

May 15, 2014

Friends of *Pickings*, Stephan and Abby Thernstrom, write on the 60th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

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Seth Mandel asks an important question. "What if college is making people stupid?" *International Monetary Fund* director Christine Lagarde has become the latest commencement speaker to be chased off by American academia's guardians of the eternally closed minds. After protests over Lagarde's planned graduation speech at Smith College from professors and students, Lagarde bowed out, echoing Condoleezza Rice's tactful statement about not wanting to derail the celebratory atmosphere of the day.

The Washington Post sums it up perfectly: "The commencement speaker purity bug has hit Smith College." Calling it a "bug" is the right classification, for it is certainly both a defect and an apparently contagious infection that demonstrates the extent to which American universities are failing their students while pocketing the tuition money (about \$45,000 in Smith's case). ...

... The question, then, is not whether American universities are producing ever more totalitarian-minded brats. Of course they are reinforcing such closed-mindedness; they are leftist institutions steeped in leftist values. This is a problem, and should be addressed. But the out-of-control speech police on college campuses, combined with the unwillingness to even listen to those who might disagree with them, raises the distinct possibility that colleges are producing brainless authoritarians.

What if college, in other words, is making the next generation stupid? Not uniformly, of course. There will always be exceptions, and there may even be a rebellion against what is increasingly making college the most expensive babysitting service in the modern world. But college administrators are now faced with the conundrum of students who pay them gobs of money to keep them uninformed and shielded from critical thinking. It's a challenge administrators have to deal with—and the sooner, the better

Ruth Wisse, professor of Yiddish, has more.

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Most painful to me was the Harvard scene several years ago when the Committee on Degrees in Social Studies, celebrating its 50th anniversary, accepted a donation in honor of its former head tutor Martin Peretz, whose contributions to the university include the chair in Yiddish I have been privileged to hold. His enemies on campus generated a "party against Marty" that forced him to walk a gauntlet of jeering students for having allegedly offended Islam, while putting others on notice that they had best not be perceived guilty of association with him.

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Females and members of visible minorities are given handicaps (as in golf). Courses are devised to inculcate in students the core lesson that (in the words of one recent graduate, writing online at the Huffington Post) "harmful structural inequalities persist on the basis of class, race, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in the U.S." On too many campuses, as in a funhouse mirror, ideological commitment to diversity has brought about its opposite: ideological

hegemony, which is much more harmful to the life of the mind than the alleged structural inequalities that social engineering set out to correct. ...

Continuing the theme, [Thomas Sowell](#) writes on kampus kangaroo courts. *There seems to be a full-court press on to get colleges to "do something" about rape on campus.*

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Why are rapists not reported to the police and prosecuted in a court of law?

Apparently this is because of some college women who say that they were raped and are dissatisfied with a legal system that does not automatically take their word for it against the word of someone who has been accused and denies the charge.

There seem to be a dangerously large number of people who think that the law exists to give them whatever they want — even when that means denying other people the same rights that they claim for themselves.

Nowhere is this self-centered attitude more common than on college campuses. And nowhere are such attitudes more encouraged than by the Obama administration's Justice Department, which is threatening colleges that don't handle rape issues the politically correct way — that is, by presuming the accused to be guilty and not letting Constitutional safeguards get in the way.

Anything that fits the "war on women" theme is seen as smart politics in an election year. The last thing Attorney General Eric Holder's Justice Department is interested in is justice.

The track record of academics in other kinds of cases is not the least bit encouraging as regards the likelihood of impartial justice. Even on many of our most prestigious college campuses, who gets punished for saying the wrong thing and who gets away with mob actions depends on which groups are in vogue and which are not. ...

The mis-education of the past thirty years has produced what [Eliot Cohen](#) calls the "selfie-taking, hashtagging teenage administration."

... Often, members of the Obama administration speak and, worse, think and act, like a bunch of teenagers. When officials roll their eyes at [Vladimir Putin](#)'s seizure of Crimea with the line that this is "19th-century behavior," the tone is not that different from a disdainful remark about a hairstyle being "so 1980s." When administration members find themselves judged not on utopian aspirations or the purity of their motives—from offering "hope and change" to stopping global warming—but on their actual accomplishments, they turn sulky. As teenagers will, they throw a few taunts (the president last month said the GOP was offering economic policies that amount to a "stinkburger" or a "meanwich") and stomp off, refusing to exchange a civil word with those of opposing views.

