

# OREGON ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS



## Trail Notes, Fall 2017

Dear Colleagues,

“Blue on blue” was the heading used by the *Economist* to describe the student mobs who shut down a mandatory introductory course in the humanities at Reed College this fall. Without much originality, they claimed that it did not give equal weight to all civilizations. The hubbub over that event was widely covered as a warning about the increasing intolerance of campus groups and the inability of administrators and faculty to assert their *loco parentis* authority. The problem of course is that Reed leadership has continually humored student demands, stoking their sense of entitlement. Rather than insisting on standards of free speech, academic freedom, and civilized student conduct (something that the mandatory course was supposed to aid), President John Kroger in fall 2016 told the group “Reedies Against Racism” what students at Reed now expect every time they feel a temper tantrum coming on: “The burdens of fear and uncertainty in our society fall disproportionately on vulnerable and marginalized populations,” the stentorian President told the entitled students who were occupying the admissions office. Many students, he went on, “experience fear and uncertainty about their safety and inclusion in our broader community due to both on-campus hate speech and recent national events.” In fact, American colleges campuses are the most liberal and safe places for a variety of people ever seen on

planet Earth. Shouldn’t President Kroger say as much? But he can’t because, as he knows, the students cannot. As the black scholar Shelby Steele of the Hoover Institution wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* in August in his essay “Why The Left Can’t Let Go of Racism”: “The ‘safe spaces’ for minority students on university campuses are actually redemptive spaces for white students and administrators looking for innocence and empowerment. As minorities in these spaces languish in precious self-absorption, their white classmates, high on the idea of their own wonderful ‘tolerance’ whistle past the very segregated areas they are barred from.” The effort to consign some students to second-rate, anti-scientific knowledge all in the name of “diversity” is worse than elitist: it damages the prospects of those very groups that the campaigners seek to assist.



Coincidentally, in November we released a compilation of three recent research reports on how well Oregon colleges and universities do in adding economic value to their students (available on the O.A.S. website). Not surprisingly, Reed College is consistently and significantly at the bottom

of the barrel. It attracts smart kids from good families, but rather than challenging them and retooling their youthful exuberance with a strong dose of professional maturity, it sends them backwards in time via a campus learning environment that is probably less educative (value-adding) than their high schools. The top-ranked school in the state for value-added was Linfield College. Linfield, which also bills itself as a liberal arts college, is the anti-thesis of Reed: truly diverse in both economic and ideological dimensions; very focused on professional training and knowledge acquisition; diligent and hardworking in spirit (no accommodations here for students to engage in anti-Trump protests, as was the case at Reed); and with a service orientation to serve the world. The *Portland Business Journal* noted in an article on our report that Reed's poor showing raised an awkward question: "If college is what you make of it, and you come out of it making very little, was your college education still valuable?"



In September, yours truly found himself besieged on social media by a mob of no less than 16,000 ideologues who believe, like the Reed College students, that the best way to pursue their idea of social justice is to censor and threaten those with whom they disagree. The occasion was a peer-reviewed article that I published in the *Third World Quarterly* titled "The Case for Colonialism". You can read N.A.S. president Peter Wood's essay on the uproar, "The

article that made 16,000 ideologues go wild", in *Minding the Campus*. The Pakistani editor of the journal was eventually subject to death threats and the publisher withdrew the article citing safety reasons. The joke was then on the mobs as many people came out in defense of either the substance of the article or my right to publish it, or both. I find some dark humor in the fact that 16,000 was the same number of French revolutionary forces that besieged the Portuguese fortress of Almeida in 1810 in order to enforce Napoleon's continental blockade against trading with English ships, which the Portuguese did not accept. Revolution and the violent imposition of limits on freedom seem always to go hand in hand. Fortunately, the article will be reprinted in the N.A.S. journal *Academic Questions* and they, at least, will not bow to mobs in defense of free speech.



Following "L'affaire TWQ" I was invited to speak on the Oregon Public Broadcasting show *Think Out Loud* on the question of viewpoint diversity (a recording is available on the OAS website). I was paired with a California scholar who works on LGBT political mobilization. Our views of whether there is a problem of political bias in social science and humanities departments predictably diverged. We were followed by two Reedies Against Racism students who had organized the campus mob at the beginning of term. Their precious self-absorption on air was astounding. As a colleague asked me afterwards: "Did you

organize that segment in order to prove your point?"

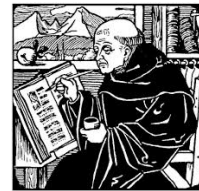


I am glad to see that the Oregon membership in the Heterodox Academy continues to grow. There are now 12 members from Oregon from a variety of disciplines. The list now includes Dr. Robert Knapp, an English professor at Reed College who teaches Shakespeare. Need we say more about why he is concerned about viewpoint diversity on his campus?



I chose medieval monks at work for this fall's newsletter icon after reading Oxford professor Larry Siedentop's 2014 book *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*. Siedentop emphasizes what is important about Western civilization is its very early invention of the idea of a common equality of mankind. This idea, formulated mainly by Paul who brought together elements of Jewish and Greek thought with his own interpretation of Jesus, lay dormant, Siedentop explained, until canon jurists of the medieval church finally put it into practice. Those medieval monks, long disparaged as living in a "dark age", are the heroes of Western civilization, he writes. The humanism and advances of

the Renaissance became possible as a result, and after that the rise of the West. Every time I watch college students rampage with all the protections of the West's free and tolerant society demanding an end to Eurocentric education, I wonder if they will grow up to appreciate the ironies of their behavior.



What is our purpose at O.A.S., as at N.A.S.? I thought about that in reading a review in *The New Criterion* of a new book published by Cambridge University Press entitled *Lacan, Psychoanalysis, and Comedy*. Lacan is what we would today call a charismatic charlatan of postmodernism, of which there are many. Christie Davies, a British sociologist who passed away shortly after writing the review, concluded with the dismaying thought that "despite its high price, this book from a prestigious publisher will find a place on the shelf in the libraries of literature departments throughout North America. Students compelled to read it will find it as frustrating as I have done, but will not be permitted to say so. Let me be their voice." Maybe that is a more general call to action. Let us be the voice of reason and common sense for young people trapped in an academic and broader intellectual environment in which nonsense is treated as scholarship. The N.A.S. report on AP European History, *The Disappearing Continent*, is a good example of providing this voice for students perplexed and frankly silenced by their radical professors. We in the O.A.S. can and should do more to

provide a voice for scholars and students in Oregon facing an increasingly illiberal intellectual environment. Let us be their voice.



At the beginning of September, our chapter's membership stood at 25. We added our first graduate student member, our first faculty member at Portland Community College, and two new faculty members at Oregon State University. This continues to strengthen our voice within the state as a credible group of scholars representing common sense in higher education and broader intellectual questions in Oregon. Thank you for being a part of our commitment to all-round excellence!

Bruce Gilley, OAS President