

America's Campuses: Crisis and Opportunity

By Ron Robinson

Since the beginning of the Republic the United States has benefited from young leaders. Thomas Jefferson was thirty-three when he wrote the Declaration of Independence. Alexander Hamilton was thirty-two when he attended the Constitutional Convention. Ben Franklin noted in his *Autobiography* that, "It is in youth that we plant our chief habits and prejudices...in youth the education even of the next generation is given; in youth the private and public character is determined." In our own day the education and character of young Americans is largely shaped in our colleges and universities. If we are to produce leaders to carry on the work of our Founding Fathers we must look to the health of American higher education.

And this is why we should be alarmed by recent reports of the crisis on our college campuses. John Le Boutillier's *Harvard Hates America*, Ben Hart's *Poisoned Ivy*, Les Csorba's *Academic License*, Charles Sykes' *Hollow Men* and *ProfScam*, Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals*, and Dinesh D'Souza's smash hit *Illiberal Education* have exposed the terrible problems students face in trying to get a decent college education.

These important works capture a tragedy that began much earlier. William F. Buckley warned of the impending crisis in 1951. In his *God and Man at Yale* Buckley raised the question of whether Yale fortified or shattered "the average student's respect for Christianity." He found Yale neither pro-Christian nor neutral towards religion.

But the conservative community was either slow to respond to calls for reform or simply chose not to do so. Conservatives continued to pour generous donations into unreformed universities. They entrusted their sons and daughters to the same deans and professors Buckley criticized. The theories of Samuelson, Galbraith, and Marx all gained influence in the 1950s and 60s.

A little more than a decade later conservatives were alarmed by the radicalism of the anti-Vietnam student movement. But our universities still were able to increase taxpayer and private donor support. The universities never paid a price for their acquiescence or support of radicalism.

I often wonder how this could be. How could financially generous conservatives support institutions that are undermining our freedoms and traditions? How can we still send our children to these campuses?

The Disguised Campus. The answer, at least in part, is that our colleges and universities pass themselves off as more conservative than they are. After all, alumni publications constantly remind us of their institutions' fine traditions. We see reassuring photos of ivy-covered campus buildings, distinguished-looking faculty and responsible administrators. We are encouraged to recall our fondest college memories. College is like Congress: we know something is wrong, but we believe the problem is not in my college or with my congressman.

An objective analysis, however, tells us there is a great imbalance in campus life.

Nearly every campus has a liberal or leftist campus newspaper, a leftist-dominated lecture series, a corps of Marxist professors, an active affirmative action program, courses increasingly organized according to race, sexual preference and gender categories, and a black studies depart-

Ron Robinson is President of Young America's Foundation.

He spoke at The Heritage Foundation on September 25, 1991, in the Resource Bank series of lectures featuring leaders of conservative education and public policy organizations.

ISSN 0272-1155 ©1992 by The Heritage Foundation.

ment. Now restrictive speech codes, sensitivity training and gender studies are becoming the norm. These programs are not only highly politicized and biased; the problems they create are exacerbated by the absence of conservative influences in the university that could provide balance.

No campus is safe. Last week we received a phone call from an 18-year old student at Southwestern University, a college of twelve hundred students in Texas. The student had placed on a literature table a Young America's Foundation poster which called for an end to campus affirmative action programs. The poster—which supports a color-blind society—was too much for the Dean of Students. He denounced it as “racist.” The next day he sent a memo to faculty members and leftist campus groups which said Young America's Foundation held views that “smack of white supremacy.” The Dean did not want to debate affirmative action, but the decision the student made to display the poster! Remember, this was Georgetown, Texas, not Berkeley, California or Cambridge, Massachusetts. So what appeared to be a conservative institution was, in fact, a Leftist bastion. And with the faculty tenure system it is designed to stay that way.

If our colleges and universities were balanced by other educational or information sources the damage might be minimal. But they are not. Other major influences on young Americans only reinforce these tendencies.

A student is unlikely to become conservative by reading *Time*, *Newsweek* or *U.S. News*. Nor do many young Americans come to conservatism via Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw or Peter Jennings. Bruce Springsteen offered some hope when he sang, “We learned more from a three minute record, baby, than we ever learned in school.” But Springsteen, Madonna, 2 Live Crew, U-2, Jackson Browne, N.W.A. and Guns n' Roses and most of the powerful record industry fail to impart conservative ideas. MTV, Hollywood films, and TV sitcoms seldom, if ever, promote conservative themes. The sad truth is that if a young person passively accepts what is today's conventional wisdom he will not become a conservative.

