



A Perspective on the Academy's Reaction to the 2016 Presidential Election

Shortly after the polls closed the evening of November 8th, 2016, post-election hysteria exploded on campuses across the land. A number of professors and



university administrators took action to convince students that the election of Donald Trump signaled the end of civilization. Rejecting the electoral victory

of Mr. Trump, academics and bureaucrats on dozens of campuses seemed to be

suggesting that their students take up the battle to repudiate the victory of the newly elected President. Classes were closed, exams were cancelled, and special rooms were secured to protect Hillary supporting students from Donald supporting students. One could not miss the message conveyed by these actions. This display of histrionics and rejection of a valid democratic election by so many in the academy shocks the more rational among us raising reasonable questions about whether the academy, on whole, is capable of responsible custody of our young. While not all were involved in the post-election encouragement of students to join the movement against the Trump presidency, it does appear to be a majority. This apparent majority reflects the monolithic postmodern politics that permeates college campuses today. There are, of course, a substantial number of professors and others on our campuses who prefer a more civil approach to electoral democracy. Perhaps understandably, they remain mostly silent.

Evidence of an academy-wide effort to enlist students in a battle to discredit the Trump victory began accumulating immediately after the last vote was cast. Yale University organized an all-school primal scream to allow students to express their horror at the Trump victory. Then several Yale professors closed classes and canceled exams in recognition that students were incapable of continuing on in the face of what was being portrayed as the greatest on-campus tragedy in history. The campaign to foster a student movement aimed at



Berkeley Students Calling for Civil War Feb. 1, 2016

discrediting the Trump victory did not end with class closings and exam cancellations. Several in the faculty at the University of Washington set up a protected Unity

Room so students could quickly take safe-refuge from Trump supporters

who the faculty apparently believed would be arriving any minute to take anti-Trump students away to an American Siberia. Shortly after these events, students at UCLA took to the street in protest. According to the Daily Bruin, students ripped open a Trump piñata and burned the remains. Students then attempted to flip over a car, always a nice touch to the democratic process. According to the Washington Post, several students at American University responded to the election results by burning the American flag. Some two months after the election, bandana-covered Berkeley students made faculties and administrations everywhere proud by taking to the streets calling for civil war and threatening to become ungovernable. It is apparent that students on our campuses have not been taught that elections come and go. That beloved candidates sometimes lose. And that in the West we call this democracy.

Almost nowhere in the academy was a voice to be heard condemning the violence, mayhem, and incitement

were a whisper. The subtext of the national academy's message seems to have been a slightly veiled approval of the students' vandalism and hysteria. Acceptance of valid election results is apparently not part of postmodern democracy for many in the academy. It would seem a reasonable conclusion, based on the actions thus far taken, that there are those in the professoriate class and a number of university administrators who are willing to endorse participation of their students in a new-style democracy of anarchy, street violence, censorship, and even call to civil war whenever a particular election does not go their way. Their endorsement comes in the form of silence, supporting statements, and refusal by university administrations to effectively respond to the episodes of campus censorship, violence and vandalism.

The faculty of Claremont Graduate University offered their own thoughtful contribution to the national

goings-on. They published a somewhat meandering post-election *Statement* whose linguistic construction uses some rhetorical slight-of-hand and includes the following:

We recognize that one of the great ironies of history is that the pursuit of noble virtues like equality, equal protection under the law, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and the self-determination of all peoples has coexisted throughout our nation's history with the failure to provide all groups, all peoples, all genders, all religions with these protections. At this moment, we feel compelled to assert that the university is and always should be one of the sites where this imbalance is redressed.¹

The faculty's so called "recognition" of the irony of our nation's failure is not a recognition at all but rather an opinion of the faculty. By declaring their opinion a recognition they attempted to rhetorically transmogrify mere assertion into fact. The Statement also sought to indemnify itself against criticism by modifying each of the faculty's long string of aggrieved groups with the word "all". Use of the modifier *all* is a rhetorical device that has the effect of obscuring the deeper complexities, contradictions, paradoxes, and harder realities of any serious political issue. Use of the adjective "all" renders the Statement's assertion of 'national failure' as unassailable as it is misleading and superficial. The faculty also leaves the reader to guess what it means by "...at this time we feel compelled". In the absence of plain language, the best guess seems to be that "at this time" is an allusion to the

election results and the birth of the new presidential administration. It also appears the faculty wants to

escape the partisan political tone that such plain language might convey. That the faculty feels "compelled" implies that they are seized by moral duty to speak out about something that is happening "at this time". That something appears to be the outcome of the election and the arrival of a new administration.

The faculty seems to be under the impression that its Statement has fully encapsulated the nation's long and complex history of civil rights, distribution of political power, and development of democratic processes. Examination of the rhetorical design shows otherwise. Describing the alleged 'national failure to protect' as irony is simply a rhetorical device designed to mislead. That a highly populated, geographically spread-out, pluralistic nation has not comprehensively secured all-encompassing perfect protections for every group, sub-group, and individual predilection is not (continued)

¹For the quotes' position within the Statement and to place the quotes in their full context see CGU Faculty Statement - FEC Approved 12/07/16-17