

THE CHRONICLE REVIEW

What Now?

Scholars respond to Trump

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Moral Persuasion

By Matthew Clair

Our country has never been taken with facts. "On the contrary," James Baldwin wrote in the 1950s, "we have a very deep-seated distrust of real intellectual effort (probably because we suspect that it will destroy, as I hope it does, that myth of America to which we cling so desperately)." So, before we grow too weary, we must first acknowledge that this blustery anti-intellectualism has always been the state of things, the undercurrent that has swept so many beneath the surface of the American dream for quite some time.

And yet, we have witnessed important moments of social progress. Often guided by scientific evidence, these moments have been rooted in moral reasoning. I want to suggest that moral persuasion and humility in the production of knowledge buttress the path forward.

Take, for example, the unanimous decision to desegregate schools in *Brown v. Board of Education*. While the Supreme Court relied on research on the psychological harms of segregation to justify its decision (which probably persuaded some), the successful desegregation of schools depended on moral persuasion. Segregation had to be understood as embodying injustice, even in the face of unclear research about its social or psychological costs. Indeed, some have questioned the scientific veracity of the psychologist Kenneth Clark's famous testimony. The historian Daniel Matlin notes, in his book *On the Corner*, that Clark's research could be interpreted as evidence that black children attending integrated schools experienced more psychological harm than their segregated peers. But for Clark and others, moral principles of equality and democracy — themselves informed by myriad forms of evidence — outweighed the ambiguity of scientific research.

We are often asked, as academics, to consider the "So what?" of our research. In the social sciences, our answer often revolves around explanatory social theory. We consider what our results tell us about *how* the social world works. But perhaps we should be answering the so-what question with greater explicit reference to, and clarity surrounding, moral principles and what is at stake ethically. We must be willing to move from *how* to *how should*. Of course, entire disciplines are devoted to such inquiry; yet, social scientists — with so much access to government and policy circles — have long been averse to explicit moral commitments. Scholars have debated the proper (and actually existing) relationship between values and facts, but this election has made at least two things clear: Our research can be imprecise, and value-neutral research alone won't save us.

The centering of moral principles in our pursuit of knowledge must also extend to our role as educators, a role that far too often is an afterthought for many academics. Research universities' disregard for teaching has probably diminished the quality of our democracy, as some social critics have warned. We must reimagine a scholarly ideal that centers on concern for both the minds of

our students and the equal worth of all. Wherever we find ourselves — in the classroom or at community gatherings — we must continually expand upon our capacity to educate. As bell hooks writes in *Teaching to Transgress*, "When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice."

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Academe's 'Frankenstein'

By Dalton Conley

Donald Trump ran against many things — Mexicans, Muslims, and marginal tax rates, to name a few — but running underneath all his proclamations was the notion that educational elites (as distinct from wealthy folks) were ruining the country. Running as the *seemingly* less-educated candidate has often been a winning strategy in U.S. presidential politics.

But of course, things are never as simple as they appear. Trump is very much a product of the culture of the academy, even as the professoriate sneers at his apparent lack of cultural capital. And by a product of academia I do not just mean that he attended an Ivy League college (the University of Pennsylvania). His political coalition and his own tactical approach to campaigning represent the fruition of at least three distinct intellectual movements that have been fostered on campuses over the past few decades: identity politics, the social-constructivist critique of science, and the computer-science revolution.

Back in the 1960s, student protests led to the establishment of ethnic-studies departments. There was retrenchment due to budgetary pressures in the 1970s and 1980s, but in the 1990s "identity" departments exploded in number. In the early 2000s, some people on campus were calling for "white studies." Some liberal academics argued for curricula on whiteness organized around recognizing and deconstructing white privilege.

But what would later become the alt-right argued for a different sort of white studies on campus — one that celebrated European-based, predominantly Anglo-Saxon culture. Its champions included David Duke. The looming notion of whites becoming a nonmajority added fuel to these claims.

Back then, I and others argued that the rise of "whiteness" knowledge claims was the logical, if ironic, extension of the organization of the academy around tribal canons. Better, some of us thought, to make the history, literature, philosophy, and sociology departments more inclusive than to organize knowledge based on ascriptive categories not in keeping with the universalism of Enlightenment ideals. This election marks the coming of age of that whiteness movement.