In a searing memoir published in January, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates describes with disdain the trash talk about the Bush administration that characterized meetings in the Obama White House. Like self-obsessed teenagers, the staffers and their superiors seemed to forget that there were other people in the room who might take offense, or merely see the world differently. Teenagers expect to be judged by intentions and promise instead of by accomplishment, and their style can be encouraged by irresponsible adults (see: the Nobel Prize committee) who give awards for perkiness and promise rather than achievement.

If the United States today looks weak, hesitant and in retreat, it is in part because its leaders and their staff do not carry themselves like adults. They may be charming, bright and attractive; they may have the best of intentions; but they do not look serious. They act as though Twitter and clenched teeth or a pout could stop invasions or rescue kidnapped children in Nigeria. They do not sound as if, when saying that some outrage is "unacceptable" or that a dictator "must go," that they represent a government capable of doing something substantial—and, if necessary, violent—if its expectations are not met. And when reality, as it so often does, gets in the way—when, for example, the Syrian regime begins dousing its opponents with chlorine gas, as it has in recent weeks, despite solemn deals and red lines—the administration ignores it, hoping, as teenagers often do, that if they do not acknowledge a screw-up no one else will notice. ...

WSJ

[Brown at 60: An American Success Story](#)

Never mind chatter about the 'resegregation' of U.S. schools. The landmark Supreme Court case did its job.

by Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom

In conventional liberal circles, there is never any good news about race. Thus, as the 60th anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark decision in the *Brown v. Board of Education* school-desegregation case nears, mainstream media outlets lately have been depicting American schools as resegregated.

Thus we read that in New York City "children trundle from segregated neighborhoods to segregated schools, living a hermetic reality," the [New York Times](#) reports. The Los Angeles Times describes more Latino children increasingly attending segregated schools, while the segregation of black students is virtually unchanged from the early 1970s. That conclusion is drawn from the work of a research team led by UCLA professor Gary Orfield, the left's go-to man on race and schooling. For decades Prof. Orfield has been successfully peddling a story of dashed hopes for school desegregation.



*At the Supreme Court on May 17, 1954, after their win in *Brown v. Board of Education*, left to right: attorneys George E.C. Hayes, Thurgood Marshall and James Nabrit Jr.*

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court declared in its unanimous *Brown* decision that state-imposed, single-race public schools violated the 14th Amendment. Separating children on the basis of race, the justices said, denied black pupils "equal educational opportunities" and hence deprived them of the "equal protection" of the laws, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote. The watershed decision marked the beginning of the end of the Jim Crow South, applying to more than 10 million children who were enrolled in color-coded schools in 21 states and the District of Columbia. They made up roughly 40% of the nation's public-school students, and more than two-thirds of all African-American pupils.

Some commentators (thinking wishfully) hailed *Brown* as a historic vindication of Justice John Marshall Harlan's magnificent dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the 1896 decision that upheld the constitutionality of state laws requiring racial segregation of public facilities. Justice Harlan, a lonely voice on the court, declared the Constitution to be "colorblind." But the *Brown* court said nothing of the sort. It spoke only of segregation's psychological harm to black children and did not bar all racial classifications, as the NAACP had hoped it would. Thus racial preferences in higher education, contracting and employment—often called affirmative action—have been periodically sanctioned by the court.

Mr. Orfield and his admirers do not regret the court's failure in 1954 to bar race-conscious public policies, of which they approve. They want more racially balanced schools and see *Brown* as a failed promise. But this comes from Mr. Orfield's problematic definition of segregation. In his view, any school in which various minority groups together constitute a majority of the student body is "segregated."

The number of such majority-minority schools has indeed increased. Seventy-four percent of black and 80% of Latino students are currently enrolled in them, up several points over the past two decades. But this is not, as Mr. Orfield argues, because federal court decisions have released many communities from desegregation orders issued many years ago. (Mr. Orfield seemingly favors permanent court supervision over most school districts.) The core problem is a stunning transformation in the racial demography of the school-age population that has resulted from immigration and the differential fertility rates of immigrants and natives.

