

Goodbye, Harvard

By Bruce Bawer

When will people stop buying the Ivy hype?

I went to Harvard. I don't remember exactly when. I visited Boston several times during the 1980s and 90s, and on one of those occasions I decided to take the appropriately named Red Line up to Cambridge and check out the campus of America's oldest university. It was cute. It was certainly prettier than my own alma mater, Stony Brook, which at the time must have been one of the world's premier showplaces of brutalist architecture at its most brutal. But on the other hand I'd seen a lot of campuses that were more beautiful than Harvard's, among them Chapel Hill, Duke, Ann Arbor, Michigan State, Berkeley, and Stanford. Yes, the buildings – and the trees – were old and stately. But there was a stuffiness about the place. You could feel it. Or maybe I'm just guilty of committing the pathetic fallacy. Admittedly, a couple of my closest and very smartest friends went to Harvard; so did a few of the dumbest people I've ever met. You can get a great education there, but that's true of a lot of places. What sets Harvard apart is that it inculcates in its students (not all, but many) an obnoxious sense of superiority, readies them to rise to the heights of the American establishment, and encourages them to subscribe to that establishment's most cherished orthodoxies.

Pretty much every one of my closest friends in high school ended up at an Ivy League college. I had the highest SAT scores in my graduating class of more than a thousand, but partly because my father wasn't eager to shell out Ivy-level tuition and partly because of what now seems to me an odd indifference to the whole business on my own part, I ended up at a state school. I'm glad I did. When an accreditation team came to check out our English department – that was the

subject in which I received my B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. – they said it was better than Harvard's. But who cared about things like that? Stony Brook, founded in 1957, was still half-finished, an active construction site where, when it rained, you had to slog through mud to get from one hideously ugly building to another. Harvard had over three centuries' worth of cachet. Its name was synonymous the world over with academic excellence. However much of an idiot you might be, a Harvard diploma could take you anywhere. Even our own department chairman felt obliged to rub in the difference. When a bunch of us Ph.D. students got to the point at which we were supposed to start thinking about applying for jobs, our chairman gathered us together and explained how he and his faculty colleagues dealt with applications from newly minted Ph.Ds. "We put them in two piles," he said. "Ivy and non-Ivy." The next step for the latter, he made clear, was the trash bin.

Stony Brook gets somewhat more respect these days than it used to. As for Harvard – well, it's been wonderful of late to see it taken down more than a few pegs. Last September, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) gave it the worst rating for freedom of speech than any other institution of higher education in the country. No surprise there: it has long been known that America's supposedly "best" colleges are also its most ideologically rigid, specializing far too infrequently in the dissemination of objective knowledge and the development of critical thinking and far too often in the inculcation of propaganda and the ruthless silencing of dissent. Two months later, at a time when those "best" colleges were also Ground Zero for the public expression of Jew-hatred, Harvard President Claudine Gay – whose administration would have handed out harsh punishments to any student guilty of, say, misgendering – told a House Committee Hearing on Anti-Semitism that calls by Harvard students for the genocide of Jews might or might not be considered violations of Harvard's code of conduct, "depending

on the context.” Gay’s fellow panelists, the presidents of MIT and the University of Pennsylvania, displayed an equally shocking level of moral callousness, providing a vividly instructive picture of what America’s purportedly elite universities really stand for.



Of course, it turned out that Gay wasn’t just morally despicable. During the ensuing weeks, hero journalists Christopher Rufo and Aaron Sebarium provided ample evidence that Gay’s so-called research – in a field (race and identity) that is mostly a load of hogwash anyway, consisting of endless reaffirmations of politically correct dogmas – was rife with plagiarism. Imagine stealing such garbage! The samples of her work that were put on display were embarrassing in their banality – and to think that she cribbed this crap from other people! Even the acknowledgements section in her dissertation wasn’t free of plagiarism. While the plagiarism stories were dribbling out, other illuminating information about her tenure emerged. We learned that, prior to her presidency, when her title was Dean of Social Sciences at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Gay focused largely on “diversity” and “inclusion” and the expansion of ethnic studies programs. On her watch,

Harvard law professor Ronald Sullivan was punished for representing Harvey Weinstein – a blatant rejection of the fundamental American principle that every individual accused of a crime, however heinous, deserves a defense. Gay, then, it turned out, was iniquitous, unscrupulous, *and*, at best, an academic mediocrity. And this was the woman who rose to what was supposedly the very topmost position in America's academic pantheon? This was the woman who presided over...Harvard?

