

“Prevent the MAGA-fication of UT”

Resentment of “liberal” academia is a form of selective indignation that is directed against professors while other professions are exempted from this sort of hostile scrutiny.

The fact is that most people who devote their lives to the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge are political liberals.

We do not insist that those who are not inclined to be doctors be force-fed into medical roles for the purpose of achieving “balance.”

The great majority of white police officers are political conservatives who have voted for Donald Trump. But calls for political “balance” within the ranks of law enforcement are nonexistent.

Trump’s assault on American universities is not rooted in anything like a philosophy of culture or education. It derives instead from the destructive instincts of a psychopath for whom orderly and civilized thinking itself is a threat to his authoritarian mindset. For what Trump is waging is nothing less than an assault on the life of the mind.

One thinks back to Trump’s feelings of academic anxiety/inferiority/inadequacy dating from his time at the Wharton School:

<https://www.phillymag.com/news/2019/09/14/donald-trump-at-wharton-university-of-pennsylvania/>

<https://www.thedp.com/article/2024/10/penn-trump-penn-mentions-distance-wharton-ivy-league-election>

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-who-often-boasts-of-his-wharton-degree-says-he-was-admitted-to-the-hardest-school-to-get-into-the-college-official-who-reviewed-his-application-recalls-it-differently/2019/07/08/0a4eb414-977a-11e9-830a-21b9b36b64ad_story.html

What is the origin of the sadistic impulse that prompts Christopher Rufo to want to inflict “existential terror” on universities until they do as he commands them to do? Where does the motivating inferiority complex come from?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/07/opinion/chris-rufo-trump-anti-dei-education.html>

It is a quixotic campaign to occupy and transform academic cultural territory the right has never occupied, even during the long period of Jim Crow segregation that preceded the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. The publication of William F. Buckley, Jr.’s *God and Man at Yale* (1952),

BOB KING

But Bob King was anything but a mindless ideologue. Twenty years after his term as dean he told me that he had been having second thoughts about certain policies he had promoted.

The vigilante phase of higher education reform began with Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' forced conversion of New College, a thriving liberal arts school, into an academy devoted to indoctrinating students with conservative orthodoxy.

A pure power-grab by historical illiterates

“SANEWASHING” PSYCHOPATHIC TRUMP

On 5 February 2025 – coinciding with Women and Girls in Sports Day – Donald Trump signed an [executive order](#) barring trans athletes from competing in women's sports. The move marked yet another [aggressive shift](#) of his legislative agenda, as he doubled down on anti-trans rhetoric, in which he has vowed to eliminate **what he calls “transgender insanity”**.

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/feb/25/ncaa-trump-trans-athlete-ban>

“I was devastated. We all knew it was coming – it wasn't necessarily a surprise – but there's a difference between anticipatory grief and present grief. It made me feel awful, knowing my identity and existence are being debated every single day, with the rhetoric only intensifying.”

Moss recalled Trump publicly attacking his boss, Mark Zaid, a Washington lawyer who represented the whistleblower who disclosed details of a call Trump made to Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in 2019 that eventually led to his first impeachment. "Donald Trump literally held up a photo of my boss, called him out by name, said he was scum, was a liar, etc," Moss said during the webinar. "Next day, I woke up to, like, 150 voicemails. Texts were flooded throughout my inbox. We were getting death threats like crazy, and there was actually at least one gentleman who went to prison for making threats against my boss."

He added: "We publicly called him out during that impeachment, when he was threatening the whistleblower in public statements, saying you are putting this person's life in jeopardy. **He made clear he doesn't care. He'll say it's not my fault if something happens to that person.**

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/27/republicans-trump-threats>

Another anonymous staffer called the laid-off workers "dedicated, hard-working civil servants who came to NOAA to help protect lives and keep our blue planet healthy".

"These indiscriminate cuts are **cruel and thoughtless**," the second worker said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/27/trump-noaa-cuts-climate>

Republicans terrified of crossing Trump due to physical threats, Democrat says

Eric Swalwell says threats to them and their families are stopping GOP officials from criticizing president

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/27/republicans-trump-threats>

“Trump is unleashing anti-trans hysteria onto the world,” The Guardian (February 28, 2025).

[Moirá Donegan](#)

In her video, Schafer stresses her own privilege: for her, the incorrect passport is not a matter of life and death. But the harm to dignity that the new document will impose on her will be repeated, intimate and needless. **It is an exercise in cruelty** that the Trump administration has declared that official documents, like passports, will no longer reflect these basic realities of trans people’s lives. It is also a brute assertion of the Trump administration’s claim to control over reality itself: a way for them to make a lie into an official truth.

The Trump administration and the broader revanchist movement are targeting trans people because they are a tiny minority that they think can be bullied and dehumanized without great political pushback. They are targeting trans people because trans life represents the principles of dignity, self-determination and gender equality that they abhor. And they are targeting trans people **because they are hateful, sadistic and cruel** – because **they want to make people suffer for the crime of being different from them**, and because they do not have the courage to pick on anyone who is more capable of fighting back.

