

BRUTAL MINDS



**The Dark World of
Left-Wing Brainwashing
in Our Universities**

STANLEY K. RIDGLEY, PH.D.

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Preface

Living within the Lie

*It is a world of appearances trying to pass
for reality.*

VÁCLAV HAVEL
“The Power of the Powerless”

THIS IS A STORY of one of the great subterfuges in American history. It's a tale of how one of history's great institutions—the American university—is undergoing an infiltration by an army of mediocrities whose goal is to destroy it as an institution of knowledge creation and replace it with an authoritarian organ of ideology and propaganda.

If I were to prescribe a single piece of reading to explain these lengthening ideological shadows on America's college campuses, it would *not* be George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. That book is grounded in the coercive realities of communism, but it's still fiction.

Václav Havel's essay "The Power of the Powerless," however, is a piece drawn from what is called in today's parlance "lived experience." Elegant in its articulation and its relentless truth, Havel's essay is an allegory for the authoritarianism that threatens to engulf American higher education. The work is powerful precisely *because* of its author, himself a victim of the authoritarians.

We likely think of these victims as prisoners tortured physically in captivity. While that is an atrocity, the majority of authoritarianism's victims are damaged psychologically.

To illustrate, Havel gives us the example of the owner of a fruit and vegetable shop, a greengrocer in 1970s Czechoslovakia.

The greengrocer is forced to post a sign in his shop window that bears a slogan: "Workers of the World, Unite!"

He puts the sign in his window “because everyone does it, and because that is the way it has to be,” Havel tells us. “If he were to refuse, there could be trouble . . . someone might even accuse him of disloyalty. He does it because these things must be done if one is to get along in life.”¹

This dynamic that governs the life of the greengrocer is the dynamic that governs much of our own university life. The sign in Havel’s tale reads, “Workers of the World, Unite!” but today it could be any of a half-dozen approved slogans rolled out by university public relations hacks, for example,

“Diversity is our strength!”

These exhortations serve less to motivate the faithful than to identify the *unfaithful* for special attention. While this can include recalcitrant faculty, I refer here to college students, the chief targets of a phalanx of fake educators in the university.

You recognize immediately that the vapid Orwellian slogan “Diversity is our strength!” could serve as the proxy for a communist propaganda trope. The demand that persons embrace this trope—or at least remain silent in the face of its anti-intellectualism—is a marker for an authoritarian system. One of many markers that constitutes powerful evidence of the thesis in *Brutal Minds*.

This is a brutal book about brutal people. It’s about the people who eagerly “live within the lie” and who even more eagerly coerce others to yield to that lie, particularly the most intellectually vulnerable persons on the college campuses—our undergraduates.

Given this, I determined to write a book of the sort we used to see much more often—honest books that called out the fakes in our society. The charlatans, the snake oil salesmen, the cultists, the mystics, the romantics, and the paranoiacs. We have many on the campus.

Today, this collection of folks has a constituency, a following, and insulation from criticism. Many call themselves “marginalized voices” and are declared off limits to criticism. The fact is that they are *not*

marginalized. They are lionized, they are feted, they have a canon of books and seminal thinkers, they have a zealous following, and some earn hundreds of thousands of dollars for diversity consulting.

You see this following on any university campus with a bustling student affairs office staffed with activists. You witness these believers among the faculty in various studies enclaves on campus as well as rooted in our schools of education. You can see the most obnoxious of them strutting on social media platforms, competing for the title of most hateful.

Brutal minds are distributed across the campuses as faculty and bureaucrats, and the worst of the lot go by the name of “student affairs.” It is they who carry the lion’s share of responsibility for the degradation of American higher education. They are frozen into a totalist belief system taught in schools of education and assorted sociology departments. They are distinguished only in their devotion to policies that absolve them of personal responsibility.

These brutal minds have a notion of “social justice education” that consists of applying the ideology of antiracist pedagogy and assorted other alien variants of critical theory and wishful, magical thinking. Their ideology is embedded in their policies, which provide them anonymity.