A second academic tradition that gives rise to Trumpism is the deconstruction of knowledge claims that characterized some strands of science studies and other postmodern thinking. Critical theory in the 1990s taught us that "facts" are political and subjective. And while we owe a huge debt to the humanities of the 1990s for cultural shifts like the crumbling of the arbitrary gender binary, we should not be surprised that today a presidential candidate gets to make up his own facts. After all, Bruno Latour taught us that there is no way that Pharaoh Ramses II died of tuberculosis since the disease was not "invented" until the 19th century.

And while Latour has since publicly backed off the claim that all scientific knowledge is socially constructed, subjective, and inflected with power relations, the seed had been planted in the culture writ large. Respect for scientific authority had already been declining steadily since the days of the infamous Milgram experiments thanks to circumstances outside the academy, such as rising individualism and a newly politicized strand of fundamentalist Christianity in the United States, but the full-scale hybridization of politics and science was ultimately a product of critical theory itself.

And, of course, we cannot let academic scientists themselves off the hook. Trump's anomalous campaign strategy that neglected both the proverbial air war (advertising) and the ground game (get-out-the-vote operations) succeeded thanks to social-media technology that was incubated in the bosom of university computer-science departments across the world. He is our first Twitter president. And that phenomenon flows back through a Harvard dorm (Facebook) through Stanford (the Google PageRank algorithm)



Kelvin Ma for The Chronicle

all the way to the early days of the Arpanet and Defense Department-sponsored academic research.

The lesson here is an old one that goes at least as far back as Shelley's *Frankenstein*: There are many unintended consequences to knowledge production. Thus, academics should think twice before declaring that Trumpism is only a product of anti-intellectualism. Our present state of politics is also the result of entrepreneurial, alchemic fusing of distinctly academic raw materials.

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Reveals About Our History, Ourselves, and the Future (Princeton U. Press).

Changing Minds

By Jonathan Freedman

I believed the numbers. Seventy-five straight polls had shown Clinton with a lead in Michigan, but she narrowly lost the state. Facts failed. Or turned out to be illusory: Cliff Zukin tells us that only 8 percent of voters answer pollsters, which is why large-scale national polls may prove accurate — Hillary will win that vote by 3 percent as predicted — but state polls are probably less so. It was the latter that mis-predicted the election. Modern numerology turns out, like older varieties, to be built on quicksand.

What didn't fail was something deeper than numbers, something that Jewish-Americans of my father's generation had told me: Hate trumps love; fear beats hope. They weren't just talking about Nazi Germany. Facing the Bund and the America Firsters before the war, McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee after, they encountered a mean-minded streak in this country, too, engaged with people willfully ignorant and sullen when confronted with facts, tolerance, or cosmopolitan perspectives. Our Founders may have been of the Enlightenment, but before them, this country was settled by fanatics inspired to found a city on a hill because they hated the dungheap the rest of humanity lived in — the place of imperfection and compromise we today live in, too. Their progeny remain, ready to niggle and judge.

President Trump

The 2016 election is over, and the reckoning has now begun. Donald J. Trump's ascent to the presidency will go down as one of the greatest political upsets in history. How did he do it? How did so many scholars and political professionals underrate his prospects so badly? And what does his presidency mean for America's future? *The Chronicle Review* has assembled a collection of essays on the president-elect from our pages in an attempt to make sense of this historic election.

- What Trump's Win Compels Scholars to Do ✓ PREMIUM
- How Political Science Gets Politics Wrong ✓ PREMIUM
- Truth After Trump

I know this hatred. I grew up in Iowa City, Iowa, an awkward geek in a school full of crew-cut vulgarians. My school was lily-white. Pat Toomey, who lived across the street, was the only Catholic kid I knew. I was one of a handful of Jews. I remember the matter-of-factness of my classmates' hatred. I remember them teasing me, ("Freak-man" was the standard line), humiliating me, very occasionally beating me up, just to show that they could. But worse: I remember watching them torment a classmate afflicted with cerebral palsy who could barely speak, forming a circle around her, chanting and yowling. I am haunted still by the inarticulate

noises she made as she tried to break through. She was Jewish, too. And, God forgive me, terrified as I was of them, I did nothing to help her.

