we must denounce faculty members that are complicit in and uphold white supremacy, normalizing it as if it were just another viable opinion in our educational tenures at the University.

Note the ironic, real racism in this: “the poor uneducated white,” that dunderhead who is responsible for the presidency of Donald Trump. Ah, if only there were no other obstacle to the progressive path. But no. Like GET-UP and IDEAL Council, these commissars of “equality” find that Authority has speech-silencing work to do. And not just Authority; faculty also must subject the deviant professors to a public shaming.

We call for the University of Pennsylvania administration–Penn President Gutmann and the deans of each school – as well as faculty to directly confront Wax and Alexander’s op-ed as racist and white supremacist discourse and to push for an investigation into Wax’s advocacy for white supremacy. We believe that such statements should point directly to the historical and sociopolitical antecedents of Wax’s hate speech, and to disallow hate speech whether shrouded in respectability or not.

“The undersigned scholars [sic],” like GET-UP and Ideal Council, do not address Wax’s and Alexander’s argument concerning the superiority of “the bourgeois script.” No surprise, that. Their “advanced degrees” are all in stilted pop psychology: Anthropology, Sociology, Communications, Africana Studies and the like. “Saying ‘therefore,’”

said William Empson, "is like giving someone a bop on the nose." Yet this scholarly herd is by no means fit to get in the intellectual ring with the brilliant Amy Wax. So they want to change the rules: Wax is made to seem a bad person, and in this way her critics can imply their own moral superiority. Nor will that be forgotten when they come up for tenure.

The politically incorrect truth is that the people who write this sort of thing are damaged and in deep existential despair. Theirs is a metaphysical crisis, for what have historically been our most significant sources of human value—the family, religion, romantic love, high culture—are now dying out in the West. In consequence, masses of (unwittingly) lost people are projecting their private inner conflicts onto the external world. Unconsciously they turn to the university authority and the authority of the state to try to cope with their profound inner poverty and confusion. In the case of elite academia, this takes an especially perverse form, for here we have mostly middle and upper class persons, spoiled, sheltered personalities who, having never known the incomparable value of the deepest suffering, are extraordinarily weak and thin-skinned. Hence their childish desire to legislate human psychology itself. Hence how, in their passionate flight from big bad reality, these walking satires of academic circumstance want everyone else to share in their illness, a goal about which they are fanatics. For them, such *conversion* is part of their very individuation. As we know from religion, there is hope, purpose, and solidarity in being unhappy with others. While such sick souls may merit pity, the most important thing is not to let them make their "cure" policy, as though an army's lowest ranking members should replace the general and his lieutenants.

Much of this anxious inclination to victimhood and dependence is traceable to the influence of Michel Foucault, that irksome intellectual Caliban. The best comment on Foucault belongs to George Scialabba: "Nietzsche is the text, Foucault the commentary." I would add, though, that this commentary the world can well do without. For