Brutal Minds exposes the pieties of the educational cultists who’ve acquired great power on America’s college campuses and access to college students, the bureaucrats who self-celebrate as they say, “I finally get a chance to use my master’s degree.”²

We aren’t quite there yet, but the university is succumbing to a clearly expressed agenda of an identifiable group of mediocrities, who embrace an antiscientific, anti-Enlightenment ideology and who impose this on undergraduate students with impunity. If folks think of the university as an aristocracy of the learned, of the best and the brightest, the reality in the bureaucracy is increasingly that of a ruling clerisy of the worst and the dullest.

“BOLDLY TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION!”

Back in 1972, the neo-Marxist Herbert Marcuse called for a “Long March through the institutions.” By this, he meant an incremental seizure of the institutions of free societies in service to an authoritarian anti-Enlightenment ideology, and this is the project of today’s brutal minds.

One off-campus professional club associated with campus administrators actually boasts with its slogan that it is boldly transforming higher education according to neo-Marxist authoritarianism. They are open about it when they believe that no one, especially parents and donors, is watching or listening.

These bureaucrats may not be intellectuals, but they also are not stupid. They outsmart the faculty in the same way the hedgehog outsmarts the fox. And increasing numbers of them have their hands on the levers of power. Their goal is to boldly transform the university into an instrument of ideological propaganda for the nation’s young people. As Havel reminds us, this is a place where people are forced to “live within the lie.”

The story is ongoing right now, and it nears its *denouement*—the final resolution.

How it ends is up to you.

Introduction

Menagerie of Authoritarians

Stop this hysterics. This is not the way for people who are socialistic communists to die.

JIM JONES

Leader of the People's Temple cult

What is remarkable about the Reverend Jim Jones is not his own self-serving behavior but the almost superhuman gullibility of his followers. Given such prodigious credulity, can anyone doubt that human minds are ripe for malignant infection?

RICHARD DAWKINS

"Viruses of the Mind"

WHEREVER BRUTAL MINDS GET the upper hand, they destroy, they dumb down, they homogenize, and, if necessary, they stamp the face of opposition with the jackboot of outright repression. They eliminate the opposition, they remove it, and they censor, block, and obliterate the record of knowledge—anything that gives the lie to the stunted intellectual parochialism that animates them.

They cancel.

These are ideologues, and they strut about American universities freely, they are paid well, and they are bent on the destruction of what they only dimly understand and certainly that which they played no role in creating.

What do brutal minds look like in action?

We have many examples from history, but no better snapshot of brutal minds at work can be found than the photos of smirking Nazi students and faculty hurling books into towering bonfires in May of 1933 in every German university city.

Those were the heady early days of the Third Reich, and they burned books, more than 25,000 of them in one night. They burned countless more in the coming months and years. And we know too well what followed, what Heinrich Heine warned us about in his oft-quoted caution from his play *Almansor*: “Where they burn books, they will also ultimately burn people.”¹

The old black-and-white photographs are faded, and some are cracked, putting an artificial distance between us and the grinning book-burners. This distance affords us the comfortable fiction that these people are somehow different from us, that *we* would never engage in the barbarism the pictures capture. That *we* would surely stand up to *them*.

The truth is that these photos capture a reality that is uncomfortably close to where we sit today.

BRUTALITY OF THE INTELLECT

Book-burning is anti-intellectualism, of course. But it's also intellectual brutality, which is much worse. Intellectual brutality is anti-intellectualism with an attitude and a purpose and a method and the dull certitude of ideology.

It's more common than many of us realize, and it is exemplified by the university's *brutal mind*.

The university would seem to be the last place for us to look for brutal minds. Yet if the barbarous book-burners teach us nothing else, it is that the university is the *first* place we should look. Brutal minds are ubiquitous in the American university today, and they tirelessly harangue, wheedle, and often abuse the next generation of American youth.

Behind a Potemkin façade, the university has been transformed dramatically from what alumni, parents, and donors imagine it to be. The public façade of higher education conflicts sharply with the reality experienced by students, witnessed by faculty, and lamented by honorable staffers who just keep their heads down and survive until the next paycheck.