In 1970, the federal government at last began to enforce *Brown* vigorously. Federal courts issued desegregation orders that forced the redrawing of school-attendance zones and imposed large-scale busing in many cities. At that time, four out of five public-school students were white. Today, that percentage is just over half (50.5%). In the South, whites already are a minority (47%), and an even smaller minority in the West, where barely 40% of public-school pupils are white. Whites are a still smaller public-school minority in the largest and most rapidly growing Southern and Western states: only 27% in California, 31% in Texas and 43% in Florida. These demographic trends are not expected to stop in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Orfield includes those numbers in his widely cited reports but shrinks from drawing the logical conclusion: It would be logistically impossible—without huge fleets of school buses full of children embarking on daily cross-country drives—to eliminate what he defines as "segregated" schools in much of America today.

If it were true that the educational achievement of minority children depended upon a large white presence in the schools they attended, profound pessimism would be in order. The share of non-Hispanic whites in the school-age population will almost surely continue to shrink. The only way to counter that trend would be to impose a complete ban on further immigration and to deport the 10 million-plus immigrants living illegally in the U.S. You won't hear that proposal coming from those who insist that America's schools are being resegregated.

It is demeaning, even racist, to assume that minority children can't learn—or can't learn as much—unless they are immersed in a student body in which whites are the majority. The most sophisticated research on the subject does not find that having white classmates notably improves the academic achievement of blacks and Hispanics.

The high test scores in the largely black or Latino charter schools run by the KIPP Academy, the Harlem Children's Zone and many others illustrate the point. Mr. Orfield and his many supporters, though, resolutely oppose charter schools, and he even faults the Obama administration for its rather mild support for them. He dismisses charter schools because they are "the most segregated sector of schools for black students."

It is true that the schools typically do not have many white students enrolled; that's because the charter schools' mission is to serve students who are most in need. Studies by Roland Fryer and many other social scientists reveal that black and Latino students actually learn more rapidly when they transfer into a good charter school (or private school where vouchers are available), even if the school has a racial mix—i.e., not a majority of white students—that passionate advocates of racial balance find objectionable.

The quality of American public schools is not what it should and could be, but the problem is not the lack of a proper racial balance in their student bodies. Schools with heavy black or Hispanic enrollment are not "segregated"; it is a gross misuse of the term to claim otherwise. The promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* has been fulfilled. Nothing resembling the Jim Crow South has re-emerged, and it never will. On Saturday we should celebrate a truly heartening American success story.

Mr. Thernstrom is a history professor at Harvard University. Ms. Thernstrom is an adjunct scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. They are the co-authors of "America in Black and White: One Nation Indivisible" (Simon & Schuster, 1997).

Contentions

What If College Is Making People Stupid?

by Seth Mandel

International Monetary Fund director Christine Lagarde has become the latest commencement speaker to be chased off by American academia's guardians of the eternally closed minds. After protests over Lagarde's planned graduation speech at Smith College from professors and students, Lagarde bowed out, echoing Condoleezza Rice's tactful statement about not wanting to derail the celebratory atmosphere of the day.

The *Washington Post* [sums it up](#) perfectly: "The commencement speaker purity bug has hit Smith College." Calling it a "bug" is the right classification, for it is certainly both a defect and an apparently contagious infection that demonstrates the extent to which American universities are failing their students while pocketing the tuition money (about \$45,000 in [Smith's case](#)).

Meanwhile at Syracuse, the *New Yorker's* David Remnick apparently gave a commencement address that deviated from the airy, ego-boosting flattery to which America's college-age toddlers are accustomed, and was thus [not altogether well received](#). Remnick's speech was a litany of liberal policy clichés, and so there was plenty to disagree with. But it was also a challenge to the graduates:

What gnaws at you? And what will you do about it?

Is it the way we treat and warehouse our elderly as our population grows older? Is it the way we isolate and underserve the physically and mentally disabled. Is it our absurd American fascination with guns and our insistence on valuing the so called rights of ownership over the clear and present danger of gun violence? What will we—what will you—do about the widening divides of class and opportunity in this country? You are, dear friends, about to enter an economy that is increasing winner take all. Part of this is the result of globalization. But do we just throw up our hands and say that's the way it is? And what about our refusal to look squarely at the degradation of the planet we inhabit? In the last election cycle many candidates refused even to acknowledge the hard science, irrefutable science, of climate change. The president, while readily accepting the facts, has done far too little to alter them. How long are we, are you, prepared to wait?

As I said, plenty to disagree with. But good for Remnick. He is addressing a generation that seems to think hashtags will catch war criminals and casting a vote for a messianic snake-oil salesman will heal the planet. They need to be reminded that they should actually do something with their knowledge, and if they don't like it—well, they can suck it up.