In contrast, a young person can become a liberal by picking up ideas in our popular culture with little thought. This should alarm every conservative, indeed every citizen, concerned about the future of our society. If conservatives make no effort to persuade young people when they are most receptive to new ideas, then we reduce our ability to win later battles. What conservative candidate, lobbying campaign, legal group or think-tank can overcome the damage inflicted upon almost every college-educated American who has spent four years studying a curriculum dominated by Leftist arguments and ideas?

While the conservative movement was enormously successful in gaining adherents to Ronald Reagan's political campaigns—especially among student-age voters—it failed to dislodge the Left's hold over our educational institutions. Even Ronald Reagan's eight years as Governor of California and eight years as President failed to slow the radicals' momentum. The Left built scores of groups and instituted countless programs to make sure that conservatives could not dislodge them from their positions.

Evidence of the extent of Leftist dominance is readily available. In a 1991 survey of faculty members in the *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac* an astounding 56.2% of private university faculty identified themselves as “Far Left” or “Liberal.” Only 13 percent claimed to be “Far Right” or “Conservative.” When one considers how reluctant most Americans are to embrace the discredited “liberal” label, these numbers become even more frightening. Almost every conservative has a catalogue of campus horror stories. The stories are humorous, but they are serious too.

Very Strange Ideas. At Princeton, for instance, feminists organized a protest against the school cafeteria because it served the Italian pasta manicotti. The feminists claimed the name was sexist and wanted it renamed “womanicotti.” Consider also Carol Adams, who teaches at South-

ern Methodist University and who is the author of *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. She tells her students how she spends her time: "I have struggled to develop a theory that explains the feminist meaning of vegetarianism and to research a history of feminist-vegetarian connections which have remained largely uninterpreted... People have always eaten meat. The aristocracy of Europe consumed large courses filled with every kind of meat... Women, second-class citizens, are more likely to eat what are considered to be second-class foods... vegetables, fruits and grains." Ms. Adams notes that society equates meat-eating with masculinity and that political violence against women flows from violence against animals.

Most case studies are not as humorous. When Timothy Maguire, a third year law student at Georgetown University, criticized affirmative action in a student newspaper, the Black Law Student Association and some college administrators attempted to keep him from graduating. In a monograph to be published by Young America's Foundation, Maguire concludes that affirmative action, abortion and sexual orientation are taboo subjects on campus. To demonstrate the atmosphere of censorship and political bias at Georgetown, Maguire cites a series of incidents from the administration's summary cancellation of student interviews with an "objectionable" law firm to disruptive attempts by Leftist activists to keep conservatives from speaking on campus.

It's not just the outspoken Tim Maguires. An American Bar Association survey found that "sixty percent of law students... reported there were professors at their law school who were intolerant of political beliefs that differed from their own... Asked whether they always felt free to express their disagreement in class, fifty-two percent said they didn't." The exclusion of conservative views begins at the admissions office. Even Alan Dershowitz asks, "How many politically correct students are demanding—in the name of diversity—an increase in the number of evangelical Christians, National Rifle Association members and Right-to-Life advocates? Let's be honest: The demand for diversity is at least in part a cover for a political grab by the Left. Most of those recruited to provide politically correct diversity— Afro-Americans, women, gays— are thought to be supporters of the Left."

The Left knows its cumulative impact is devastating. Our educational institutions demean our national heroes and attack our history and culture. College and university faculties and administrators are not our allies. They are not even neutral; they are the principal advocates of political correctness. Administrators rig the admissions procedures and replace substantive courses with trivial or "politically correct" subjects. This school year will be dominated by the horrors of Christopher Columbus, the pervasiveness of the crimes of dead white males, and calls to respect such "scholars" as Margaret Randall, Noam Chomsky and Leonard Jeffries. Leading intellectuals are really scoundrels. They have driven religion from our schools, denied there was an "Evil Empire" and preached envy and class hatred.

Freshman orientations have become little more than liberal administrators' version of a political hazing. Students receive "safe sex" kits, are warned of homophobia, and are cautioned that insensitive speech cannot be tolerated. Flying the American and Confederate flags was discouraged and banned on campuses last spring, but burning Old Glory is now a protected right.

We are too often tempted to understate the problem. But the conditions William Buckley identified on campus forty years ago have only gotten worse. Our academies are dominated by our adversaries. We need to make this clear in order to take corrective measures.

Leftist Overreaching. But there is some good news. The Left has created the demand for its own overthrow. During the past twenty-five years Leftists have honored Castro, Ho Chi Minh, Lenin and Marx, dictators and ideologues whose legacy has been rejected and whose credibility is lost to all but a few Americans—Americans like Gus Hall, Angela Davis or perhaps your average English professor. Many faculty office walls are suddenly bare as Marxist pin-ups are

silently removed. The Left is stretched thin on campus, relying on authority and intimidation to make up for its lack of intellectual fire-power. You would not need speech codes and sensitivity training if you were leading students where they wanted to go.

