

## Mob Rule on College Campuses

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America's college campuses, once thought to be bastions of free speech, have become increasingly intolerant toward the practice. Visiting speakers whose views do not conform to the prevailing left-leaning political mind-set on most campuses are at particular risk of having their free speech rights infringed upon.

While academia has its own crimes to atone for, it's the students who have become the bullies as of late. A disturbing number seem to feel that theirs is an inviolate world to which no one of differing opinion need apply. As a result, everything from pie throwing to disrupting speeches to attacks on speakers has become commonplace.

Conservative speakers have long been the targets of such illiberal treatment. The violent reception given to Jim Gilchrist, founder of the Minuteman Project, an anti-illegal immigration group, at Columbia University in October is a recent example. Gilchrist had been invited to speak by the Columbia University College Republicans, but was prevented from doing so by an unruly mob of students. What could have been mere heckling descended into yelling, screaming, kicking and punching, culminating in the rushing of the stage and Gilchrist being shuttled off by security.

The fact that the rioting students [could be heard](#) yelling, "He has no right to speak!" was telling. Apparently, in their minds, neither Gilchrist nor anyone else with whom they disagree has a right to express their viewpoints. In any other setting this would be called exactly what it is -- totalitarianism. But in the untouchable Ivy League world of Columbia, it was chalked up to student activism gone awry. While condemning the incident, Columbia University President Lee Bollinger [has yet to apologize](#) to Gilchrist or to conclude the supposed investigation into the affair. In other words, mob rule won the day.

### Bay Area PC Intolerance

Such behavior is certainly not limited to East Coast universities. Last February at San Francisco State University, former liberal activist-author turned conservative activist-author David Horowitz had [his entire speech shouted down](#) by a group of protesters. Composed primarily of students and other members of the Spartacus Youth Club, a Trotskyist organization, the group stood in the back of the room shouting slogans and comments at every turn.



Even this was not enough to warrant their removal, so Horowitz and his audience, which included me, simply had to suffer through the experience. Horowitz, whose speech centered on his [Academic Bill of Rights](#), took on his critics and attempted to engage them in dialogue, with varying degrees of success. But those who actually came to hear him speak, whether out of sympathy for his views or out of a desire to tackle them intellectually, were unable to do so fully because of the actions of a few bullies.

It is not only conservative speakers who are at risk of having their free speech rights trampled upon on American college campuses. Those who dare criticize radical Islam in any way, shape or form tend to suffer the same fate.

In 2004, UC Berkeley became the locus for bullying behavior during a speech by Islam scholar Daniel Pipes. I was [witness to the spectacle](#), one I'll never forget. Members of the Muslim Student Association and other protesters formed a disruptive group in the audience, shouting, jeering and chanting continually. They booed loudly throughout and called Pipes everything from "racist" and "Zionist" (which in their minds is an insult) to "racist Jew" -- all because Pipes had the audacity to propose that moderate Muslims distance themselves from extremist elements in their midst; that in tackling terrorism authorities take into account the preponderance of Muslim perpetrators and that Israel has a right to exist peacefully among its neighbors.

This was [hardly the first time](#) that UC Berkeley students had espoused hostility toward speakers with "unpopular" views or those hailing from "unpopular" countries such as Israel. Nonetheless, it was a wake-up call for many in the audience who had not yet experienced first-hand the intimidation of the mob.

### **Arab Reformers Silenced**

Recently, reformers from within the Arab world itself have been on the receiving end of such treatment. Whether it be the work of student groups or faculty, insurmountable security restrictions and last-minute cancellations have a strange way of arising whenever such figures are invited to speak on college campuses.

Arab American activist and author Nonie Darwish was to speak at Brown University earlier this month, when the [event was canceled](#) because her views were deemed "too controversial" by members of the Muslim Students' Association. Given that Darwish is the author of the recently released book, ["Now They Call Me Infidel: Why I Renounced Jihad for America, Israel and the War on Terror"](#), such claims are hardly unpredictable. Like most Arab reformers, Darwish must overcome the resistance within her own community, aided and abetted by misguided liberal sympathizers, in order to get her message across.

Darwish was born and raised a Muslim in Egypt and later lived in Gaza. It was during this time that she had several experiences that led her to reject the anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism with which she was indoctrinated as a child. She eventually converted to Christianity and emigrated to

the United States. She has since dedicated her life to exposing the ways that hatred and intolerance are crippling the Muslim world and leading to violence against non-Muslims.

Her pro-Israel views led to an invitation from the campus Jewish group Hillel to speak at Brown University. Unfortunately, the very same organization later backed out, fearing that their relationship with the Muslim Students' Association would be harmed by the experience. But if such a relationship is based on mutually assured censorship, then it's hardly worth preserving. In the end, all of Brown's students missed out on what would undoubtedly have been a thought-provoking experience.

Word has it that Brown University has [re-invited Darwish](#) to speak, no doubt in response to the furor, so perhaps students will have that opportunity after all.

### **Terrorists Recant**

Walid Shoebat, a former PLO terrorist turned Christian convert and outspoken anti-jihadist, fared slightly better at Columbia University in October. Shoebat is the author of "[Why I Left Jihad: The Root of Terrorism and the Return of Radical Islam](#)." He was invited to speak by the Columbia College Republicans, along with former Lebanese terrorist Zachariah Anani and former Nazi Hitler Youth member and German soldier, Hilmar von Campe. All three [have renounced](#) their former anti-Semitic views and dedicated themselves to exposing radical Islam in a no-holds-barred fashion.

They managed to [give their presentation](#), but the turnout was greatly impacted by [last-minute changes](#) to security policies implemented [in the wake of the Jim Gilchrist debacle](#). As a result, 75 to 120 people who had RSVP'd for the event were turned away at the door because only Columbia students and 20 guests were allowed to attend. An e-mail sent out 3 hours before the event was the only forewarning, and as one would expect, most of those planning to attend didn't receive it in time. The event had been widely advertised in the blogosphere, and those denied entry were not only greatly inconvenienced but also greatly disappointed.

Members of student groups who had boycotted the event were [much cheerier](#) at the prospect of a low turnout. A post at the blog for the Blue and White, Columbia's undergraduate magazine, expressed eagerness for "pretty pictures of empty chairs." Unfortunately, they got their wish, to the detriment of open discourse at Columbia.

### **Illiberal Mob Rule**

It's a sad state of affairs indeed when the figures of moderation and reform that many who call themselves liberal or progressive should in theory support are instead shunned in the name of political correctness. For how can one expect to promote progress while helping to stifle the voices at its heart?

People such as Shoebat and Darwish, who literally risk their lives to call attention to a grave threat to all our rights, are the true freedom fighters of our day. But far too many accord that label to

those who choose to effect political change by blowing themselves up in a crowd of civilians or by randomly lobbing rockets into homes and schools or by promoting hatred of other religions. By excusing such behavior and simultaneously helping to suppress reformers, liberal student groups are in fact aiding the very totalitarian forces they claim to oppose. They have in effect become part of the problem, not part of the solution.

It would be nice if we could look to our colleges and universities as the bearers of progress, but at this rate it seems an unlikely prospect. If we are to truly promote an atmosphere of intellectual openness, respectful political debate and the free flow of ideas on campus, then we must stem the tide of thuggery, bullying and intolerance that threatens to subsume future generations.

Otherwise, we cede the day to mob rule.

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