

This 40-Year-Old Statement about Evergreen College May Explain the Campus' Current Upheaval

By now most of us have heard the name of The Evergreen State College. And by now, many of us are likely sick of it as well.

The small state college was launched to national prominence early in 2017 when students protested statements made by Bret Weinstein, a liberal biology professor. Weinstein's sin occurred when he questioned the college's "Day of Absence," which demanded white students make themselves scarce on campus for a day in an effort to draw attention to the contributions of minority students.

The protests against Weinstein boiled over on to the campus, wreaking havoc for everyone—from college officials to unassuming students walking between buildings.

There has been much ink spilled over what is driving these protests, not the least of which is the heavy emphasis on the social justice mindset which is encouraged at Evergreen. But are these protests driven by something more? Are they based on a foundation which was laid several decades ago?

This thought occurred to me while reading Christopher Lasch's 1979 book, *The Culture of Narcissism*. In his chapter on education, the following footnote caught my eye largely because of its reference to Evergreen College. Lasch wrote:

*"When elders make no demands on the young, they make it almost impossible for the young to grow up. A former student of mine, **repelled by the conditions he now faces as a teacher at Evergreen State College in Washington**, writes in criticism*

of recent changes in the curriculum, in a statement to his colleagues: ***'The betrayal of youth at Evergreen starts from the assumption – shared by many teachers and administrators – that first-year students are ... only interested in wallowing in their own subjectivity and repelled by the thought of doing academic work.'*** Hoping to bolster flagging enrollments, he says, ***the faculty and administration have turned the first-year curriculum into 'a playpen of self-exploration.'***”

In the context of current trends at Evergreen, such a statement is fascinating. According to this teacher, Evergreen college made changes to the curriculum roughly 40 years ago which, at the very least, were not complimentary to the student. Instead of treating students as intelligent adults, fully capable of processing and discussing the ideas that have endured for centuries at institutions of higher learning, the faculty at Evergreen saw students as intellectual waifs.

But even while covertly shooting down the intellectual abilities of students, the Evergreen faculty was also engaged in stroking their ego, asking for their opinions and ideas and treating them as experts in subjects they knew little about.

One can only wonder if this tactic has come back to bite Evergreen. Because students are the “experts,” they are convinced they know best. But having been fed such scant amounts of mental food, students have minimal ability to argue their opinions beyond mere noise and physical force.

Unless colleges begin to once again teach students intellectual humility by introducing them to the wisdom of the ages, it seems likely that the cycle of chaos on campus will only escalate.