The old dichotomy of liberal *versus* conservative and the notion of civil discourse between them in the university still holds the imagination of many folks. This nostalgic notion is that progressive ideas espoused by a majority of professors vie in genteel and sometimes

vociferous contention with tradition in an argument that is primarily intellectual. This is the venerable model, and this faculty-on-faculty conflict is rarely uninteresting, with elaborate and often sophisticated arguments spun. In all of this, we have been gratified that our young people could be exposed to this yeasty grappling of minds.

But this model fell into disrepair long ago.

What many of us did not understand at the dawn of the twenty-first century—neither liberals nor conservatives on the faculty, nor most persons outside the university today—was that a *third* entity had entered the university as interloper.

THE MUSCULAR BRUTE

This muscular ideological contender came on the scene with stealth at the beginning of our century, complete with a single-minded cadre. It has grown steadily in influence on campuses nationwide. Parallel to this growth, the cadre has created and staffed university positions with the explicit aim of converting the university into an ideologically lockstep total-cultural environment. It now controls much of that environment as it is experienced not only by students and staff, but by faculty as well.

These are the neo-medievalists, motivated by social fantasy and pseudoscience and aiming to transform the university in accord with their primitive ideology. Most of them are ensconced in a bureaucracy called student affairs, and their mantra of social justice is the nearest thing to a cult that you will find in the university, outside of particular studies programs and institutes.

The university is increasingly managed by this dull bureaucracy and is regressing inexorably to the status of a medieval institution with fealty to an orthodoxy of what Lionel Trilling in his book *Beyond Culture* called “firm presuppositions, received ideas, approved attitudes, and a system of rewards and punishments.” Ominous it is, but what does it mean in terms of the unsuspecting college student, who

arrives with his or her unsuspecting parents on a college campus, which looks just like a college campus ought to appear?

It means that a throng of half-educated ideologues trained in schools of education will engage in psychosocial, cognitive, and social identity development of undergraduate students, and this means your son or daughter. The student should prepare to be assaulted—intellectually, verbally, psychologically, ideologically, racially, repeatedly.

The only places relatively untouched by the infestation are the STEM fields, because they are the source of so much of the university's largesse—government research contracts.

But . . . if you thought that science was safe on the campus, that scientists could pursue the truth as their inquiries led them, that the antiscience crowd was doomed to failure, even this is an optimistic expectation. Brutal minds have set their sights on destroying even this part of the university.²

THEY'RE COMING FOR THE SCIENTISTS, TOO

In October of 2021, a brouhaha erupted over an invitation to University of Chicago geophysicist Dorian Abbot to speak at MIT on extraterrestrial life.³ The invitation was rescinded under pressure from protesters who did not like Abbot's position on diversity, equity, and inclusion, which was expressed in a *Newsweek* opinion piece coauthored by Iván Marinovic.⁴ Abbot called for consideration of merit, fairness, and equality in the piece. His detractors believed this disqualified him from speaking at MIT on his academic field, and they succeeded in coercing MIT to withdraw his invitation. Abbot ended up speaking as the guest of Princeton University professor Robert George to an online audience of thousands.

While it may seem like a victory, what it suggests is perplexing.

Why does this type of thing keep happening on the college campus? There seems to be no accumulation of knowledge or of what is ethically necessary for a university to maintain its integrity and

purpose in a politically chaotic world. One outrage leads to another and to another, sometimes on the same campus. Lessons remain unlearned.

Why does there never seem to be a turning point or a breath of relief that these travesties are finally over? The reasons are several.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE CAMPUS CULTURE WARS?

Most people who follow higher education are familiar with the university culture wars.

These culture wars, or science wars, involve the insider debates between stuffy and radical faculty. They flame bright for a time, until our attention is inevitably directed elsewhere.

University administrators and their public relations flacks assure alumni—particularly deep-pocketed donors—that all is well and that such robust academic debate reflects the healthy state of the alma mater. That’s the formula and the official message.