Too many of the Left's ideas have been implemented—with plainly devastating results. Free Sex championed by the New Left in the 1960s has led to widespread venereal diseases, including AIDS. Affirmative action and its corollary, reverse discrimination, has provoked greater racial divisions. The attack on Western Civilization has undermined belief in reason and the search for truth, the purpose of higher education. Even the most apathetic student has cause to question the sanity of his teachers. It was George Orwell who remarked prophetically, "There are some ideas that are so preposterous that only an intellectual would believe them."

Defending Free Speech. It is important to note that the Left also has given up one of its most potent issues: Free Speech. The "Free Speech" Movement at Berkeley was one of the defining events for the New Left. But the Left now denies students' rights to attend ROTC, meet government recruiters, publish independent newspapers, form religious clubs, and hear conservative speakers. They have imposed restrictive speech codes. At the University of Connecticut they even proposed a ban on "inappropriately directed laughter!"

If our message is to be heard campus conservatives must protect our First Amendment rights. The defense of the First Amendment can also become a powerful issue in its own right, as Young America's Foundation learned when we fought a major legal battle to allow demonstrations in front of Communist embassies. The vast majority of students will support their fellow students' right to free speech. Conservatives should become the strongest advocates of First Amendment rights on campus.

I have been encouraged by reports of general student reaction to Leftist activities on campus. For instance, last March the faculty senate at California State University, Sacramento voted to abolish ROTC. After students contacted Young America's Foundation, we organized a campaign that generated 600 pro-ROTC letters from students to the University President. He changed his stand and decided to keep ROTC. Similarly, most students supported U.S. troops during last spring's Desert Storm operation despite faculty attempts to radicalize them against our military.

Conservative Alternatives on Campus. While the campus Left finds more support among the faculty than among students, the Young Conservative Movement, traditionally underfunded and divided, has become better organized and more combative. The Intercollegiate Studies Institute, the Federalist Society, Accuracy in Academia, The Leadership Institute, the National Center for Public Policy Research, and Young America's Foundation are in good shape to help embattled college students. Our resources are still miniscule compared to our Leftist adversaries, but we are succeeding in capturing a large and a receptive audience.

This is the context in which Young America's Foundation operates. The Foundation reports on the Left's activities on campus and we act to eliminate or overcome them. Young America's Foundation seeks to ensure that college students are given the opportunity to learn about conservative ideas and to adopt them.

A student's education is incomplete if he has not read, for example, Nobel laureates Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and if he is not exposed to free market, religious, and patriotic ideas. We seek a true marketplace of ideas. A marketplace that resembles an American supermarket with many choices. Our programs are designed to identify, activate and support the campus conservative cadre. It is this cadre that breaks through the liberal monopoly and recruits the majority of new Conservative Movement converts. It is this cadre that is forming an alternative university on our campuses with own lecture programs, newspapers and conferences.

To this end, Young America's Foundation sponsors hundreds of lectures, including recent lecture tours by Edwin Meese, Dinesh D'Souza, David Horowitz, and individual lectures by Phil Crane, Joseph Sobran, Richard Pipes and Norman Schwarzkopf. We seek especially to provide speakers to campuses that otherwise would not hear any conservative. Our Director of Lectures, Kate Obenshain, is coordinating a growing list of speakers, including Russell Kirk, Phyllis Schlafly, Kenneth Adelman, Murray Weidenbaum, Fred Barnes, and Congressman Chris Cox.

We also train campus leaders through our National Conservative Student Conference, now in its 14th year. Speakers at last year's conference included Jesse Helms, Newt Gingrich, Dana Rohrabacher, Trent Lott, Michael Williams, Donald Devine, Howard Phillips, Bob Dornan and Ed Meese. Our publications *Campus Leader* and *Libertas* keep students informed about campus developments nationwide.

Young America's Foundation is fighting to secure students' First Amendment Rights. We defend student rights to attend ROTC and to meet with government recruiters. Under the leadership of our Academic Director, Peter Schweizer, we are resisting "PC" restrictions on campuses. The Foundation's Executive Director, James Taylor, stays in regular contact with sympathetic faculty members, including frequent Foundation lecturers Burt Folsom, Russell Kirk, Mel Bradford and Forrest McDonald. Taylor oversees publication of academic works by Wilcomb Washburn, Burt Folsom, Frederick Wilhelmsen, and Manuel Johnson. We have criticized Leftist dogma at our conferences, in our books, and now with our journal of American history, *Continuity*.