while, like his master Nietzsche, Foucault sees all life as so much will to power, unlike the Emersonian Nietzsche, there is in him no positive vision, no manly, heroic affirmation. Beyond "bio-power" there is only nihilism. Now this, of course, is precisely what we should expect from a masochistic Parisian homosexual. The womanly American academy, cut off from the masculine culture of physical labor which created Western civilization, takes to this voguish, putrid French pigeon for a lot of reasons. To begin with, the Foucaultian critique is a very easy rhetorical game, applicable to virtually anything. In structure, it is no different from what a literary critic once called "the Freudian Easter egg hunt." The lame, passive-aggressive soul puts on his resentment-sanctioned bifocals, and now look, behind *The Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition* there is in fact "patriarchal objectification" or some such academic herd cant. The normal, healthy-minded person, on the other hand, looks at Irina Shayk, Kate Upton and the rest and perceives not just beauty, but a singularly powerful beauty. Here, for we animals of desire and lovers of imagination, is health, vitality, happiness, a happiness that is lacking in enfeebled academia. Here indeed is the will to life itself. "Give me a chance!" exclaims every vigorous male on the planet. "Well, what have you to offer?" answers triumphal woman. And so life goes on. Before feminism, it was just this magnificent beauty, this ennobling femininity, as it were, that inspired men to write love poetry, now a dead genre, slain by corpulent cat ladies. Farewell, Petrarch! Behold, Bertha and her violent mission against phallogocentrism!—The reductive Foucaultian sensibility, to come to its primary purpose, facilitates the moral grandstanding of academic mediocrities. This activity is crucial, for it shows that they are good guys and obscures their melancholy inability to do the "original research" of which universities laughably make so much—publish or perish! As if the life of the mind should be no different in spirit from the Philistine industry of Amazon and Walmart. Foucault also enables the vast majority of academic men who are intimidated by women—and of whom the sort of stunners named in this paragraph are unfailingly disdainful—to win the favor of American feminists, who, subsequent to feminism's first wave, have been much the most unattractive and unappealing women in world history, sheer grotesqueries of womanhood and intellectual



independence. The ordinary American feminist academic has long resembled the ugly, pimply fat girl at summer camp: her mission is to indicate her own value by using her governing resentment to tear everyone else down. “Leave us alone!” cry the pretty undergraduates to Big Sister. “If you really want to do us a favor, point us toward the bad boys.”

Let us turn now to some of Wax’s colleagues at the Penn Law School. Having seen what a blazon of intellectual and moral excellence is the University of Pennsylvania, my readers are excited to learn what they have to say, I have no doubt. Surely they, what with all their advanced degrees, eminent titles, and much-cited publications, will be exemplars of leadership. For, as Wax put it, “restoring the hegemony of the bourgeois culture will require the arbiters of culture – the academics, media, and Hollywood – to relinquish multicultural grievance polemics and the preening pretense of defending the downtrodden. Instead of bashing the bourgeois culture, they should return to the 1950s posture of celebrating it.” On August 20, professors Sarah Barringer Gordon, Sophia Z. Lee, Serena Mayeri, Dorothy E. Roberts, and Tobias Barrington Wolff, perhaps inspired by the example of Penn’s youth, published their own op-ed in *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, “[Notions of ‘Bourgeois’ Cultural Superiority Are Based on Bad History.](#)” It tells us, among other things, that

nostalgia for the 1950s breezes over the truth of inequality and exclusion. The “racial discrimination” and “limited sex roles” that the authors identify as imperfections in midcentury American life were in fact core features of it.

Exclusion and discrimination against people of color was the norm, North and South. During this period, home ownership, high-quality education, jobs with fair pay and decent working conditions and the social insurance benefits of the New Deal welfare state remained unavailable—by design—to most nonwhite Americans.

Crushing disappointment! And, as befits the minds of ideologues who are too obtuse to parse contexts with the discernment of, say, my dog Ava, the professors also liken “the bourgeois script” to the “defense of Confederate statues that ignores their promotion of white supremacy.” For did you not know, O black unprogressive heart, that

people of color were largely excluded from the housing and education benefits of the GI Bill of Rights for veterans. Segregationists ensured that social insurance legislation such as the Social Security Act and workplace protections such as the Fair Labor Standards Act exempted domestic and agricultural jobs held mainly by African Americans. And severe public school segregation persisted despite the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Many of the same Anglo-Protestants whom Wax idealizes conducted a sustained campaign across the 1950s to paint Catholics as un-American.

Gender discrimination was also fundamental to governmental and social policies in the 1950s, and to the broader culture that supported them. Before laws prohibited discrimination based on sex, race and religion, and a constitutional right to privacy eased access to contraception and other reproductive health services, women of all backgrounds could be denied jobs, fired for pregnancy and denied the ability to control their reproductive lives.