Yes, she was soon obliged to resign as university president. But she's still on the faculty. She still has an endowed chair – she's the Wilbur A. Cowett Professor of Government and of African and African-American Studies. And instead of reacting with institutional shame, many (if not most) members of the Harvard community rallied around her, attributing all her woes to – what else? – racism and misogyny. Her acts of plagiarism, which would have been far more than sufficient to result in the expulsion of any undergraduate from any responsibly run university, were euphemized as cases of “inadequate citation” and “duplicative language.” Meanwhile, members of the Harvard community continued to gather in public to demonize Israel, harass Jews, and praise Hamas, leading not a few well-heeled Harvard alumni, among them hedge-fund billionaires Bill Ackman and Ken Griffin, to [slam](#) their checkbooks shut – and make a good deal of noise about it. As if all this weren't appalling enough, Daniel Greenfield [reported](#) at FrontPage last month on Harvard's cozy relationship with Birzeit University, a staggeringly vile nest of Hamas members and terrorism fans on the West Bank.

Now, you might, at this point, expect the powers that be at Harvard would gather together in a spirit of humility (if not outright humiliation), examine their consciences, ponder their past errors, take a gander at the impact that their ideological indoctrination had had on a large proportion of their student body, and do some very serious course correction. Nope. We're talking about Harvard, after all.

These people still think that they're the bee's knees, the gold standard, the more than worthy shapers of the leaders of tomorrow. They think they're too exalted to have to answer to mere legislators; they think that answering to the great unwashed, the illiterate proles, the barely human Trump supporters and flyover nonentities, is far, far beneath them. Hillary Clinton views most ordinary middle Americans as "deplorables"; that's too weak a word to capture what most of the people who run a place like Harvard think of their inferiors out there in the hinterlands.

So it is that in mid June, thanks to another Harvard eminento, Lawrence D. Bobo, Dean of Social Science and the W. E. B. Du Bois Professor of the Social Sciences, Harvard found itself in the headlines yet again. The reason: in an [op-ed](#) for the *Harvard Crimson* entitled "Faculty Speech Must Have Limits," Bobo reacted to what he called "the appallingly rough manner" in which certain Harvard professors and alumni, and even "one former University president," had "publicly denounced Harvard's students and present leadership." The former president in question was apparently Lawrence Summers, who had reacted sharply to the repeated displays of rabid anti-Semitism on the Harvard campus and the university's scandalously lame response thereto. Bobo's take on this situation was clear: it was simply unacceptable for anyone connected with Harvard to dare to air its dirty laundry in public. When past or present members of the Harvard community engaged in such criticism, they were committing "sanctionable violations of professional conduct." To be sure, Bobo made the usual noises about the value of "[v]igorous debate" and "freedom of expression." But for him, the bottom line was that "sharply critical speech from faculty, prominent ones especially, can attract outside attention that directly impedes the University's function." You see, "[a] faculty member's right to free speech does not amount to a blank check to engage in behaviors that plainly incite external actors – be it the media, alumni, donors, federal agencies, or the

government – to intervene in Harvard’s affairs.” In other words, yes, “free speech has limits.” Harvard’s motto has long been *Veritas* (truth). But Bobo’s line “free speech has its limits” does a much better job of capturing the spirit of the place in the year 2024.

Just one example before I wind this up: on a recent [episode](#) of the Triggernometry podcast, Roland Fryer, a young and highly regarded professor of economics at Harvard, discussed a study that he initiated in 2014. Collecting data with an eye to proving the widespread contention that American police are systematically biased against blacks, he found evidence of an excessive use of lower-level force against blacks as opposed to whites, but also discovered – to his utter astonishment – that there was absolutely no racial difference when it came to the use of lethal force. These results were “so counter to my own beliefs,” he said, that he kept plugging away, collecting more and more data – but the more information he gathered, the more he found his conclusions being confirmed. And as stunned as he was by his findings, he was even more stunned by the way in which the academic community – not least his colleagues at Harvard – responded to them. *Veritas* be damned. They didn’t want the truth – they wanted to see the official narrative reinforced. In short, Fryer was put through the wringer: “My life really got turned upside down.” At one point he required police protection. His own department issued a statement essentially denying the facts he’d uncovered. Fryer should be considered a treasure by his employers; instead, the only reason he still has a job at Harvard is that he’s got tenure. I know Harvard is sitting on a fifty billion dollar endowment – enough money to keep even the most overrated and incompetently administered institution going for decades – but it’s one thing for a place to hang in there living off its savings, and another thing for it to retain for very many years a reputation as the *crème de la crème* of universities. Conclusion: it’s long past time for Harvard’s image to take a very big and well-deserved nosedive.

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