But a far more important war has been waged on the campuses for the past twenty years, and it’s hardly been noticed.

Occasionally, we see public recognition of the actual dynamic at work in the university, as from this description that appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*: “While colorful culture-war controversies flare and state legislators meddle, some academics and observers say that the most pronounced threat to academic freedom may be the quiet gears of the corporate university.”⁵

What constitutes those quiet gears?

Sleepy boards of trustees are feted and given PowerPoint presentations that show progress of a sort, with metrics sufficiently abstract and yet seemingly on point. Enough to get the president and his cronies through another year or so of keeping the ship afloat while fending off serious inquiries about the bureaucratic ideology that suffuses the campus with its pieties and enforcement mechanisms. The president is given a bonus, his or her staff given three cheers. More important,

yet another year passes without explanation of *who* has access to students and in *what ways* when that access and the resulting ideological asphyxiation grow ever more dominant and less reversible.

Meanwhile, campus brutal minds are busily at work transforming the university according to the dictates of an alien ideology that has as its major goal the subversion of American higher education.

Much of American academia constitutes a world populated by paranoiacs, by their duped followers, by amateur psychotherapists, by neo-Marxist totalitarians, by unqualified faculty apprentices, by ancillary support personnel with delusions of grandeur, by student affairs staffers imbued with autocratic mentality, and by thought reformers who violate federal law against human subject experimentation to attack young people in workshops, to destroy their relationships with parents and friends, and to clear the way for new relationships grounded in a hate-filled racist ideology. I happen to think of this as a dark world.

This is the unsavory cast of characters who populate today's university. They are academia's brutal minds, straight out of a Kafka fantasy, and they're on every campus.

And the students?

The vast majority of students haven't changed much at all, of course, in spite of the protestations of campus functionaries. These bureaucrats wring their hands over the changing demographics of the university, inflating their own narrow concerns into a major university-wide "problem" that is a product of their imaginations. The challenges that students face, however, *have* changed. They've changed for the worse, *much* worse.

Today's students face a gallery of rascals in the academy. These are not the oddballs we've always associated with academia, the nutty

professor, the aging radical, the mystic poet, the English professor who believes that she's a scientist.

Some of these rascals in the gallery are outright dangerous, without conscience, and armed with the zeal of a cultist. Many of them threaten the fundamental constitutional rights of students. Others threaten student health and well-being.

STONE BY STONE, BOOK BY BOOK

Today's brutal minds are dismantling the university's intellectual heritage stone by metaphorical stone, not unlike barbarous tribes who dismantled the Roman coliseum for cheap building materials to construct their ill-designed shacks as Europe descended into the period that later scholars rightly branded the Dark Ages.

They are brutal minds bound by Plato's conceit, and most of them are likely ignorant that Plato described them more than two thousand years ago in his *Republic* in the allegory of the cave. Assuming they know Plato, they would resent that Plato helped construct today's intellectual architecture that so bedevils them that they must racialize it as something they call "whiteness"—as they racialize everything—and so the brutal minds are bent on destroying Plato and a phalanx of other Greco-Roman ancients and their influence in the modern American university.⁶

No, brutal minds don't like great books at all, certainly nothing related to the Enlightenment. Great books with great ideas diminish them, just as they diminished the National Socialists in 1933. Azar Nafisi, author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, offers this perplexed question in a video at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum: "Books represent humanity at its best and its worst. . . . I mean, what can a book do? And why is it so dangerous? That it needs to be physically annihilated?" The impetus for this wholesale rage against the Enlightenment tradition is easy to recognize, but ridding the campus of its destructive influence is another thing altogether, for the brutal minds are in a race

against the clock; they rush to destroy and to remove and to coerce—they rush to *cancel and replace*—because they recognize that at some point they will be found out, and their celebration of dunderheadedness will abruptly end.