I give only part of the op-ed, the rest also missing the point. A strange time, ours, when five law professors at what is supposed to be a top notch law school publish a long *non-sequitur* as if they were debunking their wayward colleague. To begin with, Wax’s central point concerns the superiority of certain kinds of behavior, and though that behavior has a certain ethnic-cultural origin, it is not the same

thing as that origin, nor obviously reducible to it. If the Chinese were to find a cure for cancer, it would be absurd for non-Chinese to say: "No, we will not use that; we will not be oppressed by your Western superiority." The many people all over the world who want to enjoy human rights are not disturbed by their being a Western creation. When I read Confucius—charming, subtle, serene mind—I do not resist applying what I learn from him to my own life, as if doing so were to imply his culture's superiority. Ideas are one thing, culture another, and people themselves still another. If you advocate diversity, then let the world be what it is.

Nor does it follow, just because the 1950s were a better time to Wax, that she downplays the racism and sexism of the age. The professors' bias is evident in the word "nostalgia." It's not that Wax has made a considered judgment that the 1950s bourgeois culture was superior to the present, all in all. She has "nostalgia," that cloudy, mawkish mind, and in so doing she "erases . . . historical context." Lord have mercy, cruel satirist! Are these law professors, or canters in a vortex?—Nothing in her op-ed suggests that "racial discrimination" and "limited sex roles" were mere "imperfections" to Wax's thinking. But as the Left is so keen to remind us, evil does exist; it's not got rid of overnight (or ever, for that matter): and just as there's more to Thomas Jefferson than the fact that he owned slaves—just as there's more to your dear, beloved mother than those long, rambling phone calls that get on your nerves—so the fact that the 1950s, like every era, was full of injustice and misery, doesn't mean we have nothing to learn from it. As Wax remarked in the interview, "it's partly what gets the left in trouble—to tar everything that's good with some of the crimes that undoubtedly have been committed."

Like the two graduate student groups, Wax's colleagues—whom she must need all the patience in the world to bear—do not address the actual substance of her critique, which, by the way, is akin to the work of Thomas Sowell and, across the Atlantic, to that of Theodore Dalrymple, both penetrating critics of the Left's social constructionist

victimology. Professor Barringer et al., too, make a strawman out of the op-ed. In dull, predictable conceit they end their “historical scrutiny” with this would-be word to the wise: “If the history of the twentieth century, and now the twenty-first, teaches us anything, it is that assertions of white cultural superiority have devastating consequences.” Here it is fitting to quote the unbending woman’s e-mail to *The Daily Pennsylvanian*: “If this is the best Penn professors and grad students can do, our culture really is in trouble.”

Perhaps indeed it is. Reading Wax’s critics, I got the impression of people who, in spite of attending or teaching at a brand name institution, and in spite of having a variety of worldly accomplishments to their names, from often-cited scholarship to membership on powerful boards and committees, could not distinguish a coherent argument from a high-toned assertion. Whether they are capable are not, theirs comes to what Ezra Pound called the “fogged language of swindling classes.” Though that language “serves only a temporary purpose,” it is a tremendous evil for democracy because, as Pound knew, “a people that grows accustomed to sloppy writing is a people in process of losing grip on its empire and on itself. And this looseness and blowsiness is not anything as simple and scandalous as abrupt and disordered syntax. It concerns the relation of expression to meaning.” Since the late 1960’s the academy has valued politics more than education. The extreme folly of that decision is now seen: the culture has been stupefied, and not only do words not mean what they used to; the powerful themselves seem barely able to reason when it comes to the gravest matters. Are these the people we want to govern us?

It would be difficult to overestimate the bad effects of this vast intellectual incompetence. For instance, the University of Pennsylvania is the leading academic institution in a city that maintains its longtime status as America’s poorest big city. Writing in [\*The Philadelphia Inquirer\*](#), Alfred Lubrano observes that in 2016

Philadelphia retained its unenviable designation as the poorest of the 10 most populous cities in America, recording the highest rate of deep poverty—people living at 50 percent of the poverty line or less—among big cities.