But that last point raises a slightly different question. Is using the phrase "their knowledge" too presumptuous for today's university climate? In its [story](#) on Lagarde, the *Wall Street Journal* talks to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education's Greg Lukianoff:

Mr. Lukianoff said the trend is clearly growing. According to a tally by his group, between 1987 and 2008, there were 48 protests of planned speeches, not all for graduations, that led to 21 incidents of an invited guest not speaking. Since 2009 there have been 95 protests, resulting in 39 cancellations, according to Mr. Lukianoff's group.

After recounting previous speakers at Smith, including such liberal leading lights as Rachel Maddow, Gloria Steinem, and last year Arianna Huffington, the *Journal* gets the following quote from a student who possesses neither self-awareness nor even a tangential relationship with the facts:

“The issue isn’t that we’re against debate but that we’re only hearing one side of the debate continuously,” said Nandi Marumo, a 22-year-old junior at Smith, who signed the petition against Ms. Lagarde. “We hear the same narrative from every person, from the media, from everything.”

The question, then, is not whether American universities are producing ever more totalitarian-minded brats. Of course they are reinforcing such closed-mindedness; they are leftist institutions steeped in leftist values. This is a problem, and should be addressed. But the out-of-control speech police on college campuses, combined with the unwillingness to even listen to those who might disagree with them, raises the distinct possibility that colleges are producing *brainless* authoritarians.

What if college, in other words, is making the next generation stupid? Not uniformly, of course. There will always be exceptions, and there may even be a rebellion against what is increasingly making college the most expensive babysitting service in the modern world. But college administrators are now faced with the conundrum of students who pay them gobs of money to keep them uninformed and shielded from critical thinking. It’s a challenge administrators have to deal with—and the sooner, the better.

WSJ

The Closing of the Collegiate Mind

Opponents of free speech have chalked up many campus victories lately as ideological conformity marches on.

by Ruth R. Wisse

There was a time when people looking for intellectual debate turned away from politics to the university. Political backrooms bred slogans and bagmen; universities fostered educated discussion. But when students in the 1960s began occupying university property like the thugs of regimes America was fighting abroad, the venues gradually reversed. Open debate is now protected only in the polity: In universities, muggers prevail.

Assaults on intellectual and political freedom have been making headlines. Pressure from faculty egged on by Muslim groups induced Brandeis University last month not to grant Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the proponent of women's rights under Islam, an intended honorary degree at its convocation. This was a replay of 1994, when Brandeis faculty demanded that trustees rescind their decision to award an honorary degree to Jeane Kirkpatrick, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. In each case, a faculty cabal joined by (let us charitably say) ignorant students promoted the value of repression over the values of America's liberal democracy.

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Most painful to me was the Harvard scene several years ago when the Committee on Degrees in Social Studies, celebrating its 50th anniversary, accepted a donation in honor of its former head tutor Martin Peretz, whose contributions to the university include the chair in Yiddish I have been privileged to hold. His enemies on campus generated a "party against Marty" that forced him to walk a gauntlet of jeering students for having allegedly offended Islam, while putting others on notice that they had best not be perceived guilty of association with him.

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Females and members of visible minorities are given handicaps (as in golf). Courses are devised to inculcate in students the core lesson that (in the words of one recent graduate, writing online at the Huffington Post) "harmful structural inequalities persist on the basis of class, race, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in the U.S." On too many campuses, as in a funhouse mirror, ideological commitment to diversity has brought about its opposite: ideological hegemony, which is much more harmful to the life of the mind than the alleged structural inequalities that social engineering set out to correct.

In 1995 I participated in a campus debate on affirmative action that drew so much student interest it had to be rerouted to Harvard's largest auditorium. This year I was asked by a student group to participate in a debate on modern feminism. Though I am not hotly engaged in the subject, I agreed and waited for confirmation, thinking it might be fun to consider a women's movement that has never graduated from sisterhood to motherhood. There followed several emails apologizing for the delay and finally a message acknowledging that no one could be found to take the pro-feminist side. Evidently, one of those asked had responded: "What is there to debate?" No wonder those who admit no legitimate opposition to their ideas feel duty-bound to shut down unwelcome speakers.

