

Writer: We Have to Ditch Free Speech Because Trump Won

In a recent opinion piece in *Slate*, titled “The Kids are Right: There’s Nothing Outrageous about Stamping out Bigoted Speech,” [Osita Nwanevu](#) argues that in the age of Trump student activists should be permitted to dictate who speaks on college campuses. Shutting down speakers like [Charles Murray at Middlebury College](#) and [Milo Yiannopoulos at UC Berkeley](#) come with the territory. Why? Because, as the title of the article states, the students are absolutely right.

In order to resist the gathering dark forces, Nwanevu believes that these extraordinary times demand extraordinary measures. In the battle of good versus evil, Trump’s assault on logic, reason and truth requires that the Left up their game, adopting their own unscrupulous tactics to silence bigotry, racism, sexism and xenophobia:

“[T]his moment in American politics and American life proves that the victory of reason cannot always be assured. The purveyors of logic, of facts dutifully checked and delivered to the public, lost big league in November. [...] This is, to borrow a phrase, a time for choosing. In the Trump era, should we side with those who insist that the bigoted must traipse unhindered through our halls of learning? Or should we dare to disagree?”

College campuses are the proving grounds for these new tactics, which include [shouting down unpopular speakers](#), [damaging campus property](#) and [attacking faculty members](#). The author calls those who insist that safe spaces, trigger warnings and disinvites to controversial speakers are unwarranted the “critics of political correctness.” (Note: The PC movement occurred in the 80’s and 90’s and while related to

the more recent movement to protect the fragile minds of young adults, they are [not identical](#).)

So the new tactics of the Left on college campuses are not really about disagreeing with bigoted speakers. They're about stopping civil discourse, deliberation and debate from ensuing, all in order to resist and eventually defeat so-called Trumpism. In order to achieve this end, students are encouraged to resort to heckling and violence in a brass-knuckles campaign to win the culture wars. Unfortunately, the [end does not justify the means](#).

Here are three examples to support my point:

Example #1: In the spring of 1999, I sat in the audience of a formal debate at the Oxford University Student Union, where the proposition of the house was "America is a rogue nation." [U.S.-backed NATO forces had been bombing Belgrade and Pristina](#) in retaliation for [Slobodan Milošević](#)'s invasion of Kosovo. Despite claims that the bombing was exclusively targeted at military installations, pictures said otherwise. Civilian carnage was terrible. U.S. President Clinton (who by the way was a Fulbright scholar at Oxford) declared it a great victory, since air power alone led to victory. (So was the [firebombing of Dresden](#), I'll point out.) All defenders of the U.S. and NATO campaign were permitted to speak. The proposition of the house was affirmed.

Example #2: In the early 2000s I gave a talk in Chicago in which I advanced the thesis that progressive [educators, particularly followers of John Dewey, should be more open-minded about home schooling initiatives](#). Although I was heckled by several members of the audience, I continued to present my case in a civil and respectful manner. Some insisted afterwards that I should have never been offered a platform to express these "noxious views." After this episode, I found myself disinvited from several talks because my position on home schooling did not fit with the orthodoxy.

Example #3: On the same day as Murray's talk was shut down by protesters at Middlebury, another controversial speaker [addressed students at Franklin & Marshall College](#) in Pennsylvania. The speaker was none other than [Flemming Rose](#), the Danish editor who published cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed, setting off a series of terrorist attacks. Rose gave his talk. Some students protested outside the speech forum. But inside the forum, the speaker was never interrupted. F & M's president claimed that the event went off without a slip because the institution instills values crucial for attentive listening, respect of ideological differences and non-disruptive protest.

The lessons these three examples offer are, one, that while context matters (whether the onset of a barbaric bombing campaign or the age of Trump), it should not be used to deny a speaker's opportunity to voice their views, no matter how unpopular; two, speakers and audience members ought to take the "high ground" and resist any temptation to lower themselves to their critics' level, employing the same or similarly unscrupulous tactics (Nwanevu recommends the opposite); and, three, college kids aren't always right in their decision to shut down controversial speakers and that's why they're in college, as Franklin & Marshall proved in its successful hosting of Flemming Rose's talk.

It seems quite ironic that those on the ideological right have become the new vanguard of free speech. The challenge for institutions of higher learning: How do we socialize students to become more reasonable, logical and deliberative citizens, rather than belligerent and intolerant protesters?

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