Philadelphia's 2016 poverty and deep-poverty rates were statistically the same as in 2015 – 25.7 percent and 12.2 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, more than 37 percent of the city's children were living in poverty.

At the same time, the city defied another national trend: Its median household income – \$41,449 –dropped a bit between 2015 and 2016, even as America as a whole saw incomes recovering from the recession and rising from \$57,230 to \$59,039.

Meanwhile, when Amy Wax tries to encourage a return to the very lifestyle that could improve this dismal situation, she is met with castigation. Penn thus shows how blind it is to the workings of the world outside its charmed bubble. I would venture that few to none of Wax's many critics have had any experience of or direct contact with working class life. I am the only child of a construction worker who spent nearly thirty-five years as a member of Local Union # 57 here in the City of Brotherly Love. My mother, before becoming disabled, had had such humble occupations as nurse's assistant, cleaner, and cook. Because of my background, I have spent a lot of time in the company of people who need nothing so much as Wax's bourgeois script. What an irony, and what evidence of cultural decline that the city's best university should find that corrective unacceptable!

And yet the Penn professors and students, in their manner of life, are bourgeois through and through. That includes Ted Ruger, Dean of the Law School, who in his August 14 [op-ed](#) in *The Daily Pennsylvanian* said, "As a scholar and educator I reject emphatically any claim that a single cultural tradition is better than all others." Good boy, Ted. Now you can have milk and cookies with the other middle-age children.

How lacking in self-awareness, these diligent aspirants to success. One wonders, do they never tire of their trite self-loathing? That is indeed their problem: they are themselves bourgeois, and they unconsciously detest the very thing they are, which therefore must be condemned.

It is an edifying contrast in cultural vitality and mental health to go from the Penn campus to the basketball courts at nearby Schuylkill River Park. There, among the tough, trash talking men, many of them black, one encounters an exuberant freedom, like the recent agon between Conor McGregor and Floyd Mayweather, that is, alas, too unprofessional for the stuffy Penn crowd. It amuses me to think of the many young black men and women, from Princeton to Berkeley, who are doubtless falling over in laughter day after day at the spectacle of endlessly uptight white academia. Academics have plenty to learn from distinctly straightforward black athletes like Charles Barkley and Shaquille O'Neal (significantly, raised by a military man). These manly men are not only indifferent to political correctness; they are also patriots who display much more good sense than most academics do. It is a beautiful irony that in the testy, wildly assertive world of athletes, there is more actual respect than in any American university. The frequent trash talk of athletes is akin to the spirit of intellectual combat that, from the Pre-Socratics up until the sentimental 1970s, was the healthy norm in the West. Pindar tells us he is "an eagle soaring sunward" as others poets "vainly croak like ravens." In this joyful pride he resembles Larry Bird, who once walked into the NBA All Star Game locker room in the mid-1980s and, taking a cocky look around at the other elite contenders, asked who is shooting for second place in the three point contest, then went out onto the court and demolished the competition.

On August 25, the National Lawyers Guild, Penn Law Chapter gave us another sign of a dark future. Here is a telling paragraph from their [Penn NLG Statement on Professor Amy Wax](#):

While we do not challenge Professor Wax's right to express her views, we question whether it is appropriate for her to continue to teach a required first-year course. The Penn Law administration has long been aware that her bigoted views inevitably seep into her words and actions in the classroom and in private conversations with students. We call on the administration to consider more deeply the toll that this takes on students, particularly students of color and members of the LGBTQIA community, and to consider whether it is in the best interests of the school and its students for Professor Wax to continue to teach a required first-year class. Exposure to a diversity of viewpoints is an essential and valuable part of any educational experience, but no student should have to be exposed to bigotry or abuse in the classroom.