Because conservative students do not take over buildings or drown others out with their shouting, instructors feel free to mock conservatives in the classroom, and administrators pay scant attention when their posters are torn down or their sensibilities offended. As a tenured professor who does not decline the label "conservative," I benefit from this imbalance by getting to know some of the feistiest students on campus.

But these students need and deserve every encouragement from outside their closed and claustrophobic environs. As one of them put it to me, "There's more faculty interest in climate control than in the Western canon." Multiculturalism guarantees that courses on Islam highlight all the good that can be said of Muhammad and the Quran, but there is no comparable academic commitment to reinvigorating the foundational teachings of American liberal democracy or to strengthening the legacy bequeathed to us by "dead white males."

So far the university culture has not been able to destroy the two-party system, but its influence on the current administration in Washington gives some sense of what may lie ahead unless small "d" democrats—which these days means mostly conservatives—begin to take back the campus. Through patient but persistent means, they ought to help students introduce speakers, debates, demands for courses and all the intellectual firepower they can muster in favor of

American exceptionalism, the moral advantages of a free economy and the need to protect democracy from enemies we are not afraid to name.

In short, let the university become as contentious as Congress. In Nigeria, Islamists think nothing of seizing hundreds of schoolgirls for the crime of aspiring to an education. Here in the United States, the educated class thinks nothing of denying an honorary degree to a fearless Muslim woman who at peril of her life, and in the name of liberal democracy, has insisted on exposing such outrages to the light. The struggle for freedom is universal; would that our universities were on its side.

Ms. Wisse, a professor of Yiddish and comparative literature at Harvard University, is the author of "Jews and Power" (Schocken, 2007) and "No Joke: Making Jewish Humor" (Princeton, 2013).

Jewish World Review **Kangaroo Courts on Campus?**

by Thomas Sowell

There seems to be a full-court press on to get colleges to "do something" about rape on campus.

But there seems to be remarkably little attention paid to two crucial facts: (1) rape is a crime and (2) colleges are not qualified to be law-enforcement institutions.

Why are rapists not reported to the police and prosecuted in a court of law?

Apparently this is because of some college women who say that they were raped and are dissatisfied with a legal system that does not automatically take their word for it against the word of someone who has been accused and denies the charge.

There seem to be a dangerously large **number of people** who think that the law exists to give them whatever they want — even when that means denying other people the same rights that they claim for themselves.

Nowhere is this self-centered attitude more common than on college campuses. And nowhere are such attitudes more encouraged than by the Obama administration's Justice Department, which is threatening colleges that don't handle rape issues the politically correct way — that is, by presuming the accused to be guilty and not letting Constitutional safeguards get in the way.

Anything that fits the "war on women" theme is seen as smart politics in an election year. The last thing Attorney General Eric Holder's Justice Department is interested in is justice.

The track record of academics in other kinds of cases is not the least bit encouraging as regards the likelihood of impartial justice. Even on many of our most prestigious college campuses, who gets punished for saying the wrong thing and who gets away with mob actions depends on which groups are in vogue and which are not.

This is carried to the point where some colleges have established what they call "free speech zones" — as if they are granting a special favor by not imposing their vague and arbitrary "speech codes" everywhere on campus.

The irony in this is that the Constitution already established a free speech zone. It covers the entire United States.

Have we already [forgotten](#) the lynch mob atmosphere on the Duke University campus a few years ago, when three young men were accused of raping a stripper?

Thank heaven that case was handled by the [criminal](#) justice system, where all the evidence showed that the charge was bogus, leading to the district attorney's being removed and disbarred.

If all the current crusades to institutionalize lynch law on campuses across the country were motivated by a zeal to protect young women, that might at least be understandable, however unjustified.

But those who are whipping up the lynch mob mentality have shown far less interest in stopping rape than in politicizing it. Many of the politically correct crusaders are the same people who have pushed for unisex living arrangements on campus, including unisex bathrooms, and who have put condom machines in dormitories and turned freshman orientation [programs](#) into a venue for sexual "liberation" propaganda.

They laughed at old-fashioned restrictions designed to reduce sexual dangers among young people on campus. Now that real life experience has shown that these are not laughing matters, the politically correct still want their sexual Utopia, and want scapegoats when they don't get it.

There is a price to pay for allowing unsubstantiated accusations to prevail, and that price extends beyond particular young men whose lives can be ruined by false charges. The whole atmosphere of learning is compromised when male faculty have to protect themselves from accusations by female students.