But **the anti-trans sadism of the new Trump administration** should not only offend us because it is cruel. It should offend us because it demands that government departments, federally funded institutions, and the people who work for them participate in a lie: that trans people are not who they say they are.

Anti-trans hysteria, then, should be understood as a function of the Trump administration’s **epistemic violence**, its mission to make lies into policy and to suppress truth.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/feb/28/trump-anti-trans-hysteria>

WHY TRUMP HATES UNIVERSITIES

Donald Trump hates universities in part because he knows that large numbers of academics regard him as a demagogue and an ignoramus. Most economists, for example, see his tariff “policy” as an act of stupidity that incinerated \$6 trillion of American wealth overnight. All of this is intolerable to a pathological narcissist who seeks “retribution” for every perceived slight or insult.

Trump’s rationale for occupying and forcibly converting elite universities into bastions of MAGA ideology has been articulated by JD Vance on many occasions. At the 2021 National Conservatism convention, he told his receptive audience that “the universities in our country are fundamentally corrupt and dedicated to deceit and lies, not to the truth.” He concludes by praising the “wisdom” of Richard Nixon that prompted to declare: “The professors are the enemy.”

J.D. Vance, “The Universities Are The Enemy,” National Conservatism conference (NatCon2).

[<https://nationalconservatism.org/natcon-2-2021/presenters/jd-vance/>]

Paul Braterman, “‘The Professors Are The Enemy,’ Said JD Vance. And More Besides. Pay Attention,” 3 Quarks Daily (February 13, 2025).

<https://3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2025/02/the-professors-are-the-enemy-said-jd-vance-and-more-besides-pay-attention.html>

But there is nothing that qualifies Vance, or the “anti-woke” activist Christopher Rufo, to redesign American higher education. Vance’s conversion from GOP gadfly to Trump sycophant suggests that he is incapable of thinking outside the box of MAGA orthodoxy that distrusts academic freedom and the entire value system it stands for.

And what is the origin of the sadistic impulse that prompts Christopher Rufo to want to inflict “existential terror” on universities until they do as he commands them to do? Where does the motivating inferiority complex come from?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/07/opinion/chris-rufo-trump-anti-dei-education.html>

Vance is apparently unaware that certain professions attract specific political temperaments. People who are willing to devote their lives to the production and dissemination of knowledge tend to develop liberal attitudes regarding freedom of thought and resistance to authoritarianism. Vance's plan to restock universities with MAGA ideologues is thus both impractical and absurd, since it ignores the issue of professional temperament.

Compare the policing profession which votes as a bloc for Donald Trump. In September 2016, Police.com reported on a poll that showed Trump crushing Hillary Clinton by a margin of ten-to-one. Every police union that endorsed a presidential candidate in 2016, 2020, and 2016 endorsed Trump.

Liberals don't demand ideological purges of police departments, because they are much less autocratic than their MAGA counterparts, and they recognize the nonsensicality of such a proposal. They can't restock police ranks with an army of "liberal cops," because they don't exist. Similarly, the supply of MAGA-thinkers with Ph.D.'s who are prepared to replace tens of thousands of "liberal" professors is likely to fall far short of the task.

So where does Trump's vengeful hostility toward intellectual accomplishment come from?

There is no evidence to suggest that Trump experienced academic humiliation during his four years at Fordham University and the Wharton School at Penn. Classmates who remember him recall an indifferent student who saw his Wharton degree as a hot ticket into the top echelons of the New York real estate world. Trump recalls

his Wharton studies as “super genius stuff,” but there is nothing that confirms this typically Trumpian fantasy. Trump has long encouraged the idea that he finished “first in the class.” University records, however, show that, having earned no academic distinctions by graduation, Trump could not have even finished in the top 56 of the 366 graduates.

The catastrophic result of Trump’s hostility toward scientific accomplishment is his ongoing destruction of American medical research, medical support for many vulnerable patient populations, and our most important medical institutions (NIH, FDA, CDC). A day before Trump’s inauguration, nihilistic vandalism on this scale by a president was unthinkable. But Trump’s insatiable thirst for “retribution” against scientific and scholarly institutions that have been beyond his control means that, with this president, literally anything is possible.

This is not policy — it is savagery.

At last year’s meeting of the College of Liberal Arts promotion & tenure committee, the sheer quality of the faculty up for promotion was stunning. I had never seen anything like it during my previous service on the committee. Similarly, the academic ability of the undergraduate students I have seen in my classrooms in recent years is unprecedented in my long experience.

The Trump strategy for this hostile takeover of American universities is a form of extortion: either you take the loyalty oath or face financial starvation. Lacking the brainpower to persuade

“liberal” academics to undergo the conversion to Trumpism, Trump and his MAGA surrogates must threaten professors with that fateful choice – submission or fiscal ruin.