America's future does not look bright when these future lawyers, though they were able to get into one of the most selective law schools in the country, tell us that they "do not challenge Professor Wax's right to express her views," but then contradict themselves in the next clause, going on to "call on the administration" (notice again the reflexive turn to the *locus parentis*) to give her the ax for the unpardonable toll she takes on people who disagree with her. It is depressing to see the lack of self-awareness here. The last sentence contains the same hypocrisy as the first: the students convey the usual spiel about "diversity of viewpoints," but then make it clear that any real diversity of thought, anything that is not in agreement with them, is "bigotry or abuse."

Behind the Left's confused notions of tolerance and diversity there is a neurotic desire to rid life of any sort of conflict and unhappiness. That is why, for example, the conflict feminism faces between the demands of a career and those of the family, indeed of womanhood itself, cannot be faced squarely, but must be evaded through the usual foggy language about patriarchy. "Here I am," says reality, "and I don't give a damn about your pretense to happiness." "It's not *faiiir*,"



moan the child-like feminists, reaching for their chocolate. Having freed women from their bondage to nature, through suffrage, the pill, and the material edifice of civilization that he built (impelled to do so largely by his desire for woman), man is now told—trigger warning—that women remain unsatisfied. “What have you done for me lately, you big hairy fellow?” “Why, shucks, dear, I—I, oh, don’t cry! . . .” Again, the great scandal, for the progressive mind, is simply unhappiness itself. For the progressive, unhappiness is “wrong,” a “disorder” that requires “reform” or “medication.” Where, sixty years ago, a person would have simply shrugged his shoulders saying, “Well, life’s hard,” today people go to a therapist (more often than not a wrongheaded woman who takes it for granted that her femicentric perspective is obviously right for boys and men), or, if they have intellectual pretensions, they may take to [fashionable nonsense](#) on the French model. It is a problem here that most progressives have read so few works of intellectual substance, and that most academics are little more than clones of their middling graduate school professors, whose hides they kissed for many sad, dismal years. The Old Masters are not in the business of offering rosy illusions; they rather dispel them.

On August 30, thirty three members of the Penn law faculty provided yet another example of Penn’s characteristic shoddiness with their [Open letter to the University of Pennsylvania community](#) in *The Daily Pennsylvanian*:

Wax has every right to express her opinions publicly free from fear of legal sanction thanks to the First Amendment, and she may do so without fear for her job due to her position as a tenured faculty member at Penn.

We do not question those rights, or the important role that principles of academic freedom play at our University. But Wax’s right to express her opinions does not make her statements right, nor insulate her from criticism.

We categorically reject Wax's claims.

We believe the ideal of equal opportunity to succeed in education is best achieved by a combination of academic freedom, open debate and a commitment by all participants to respect one another without bias or stereotype. To our students, we say the following: If your experience at Penn Law falls substantially short of this ideal, something has gone wrong, and we want to know about it.

The general farce of academia is plain here. "Wax's right to express her opinions does not make her statements right, nor insulate her from criticism," the writers declare banally, but like the others, there is no *argument* in their criticism, only an empty categorical rejection, followed by a reassurance to Penn's already hyper-sensitive students that the law professors care about their precious feelings. Thus the Penn law school, through this instance and the others, has shown all the world its intellectual weightlessness. These so-called law professors seem not to even understand English grammar, let alone possess the ability to craft a coherent non-doctrinaire argument. Blessed with white privilege, I can afford to live in Center City, just a few miles from the Penn campus. My afternoon walks with my dog often find me there, the animal being unable to resist the smell of the pork chops the feminists keep in their pocketbooks at all times. Yesterday, amid an enthusiastic frenzy of squawking, whinnying and snorting, I happened to overhear a group of scholars gossiping about the identity of the law school's soon to be appointed Diversity-Advocate-in-Chief. The leading candidate is the celebrated Philadelphia poet [C.A. Conrad](#), whose qualifications are formidable, for the man is gay, illiterate and, what is most essential, disgusting. With Penn's own prominent poetess Charles Bernstein lobbying for him, his case is certainly a strong one. Rumor has it that Conrad is already deep into the composition of a 3,000 page paean to all "students of color and members of the LGBTQIA community," a work that he is to recite stark naked from high atop Independence Hall. Afterwards the poet, joined by a hungry horde of Muslims and Mexicans, shall perform fellatio on Mayor Kenney, in thankfulness for

allowing Philadelphia to be a sanctuary city.