These marginalized voices are bent on destroying *as much* as they can of the Western canon *as fast* as they can by tarring everything they despise with the pejorative of white supremacy. New York's Bard College is actively doing this right now in a process of decanonizing its library with a diversity audit conducted by students to evaluate all books for “representations of race/ethnicity, gender, religion, and ability.”⁷ This is the reflexive solution for mediocrity and for envy. The culprit could just as easily be “international Jewry,” or “bourgeois thinking,” or “the kulaks,” or “*untermenschen*,” or “religious heretics,” as this is the practice of pseudoscience and witch doctors throughout history—to contrive a devil, a rhetorical scapegoat.

These marginalized voices are a type of brutal mind more prevalent than people suspect. They are so prevalent and vocal, in fact, that one wonders what it is that renders them marginalized. Bigoted brutal minds, who have perpetrated the fraud of the marginalized voice, are themselves engaged in marginalizing the builders of the Western intellectual heritage. This erasure is essential to the psychological well-being of the brutal mind; it is, in fact, a characteristic of the brutal mind-in-action.

The giant of sociology Max Weber warned of classroom activism and advocacy one hundred years ago, but he didn't anticipate the expansion of the ideological intrusion into the university's out-of-classroom environment in the form of residential life commissars who run workshops. A large contingent of professors in the humanities and the social sciences (with the exception of economics) are now

social activists—participants in what they perceive as struggles for emancipation.

They embrace the activist label, and they'll tell you how they are praxis-oriented, inspired by Marx, with a mission to change the world in accord with their philosophy. This is even truer of the nonfaculty foot soldiers of the university's rigid bureaucracy—student affairs. They constitute a growing cadre of thought reformers and zealous authoritarians.

Now imagine for a moment that you are one of them.

INCENTIVES OF CAMPUS BRUTAL MINDS

If you're a social activist participant in the struggle, and you've succeeded in recruiting an ideologically uniform department/program/institute/bureaucracy by excluding bad thinkers from the academy, why would you indulge this outdated, traditional notion of the marketplace of ideas?

Why wouldn't you just communicate to your students the received wisdom? Why not just neglect teaching the so-called other side? Why not teach only what you believe to be good and right and proper, because, well, it is. If you have a monopoly on the truth and a monopoly on the telling, why permit the ideological enemy a hearing at all?

Why not just cancel it?

There is precedent for this, of course. . . .

If you're a barbarian entering Rome, tearing down statues, gutting buildings, and destroying temples—*canceling* Roman culture—can you be trusted to convey the other side of the argument, to articulate the case for maintaining the Roman Empire? Will you create a safe space for Roman loyalists to gather and discuss the vanquished and marginalized Roman way of life? Or will you just cancel it?

If you're a Brownshirt in May of 1933 Berlin, looting libraries and burning books by Albert Einstein, Bertolt Brecht, Heinrich Heine, can you nonetheless be relied upon to protect that marketplace of ideas?

Will you permit and subsidize “courageous conversations” about the Jewish intellectual heritage in Germany? Or just cancel it?

If you’re a Red Guard in 1966 Beijing, burning ancient scrolls, humiliating and murdering professors, coercing confessions in struggle sessions, and smashing cultural artifacts, can we expect you to engage the world of ideas and philosophies in a “difficult dialogue” without your truncheon in hand?

You know the answer to these questions.

And if you know the answer, then you already know the answer to what is happening on America’s university campuses.

ANONYMOUS AUTHORITARIANS: WHO? WHAT? HOW?

Who are these brutal minds? *What* doctrines do they impose? *How* do they systematically coerce students and staff in a grand ballet of “milieu management?” *Brutal Minds* answers these urgent questions and then suggests how our universities might achieve redemption in spite of the challenge of the new barbarians.

Part I

Diktat and Domination

Thought reform is . . . a never-ending process with recurrent demands for self-examination, for criticism and self-criticism, for new confessions and fresh pledges. It carries on under different slogans at different times but the same methods of group pressure are used, and the real objective is always the complete surrender of the individual to the Party and the state.

THEODORE E. H. CHEN

Thought Reform of the Chinese Intellectuals