People today are amazed when I tell them about a young African woman who had just arrived in America back in 1963, and who was so overwhelmed by everything that she fell far behind in my economics class. I met with her each evening for an hour of tutoring until she caught up with the rest of the class.

There is no way that I would do that today, and there is no way that she would have passed that class otherwise. Instead, she would have returned to Africa a failure. There are many unintended consequences of lynch law policies that poison the atmosphere on campus and diminish American life in general.

WSJ

[A Selfie-Taking, Hashtagging Teenage Administration](#)

The Obama crowd too often responds to critics and to world affairs like self-absorbed adolescents.

by Eliot A. Cohen

As American foreign policy continues its long string of failures—not a series of singles and doubles, as President [Obama](#) asserted in a recent news conference, but rather season upon season of fouls and strikes—the question becomes: Why?

Why does the Economist magazine put a tethered eagle on its cover, with the plaintive question, "What would America fight for?" Why do Washington Post columnists sympathetic to the administration write pieces like one last week headlined, "Obama tends to create his own foreign policy headaches"?

The administration would respond with complaints, some legitimate, about the difficulties of an intractable world. Then there are claims, more difficult to support, of steadily accumulating of minor successes; and whinges about the legacy of the Bush administration, gone but never forgotten in the collective memory of the National Security Council staff.

More dispassionate observers might pick out misjudgments about opportunities (the bewitching chimera of an Israeli-Palestinian peace, or the risible Russian reset), excessively hopeful misunderstandings of threats (al Qaeda, we were once told, is on the verge of strategic defeat), and a constipated decision-making apparatus centered in a White House often at war with the State and Defense departments.



U.S. President Barack Obama (R) and British Prime Minister David Cameron pose for a selfie picture with Denmark's Prime Minister Helle Thorning Schmidt (C) during the memorial service of South African former President Nelson Mandela.

There is a further explanation. Clues may be found in the president's selfie with the attractive Danish prime minister at the memorial service for [Nelson Mandela](#) in December; in State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki in March cheerily holding up a sign with the hashtag #UnitedForUkraine while giving a thumbs up; or Michelle Obama looking glum last week, holding up another Twitter sign: #BringBackOurGirls. It can be found in the president's petulance in recently saying that if you do not support his (in)action in Ukraine you must want to go to war with Russia—when there are plenty of potentially effective steps available that stop well short of violence. It can be heard in the former NSC spokesman, Thomas Vietor, responding on May 1 to a question on Fox News about the deaths of an American ambassador and three other Americans with the line, "Dude, this was like two years ago."

Often, members of the Obama administration speak and, worse, think and act, like a bunch of teenagers. When officials roll their eyes at [Vladimir Putin](#)'s seizure of Crimea with the line that this is "19th-century behavior," the tone is not that different from a disdainful remark about a hairstyle being "so 1980s." When administration members find themselves judged not on utopian aspirations or the purity of their motives—from offering "hope and change" to stopping global warming—but on their actual accomplishments, they turn sulky. As teenagers will, they throw a few taunts (the president last month said the GOP was offering economic policies that amount to a "stinkburger" or a "meanwich") and stomp off, refusing to exchange a civil word with those of opposing views.

In a searing memoir published in January, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates describes with disdain the trash talk about the Bush administration that characterized meetings in the Obama White House. Like self-obsessed teenagers, the staffers and their superiors seemed to forget that there were other people in the room who might take offense, or merely see the world differently. Teenagers expect to be judged by intentions and promise instead of by accomplishment, and their style can be encouraged by irresponsible adults (see: the Nobel Prize committee) who give awards for perkiness and promise rather than achievement.

If the United States today looks weak, hesitant and in retreat, it is in part because its leaders and their staff do not carry themselves like adults. They may be charming, bright and attractive; they may have the best of intentions; but they do not look serious. They act as though Twitter and clenched teeth or a pout could stop invasions or rescue kidnapped children in Nigeria. They do not sound as if, when saying that some outrage is "unacceptable" or that a dictator "must go," that they represent a government capable of doing something substantial—and, if necessary, violent—if its expectations are not met. And when reality, as it so often does, gets in the way—when, for example, the Syrian regime begins dousing its opponents with chlorine gas, as it has in recent weeks, despite solemn deals and red lines—the administration ignores it, hoping, as teenagers often do, that if they do not acknowledge a screw-up no one else will notice.