On September 13 Wax did an [interview](#) with Seth Leibsohn of *American Greatness* that is well worth listening to or reading. Like many people, she is struck by the academy's plunge into intellectual and moral decline.

I've talked to a number of people, including colleagues who haven't signed the letter and people outside of the law school . . . one of the interesting observations is that the climate has become so much more illiberal. Many of the understandings and conventions that we took for granted years ago, 10 years ago maybe, one being that you would never, ever write a letter like this calling out one of your colleagues in categorical terms without any argumentation or engaging that person on the merits . . . that wouldn't happen . . . they are gone by the board. We see it all over.

In a law school—until recently anyway—we are tempered by one of our purposes, which is to teach students how to present points of view and to marshal evidence and points against that point of view. That's what we do. That's our stock-in-trade.

Certainly, philosophy is oriented to that. It's interesting that none of the philosophers on the faculty, the people with philosophical training, signed the letter condemning me. That is, to me, very telling and very heartening.

It is indeed significant that no one in the Penn philosophy department signed the letter. It would be rather odd if someone with philosophical training were to practice such weak misreading. While the undergraduate and graduate students may deserve something of a

pardon, being young and still pretty ill-informed, it is astonishing that Wax's fellow law professors would simply admonish her "in categorical terms without any argumentation." What is a person doing professing the law in the first place when his approach is not disinterested reasoning, but (as it were) *a priori projection*? That projection seemed to issue from mere angry sentimentalism, occasioned by the general reaction in the greater Penn community, which the professors picked up on like so many gossipy teenagers. Wax's colleagues think it is enough to just assume the moral high ground. They do not "marshal evidence" against her claims. Since such ardent incompetence is now common in law schools across the US, it is no wonder that our courts are marred by activist judges, committed enemies of federalism. Nor can there be democracy itself if an institution such as the University of Pennsylvania, of all places, is teeming with expert fools. In 1994, Camille Paglia, in dismay with the academy, asked: "How many more young minds must be distorted or destroyed before the faculty decides to defend...free inquiry?" In 2017, we ask the question with the future of the nation itself at stake. For the dogmatic, social justice-oriented mind that the academic Left implants in the young perverts the nation as a whole. Teachers and therapists, doctors and lawyers, managers, journalists and editors, and innumerable other persons of influence perceive reality in a simplistic manner that will hear nothing of the incompatibility of human values or of reigning in our present unsustainable economic course: whatever doesn't fit the *a priori* agenda is wrong, and now look, here are Antifa and Black Lives Matter rioting again. Because of what the American academy has done, because of the delusive social conditioning it has wrought, the Amy Waxes of the future are sure to have a harder time living intellectually honest, principled lives than even Wax herself has.

In 2015, Wax received the University of Pennsylvania's [Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching](#), one of only three other Penn law professors to have received it in the past twenty years. Nevertheless, the law school's most distinguished professor seems to be the most disliked person on campus. How can that be? The problem for Wax, who's not a stranger to [controversy](#), as Penn, like any good progressive

witch hunter, is eager for us to know, is that being that rarest sort of person, one who thinks for herself, she is all too easily misunderstood, a horrible heretic to the progressive perspective. No surprise—it must be so. Being misunderstood is an experience excellent minds are bound to have a great deal in any democratic society, especially if it is a very large one like our own, which has been dumbing itself down for half a century. In a memorable passage in *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville observes that

the majority draws a formidable circle around thought. Inside those limits, the writer is free; but unhappiness awaits him if he dares to leave them. It is not that he has to fear an auto-da-fe [forced public penance and execution], but he is the butt of mortifications of all kinds and of persecutions every day. A political career is closed to him; he has offended the only power that has the capacity to open it up.