“Prevent the MAGA-fication of UT”

John Hoberman

During the 45 years I have served on the faculty of the University of Texas, I have seen UT achieve the status of a great university. During most of this ascension to the top ranks, Texas has been governed by political conservatives who wisely chose not to threaten the principles of academic freedom that make great universities possible. In my own case, since 1993 I have taught at least 20 semester courses on racial topics, and there has never been a hint of censorship or administration disapproval.

At last year’s meeting of the College of Liberal Arts promotion & tenure committee, the sheer quality of the faculty up for promotion was stunning. I had never seen anything like it during my previous service on the P & T committee. Similarly, the academic ability of the undergraduate students I have seen in my classrooms in recent years is unprecedented in my long experience. I seldom see a student who is unprepared to do high-quality college-level work.

In the wake of Donald Trump’s recent offer to nine universities, including UT, the University’s top-rank status and reputation are in danger of going into free fall. Having heard about Trump’s plan to buy ideological conformity with federal funding incentives, UT System Board of Regents Chairman Kevin Eltife promptly announced that university leaders would be “honored” to collaborate in the Trump-led political takeover of the University. (1) As of now, Mr. Eltife is the only leader in higher education to have embraced Trump’s coercive plan for an ideological makeover of

American universities. MIT has just refused to sign Trump's devil's bargain. (2)

The Trump strategy for this hostile takeover of American universities is a form of extortion: either you take the loyalty oath or face financial starvation. Lacking the brainpower to persuade American academics to make the conversion to Trumpism, Trump and his MAGA surrogates must resort to threatening professors with that fateful choice – submission or fiscal ruin.

In the 1980s UT's College of Liberal Arts was led by Dean Robert D. ("Bob") King, an accomplished linguist and an outspoken political conservative. I knew Bob King, and the idea of subjecting the College to an ideological takeover would have repelled him. There is a crucial difference between political conservatives with principles and MAGA ideologues who are willing to break cherished norms to get whatever they want.

Longstanding conservative resentment of "liberal" universities is rooted in the illusion that university faculties, animated by liberal values such as academic freedom, have somehow conspired to limit the numbers of conservative academics who would have created a different academic culture. And yet, according to conservatives, it was a mostly liberal professoriat that built the American academic institutions that are routinely called "the envy of the world." Conservatives should ask themselves how they would have done better. For it is now clear that enacting anything like Trump's "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education" would have been a disaster for American higher education.

Conservatives who resent the liberal "capture" of universities over the past sixty years ignore the fact that certain professions attract specific political temperaments. People who are willing to devote their lives to the production and dissemination of knowledge tend to develop liberal attitudes regarding freedom of thought and

resistance to authoritarianism. Trump's plan to put universities under the control of MAGA ideologues is thus both impractical and absurd, since it ignores the issue of professional temperament.

Compare the policing profession which votes as a bloc for Donald Trump. In September 2016, Police.com reported on a poll that showed Trump crushing Hillary Clinton by a margin of ten-to-one. (3) Every police union that endorsed a presidential candidate in 2016, 2020, and 2024 endorsed Trump. (4)

Liberals don't demand ideological purges of police departments, because they don't share the autocratic instincts of their MAGA counterparts, and they recognize the nonsensicality of such a proposal. They can't restock police ranks with an army of "liberal cops," because they don't exist. Similarly, the supply of MAGA-thinkers with Ph.D.'s who are prepared to counterbalance tens of thousands of "liberal" professors is likely to fall far short of the mark.

There is also the question of why university administrators would enter a "Compact" with a president who has already done enormous damage to American biomedical research and our premier medical institutions. Why submit to an administration that has perpetrated such wanton vandalism targeted at university-sponsored research?

It is not too late to prevent the end of academic freedom at UT. All nine of the universities Trump has targeted must make it clear to him that American higher education is not for sale.

John Hoberman has taught at the University of Texas at Austin since 1979. He is speaking here as a private citizen.

- (1) “UT-Austin considering offer to adopt Trump priorities for funding advantages,” *Texas Tribune* (October 2, 2025).**
<https://www.texastribune.org/2025/10/02/university-texas-austin-trump-administration-compact/>
- (2) “MIT Rejects Proposed Federal Compact,” *Inside Higher Education* (October 19, 2025).**
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/governance/executive-leadership/2025/10/10/mit-rejects-proposed-federal-compact>
- (3) “The 2016 POLICE Presidential Poll,” *Police* (September 2, 2016).**
<https://www.policemag.com/patrol/article/15346665/the-2016-police-presidential-poll>
- (4) “FOP Endorses Trump!” *Fraternal Order of Police* (September 6, 2024).**
<https://fop.net/2024/09/fop-endorses-trump/>