We also have been greatly strengthened by our Board of Directors: Frank Donatelli, James Lacy, Ron Pearson, Al Regnery, Wayne Thorburn and Ken Cribb. These Foundation leaders are themselves a product of young conservative activism. Each director became a leader in the late 1960s and early 1970s fighting the excesses of the New Left. One became the top aide to two Congressmen, John Ashbrook and John Rousselot. Two became Assistants to President Reagan, one for Domestic Policy, the other for Political and Intergovernmental Affairs. One was a professor of political science who was later executive director of the Texas Republican Party. Another is a top Commerce Department official and still another a major conservative publisher. These outstanding leaders are typical of conservatives molded in the fires of campus activism.

Each academic year Young America's Foundation publishes and distributes without charge over 100,000 campus posters, conducts an annual essay contest, provides scholarship assistance to scores of campus activists, publishes *The Activist Handbook* and republishes and distributes free of charge up to 50,000 copies of such conservative classics as *The Conscience of A Conservative* and *The Roots of American Order*. We provide guidance and encouragement to beleaguered students and have this year inaugurated an annual cash prize of \$10,000 to be awarded to the faculty member who most actively opposes political correctness.

The audience we address and the activists we support will become, like the college graduates before them, the next generation of national leaders. They will be shaped, at least in part, by their own network of educational activities, by their own newspapers, lectures, conferences and contacts.

An Agenda for Campus Reform. Now that the threat of communism has receded and the Supreme Court is reformed, conservatives must reorder our national priorities and redirect our own resources. It's time to make reform of our campuses a national priority. Americans spend \$100 billion a year on our colleges. We entrust them with educating our future leaders and allow them to frame our broader intellectual debates. To reform higher education I suggest that we focus on higher education administrators. They have disappointed us in many ways. They have engaged in price-fixing and in financial corruption, instances well documented by serious government inves-

tigations. But the greatest fault of college administrators is their failure to counteract ideological bias.

It is time we demanded that our colleges treat conservatives and conservative ideas fairly. That is a simple proposition but it is also a neglected one. No education is complete until both major schools of thought—liberalism and conservatism—are equally presented. This will require conservatives to promote actively their own ideas on campus. Our efforts to reform the university will be one-sided until balance is restored. Any other course rewards the Left by postponing its day of reckoning.

Those who have been most affected by the campus crisis are students, the purported consumers in this \$100 billion enterprise. They are the easiest group to rally. College students are attending conservative seminars, training sessions and lectures in record numbers. We at Young America's Foundation literally cannot keep most of our books, literature and posters in stock. By using our campus cadre to address their fellow students we break through the liberal monopoly otherwise imposed by faculties, the entertainment industry and the mass media.

If you are a conservative student: get involved. You have countless classmates waiting to hear your message. If we are to deliver conservatism's message, you must carry it. These campus activities will be among the most memorable and rewarding in your life.

If you are a conservative donor: give to conservative youth or youth service organizations. Your support will do more to uphold and spread your ideas than anything else you can do. Your contribution is a wiser investment than giving to college administrations and faculties who have contempt for your principles. Young America's Foundation has been blessed with a band of loyal supporters. Their help has kept the conservative remnant alive. Their contributions have done much more for education than if they had only supported their alma mater.

If you are a conservative leader, columnist or spokesman: hit the campus circuit. Students are anxious to hear from you. They will be your best audiences. I recently offered a generous honorarium to a major conservative columnist for a campus speech. He refused, arguing that students would not be receptive! He was thinking of college campuses in the late 1960s and early 1970s and laughed off an invitation to return.

The Left has no such reluctance. The first three guest lecturers at the University of Michigan this semester will be Spike Lee, Betty Friedan and Al Sharpton. The University of Delaware recently gave \$6,000 to Molly Yard to lecture and \$5,000 to Angela Davis, amounts typical for Leftist lectures. There is no question that the ideological bias of the campus Left largely determines who will receive these fees. But the hard fact remains that too few conservative leaders are willing to speak on campus. Look, for instance, at which members of the House of Representatives were campus lecturers. Patricia Schroeder made 39 separate campus trips last year. William Gray spoke at sixteen campuses and John Lewis spoke fifteen times. There wasn't a conservative or Republican who made more than a handful of appearances.

In contrast, conservative leaders like William Buckley, Jack Kemp, Dinesh D'Souza and Ronald Reagan who frequently address campus audiences build large student followings. They truly are seen as heroes and role models by young Americans.

Our colleges and universities are vitally important. The ideas and beliefs implanted in the three million seventeen and eighteen year olds entering college this year will influence our nation for decades to come. Let's make the 1990s the years that will be called the seedtime for the Conservative Movement. Whether America in the 21st century will share our principles of limited government, traditional values and patriotism will be determined by the success of our work on campus today.