John Stuart Mill, de Tocqueville's great reviewer, says in *On Liberty*: "In sober truth, whatever homage may be professed, or even paid, to real or supposed mental superiority, the general tendency of things throughout the world is to render mediocrity the ascendant power among mankind." Nicolas Chamfort is even more elitist. "Public opinion reigns in society," he says, "because stupidity reigns among the stupid." A free thinker and non-conformist, Amy Wax does not dwell in the "formidable circle" of politically correct "public opinion." Her "ascendant power" is her own mind. So she has long been "the butt of mortifications of all kinds and of persecutions."

Down there they are dubious and askance;  
there nobody thinks as I;  
But mind-chains do not clank  
where one's next neighbour is the sky.

—Hardy

For ideas have a powerfully *affective* value: far from being merely abstract, they guide, they justify life itself. So it happens that disagreement is often perceived as an existential threat, and it is the natural way of conformists like Wax's critics to come together to a common purpose, like so many dwarfs who, by climbing on top of one another, would erect a kind of ladder up, up and away to the stars, although, as the poet Edward Thomas put it,

There's none less free than who  
Does nothing and has nothing else to do,  
Being free only for what is not to his mind,  
And nothing is to his mind.

The ordinary academic is not free, because "nothing is to his mind" besides what his colleagues think. His is a narrow life of the most odious conformity. In his world, yesterday's hard-won wisdom becomes today's shallow resentment, which he broadcasts for careerism's sake. Wittgenstein used to tell his students that they should not be a part of any school or party, because with such allegiance they would be prevented from exercising the philosopher's greatest virtue: disinterestedness of mind, which, in fidelity to the pursuit of truth, entails the willingness to change your mind at any moment. The late Hilary Putnam was highly regarded by the philosophical community because, among other reasons, he exemplified that noble (and rare) disposition. Today most academics are very unlike that excellent man. They are pretend Puritans and it's only their weakness that keeps them from avowing the evil that really drives them.

In the interview with Seth Leibsohn from which I have already quoted, Wax rightly says of the intellectual and moral character of academia that it is "sinking by the minute." For Wax, "elite academia" is "bubble-wrapped," and of course quite unaware of it.

They really have a set of ideas and values, and an outlook on life and society, that is quite insular and unique and forms a kind of echo chamber where they all believe basically the same thing. They reinforce their own views, and there's very little contact with just your rank-and-file-type people out there in the great heartland, I guess what has been termed "the forgotten man." . . . The academy has become irrelevant . . . It's bankrupt . . . I have really come to the conclusion that we should defund the Ivy League. They have enough money.

Not a bad idea. After all, to the "stars" and powerful administrators of elite academia, educating the young means nothing. Their gods are vanity and financial gain. Accordingly, Ivy League professors are happy to be ignorant of "the forgotten man," just as they are content to dodge our difficult problems, all while trying to appear so very good and just. For true education is necessarily uncomfortable; getting at the truth involves ruffling some feathers, something that is not good for business. And while the Ivy League is the worst of the academy, it should be said that, allowing for some honorable exceptions, academics as a class are insular pretenders. In academia, left-wing thought is no more authentic than the marketer's smiling query, "how is your day?" Like corporate America, academics wear their good team member faces, while they ostracize people like Amy Wax, the very sages whom we need to steer us off our destructive course. Compared to academics, politicians are as selfless as nuns. Street thugs, unlike academics, at least have the manly aspect of being straightforward. Notice, too, the complete lack of public support for Wax from the Penn faculty: not a single statement by way of defense or clarification from her colleagues, despite her seventeen years of service to the university. While nobody in Philosophy signed the letter, neither did any of those philosophers come forward to point out the obvious fallacies of Wax's critics. Here, then, is what all those pleasantries exchanged in the faculty lounge and on the conference circuit come to: the usual careerism, with nobody daring to



Speak up, lest he not cover his own yellow hide. Here, in essence, is the true social character of Success.