The Obama administration is not alone. The teenage temperament infects our politics on both sides of the aisle, not to mention our great universities and leading corporations. The old, adult virtues—gravitas, sobriety, perseverance and constancy—are the virtues that enabled America to stabilize a shattered world in the 1940s, preserve a perilous order despite the Cold War and navigate the conclusion of that conflict. These and other stoic qualities are worth rediscovering, because their dearth among our leaders is leading them, and us and large parts of the globe, into real danger.

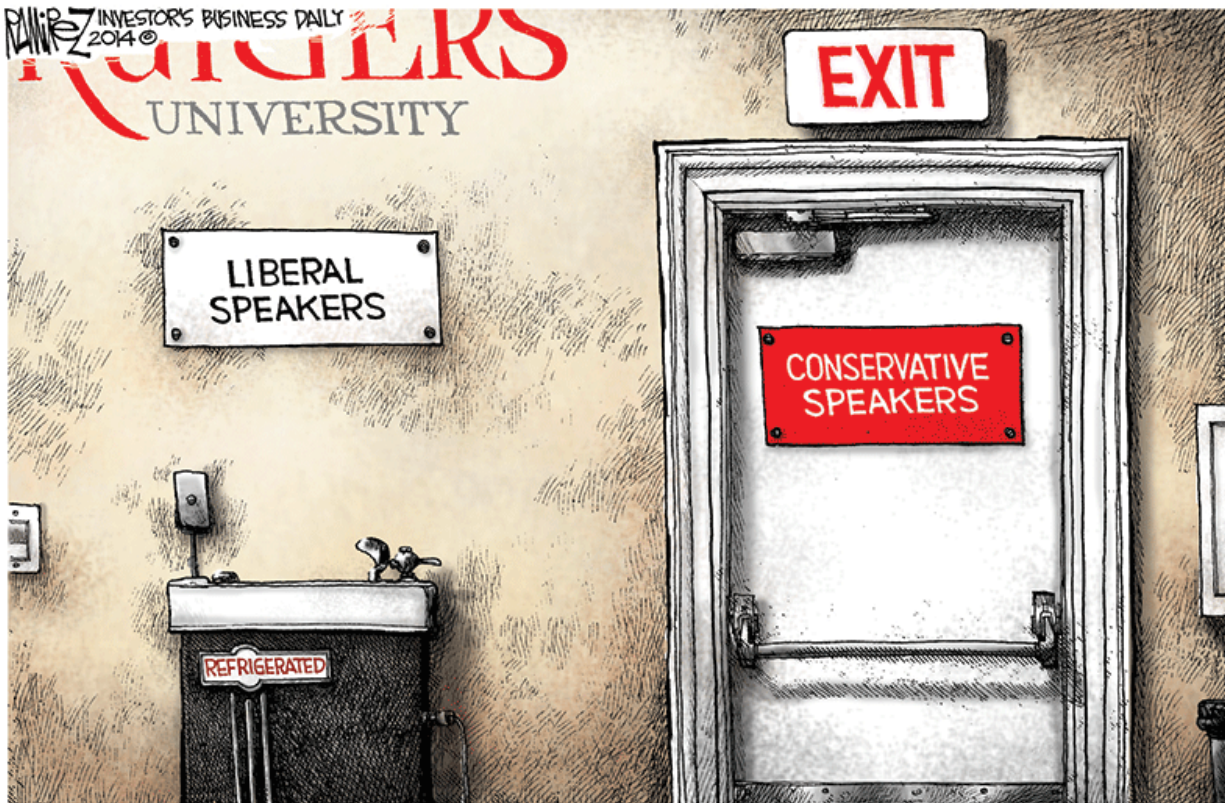
Mr. Cohen was counselor of the State Department from 2007-08.

The
White House's
response to the
attack in
Benghazi...



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WHY WAS THE BENGHAZI
ATTACK BLAMED ON A
VIDEO?



DON'T
KNOW.

WHY WAS SECURITY SO
LAX AT THE CONSULATE?



NO
IDEA.

WHERE WAS
PRESIDENT OBAMA
DURING THE CRISIS?



CAN'T
SAY.

WHY WAS NO RESCUE
ATTEMPT MADE?



NO
COMMENT.

WHY HAS NO
PERPETRATOR BEEN
BROUGHT TO JUSTICE?



WHO
KNOWS?

SEE?... WE'VE ANSWERED
EVERY REPUBLICAN
QUESTION ON BENGHAZI!



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