What is the reason for the steep intellectual and moral decline that we have been examining? As should only have been expected, the unprecedented material affluence that we have enjoyed in this country since the end of World War II has left us weak and decadent. That is our weighty problem, along with our concomitant unrealistic expectations. For if it's true that suffering builds character, if it's true that suffering is essential to developing good character, then it must also be true that being deprived of hardship, having it too good, as it were, makes for a querulous nature, whereby academia is now particularly intolerable. G.K. Chesterton, an inexhaustible modern prophet, wrote that "the enemy arises not from among the people, but from the educated and well-off, those who unite intellectualism and ignorance." As well-off academics pretend to value diversity of opinion and independent thought, the self-imposed narrowness and conformity of their thinking and way of life reinforces their unwitting ignorance. Then, lost in their hubris, they are able to condescend to "flyover country" in the manner of Hilary Clinton, who is a pure representative of the stunning ignorance of America's corrupt elite. The supreme irony here is that these persons are quite unaware of the deranged, stifling character of their own lives: allergic to the language of conviction, even as they are forever agreeing to disagree, they are oblivious to the superior health and vitality of the noble struggling classes, in whose heartier, truer souls lay the seeds of making America great again.

Thanks to academia's proud hypocrisy and shameless betrayal of the public trust, we are now facing a generation that can barely read, write or think, though it certainly knows how to act on its dangerous, entitled passions. This is a type who is lacking in what democracy requires, like a man who wants to play tennis though he has no arms. Madeleine Kearns captures the madness of our present path in her article "[Safe spaces and 'ze' badges: My bewildering year at a US](#)

[university.](#)” “The university experience in America,” she says,

is now not one that will adequately prepare students for real life. In real-life democracy, people disagree—and normally they don’t die or suffer emotional injury because of it. In normal life, there’s no reason not to like someone with whom you disagree politically. On campus, opinions are often ontology: you are what you think. But this is dangerous logic: if I hate what you think, I must hate what you are.

It is significant that Kearns is not an American. Our national degeneracy is naturally most evident from without. Let us be clear: the logic of “if I hate what you think, I must hate what you are” leads inexorably to *your life is a lethal threat to mine; therefore, you must die*. That is no overstatement. Today’s dominant academic sensibility—that of reducing people to their ideas—is a familiar historical evil. Seen in this light, the manner in which Penn has relentlessly made Wax seem like a villain is deeply irresponsible. Thanks in part to the longtime anarchist presence on Baltimore Avenue, which is just a few miles from Penn’s campus, Antifa has a [strong presence](#) in Philly, and as it has throughout the rest of the country, Antifa has wrought havoc in the city this year. Nor is it unthinkable that a group which [calls for](#) violence against police (or “Our Enemies in Blue”) and the violent seizure of other people’s property would go after Wax, a figure whom it doubtless considers to be a “racist oppressor.” We must understand that from the bloody Middle Ages to the totalitarian twentieth century, history provides abundant evidence that when, in our selfishness, ignorance and delusion, we do not distinguish between who people are and what they *believe*, tyranny is sure to follow. In keeping with man’s historical record of misunderstanding the very people who can show him a better, wiser way, Penn has treated the courageous Amy Wax as though she were some kind of monster. Let the rest of us rather feel gratitude for the fine public servant. Let that virtue be a part of an awakened effort to

save America from self-destruction.

---

**Christopher DeGroot** is a columnist at *Taki's Magazine*. His writing appears frequently in *New English Review*. Be a team player: share it and follow him @CEGrotius.

More by Christopher DeGroot [here](#).

Please donate to *New English Review* [here](#).