So we must continue to do what we do, for what else can we do? Let's keep teaching facts and numbers and what they mean, even if facts and numbers failed, in the recent election and its hideous aftermath of swastika flaunting and immigrant bashing, to move enough of our fellow citizens to reject fear and condemn hate. Perhaps when global warming makes them sweat in February and they watch Medicare evaporate, the facts will be harder to ignore.

But facts are not enough. I did not understand my hometown until at age 12 I read Sherwood Anderson, who wrote about the cruelties of Middle America with a vividness that made me cry with recognition. We must teach that too — teach our past, teach our literature, but more importantly teach ways of knowing that surpass cognition. All of us — despairing humanists as well as social and hard scientists — need to affirm that the humanities can offer powerful ways of knowing and perhaps even healing the world — as reading *Winesburg, Ohio* did for this scared Iowa kid more than a half-century ago.

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What 'Public' Means

By Robert Greene II

Donald Trump's victory should be an occasion for academics — especially humanists — to think about both the necessity and the limits of public scholarship. Getting our work out there, being part of serious debates about the future of the nation, and making clear arguments for a mass audience should all be on the agenda.

There are already models out there for scholars to follow. Many of them happen to come from the African-American intellectual tradition.

Consider that it formed as part of a larger African-American resistance to white supremacy. African-American scholars could never divorce themselves from this struggle even if they wanted to — which, often, they did not. John Hope Franklin, among others, wrote about the need for African-American scholars both to produce first-rate scholarship and to remain tied to larger struggles for civil and human rights. In the "The Dilemma of the American Negro Scholar," published in 1963, Franklin points out the tension between public engagement and scholarly detachment. But Franklin did not limit his argument to just black intellectuals. He wrote, "whether he wanted to or not, the American scholar has been drawn irresistibly into the mainstream of American life," and we would do well to remember Franklin's admonition.

In short, scholars have little choice but to be engaged with the public. This would have been the case even with a Hillary Clinton victory. The problems of climate change, the protests of Black Lives Matter, and countless other domestic and foreign policy issues mean that any person entering the White House would face a bevy of challenges. We should not forget the lessons offered by scholars, intellectuals, and activists such as Franklin, W.E.B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, or Pauli Murray. And we should not forget that there are plenty of people outside the academy who can be thought of as scholar-activists. The African-American intellectual tradition provides examples of this, such as John Henrik Clarke, whose intellect could not be doubted by people surprised he never even held a college degree.

In the modern world of blogs, Twitter, and Facebook, we should work with people both inside and outside the academy who have something to offer public discourse. The task of public engagement cannot begin and end with scholars.

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A Social Problem

By Nell Irvin Painter

Trump's election is a crisis for scholarship, but the crisis did not arrive suddenly. This election comes on top of a chronic problem in American public life that can be summed up as anti-intellectualism. Donald Trump's grade-school vocabulary, his campaign's superficiality, its disbelief in science, and its utter disinterest in policy: All these indicate distrust of education.

Within this cultural defect is another fundamental problem: the fact of Republicans in total charge, on the state as well as federal levels, given their disinclination to support education that isn't profit oriented. Profit-making is just one of the flaws. Hostility to multiculturalism in an era when increasing numbers of students are not white or Christian is another that is just as grave.

Colleges have actively embraced multiculturalism along with liberalism. You're more likely to have read liberal and nonwhite authors in college than in high school, a difference that plays out politically. Maps of the election trace higher education's inclination toward multiculturalism. Even in deep-red states, college towns stood out as blue. It's no accident that Trump's core is white people who haven't gone to college, and that the rise of Trumpism is sometimes (erroneously) ascribed to the supposed denigration by "coastal elites" of ordinary white people in the hinterland. (Note that the "coastal elites" at fault are always assumed to be Democrats, not Republicans.)

What should we who are associated with higher education do? I offer no quick fixes, for our predicament, though political, is fundamentally social: a politically naïve population with little understanding of government and its relation to education and society. To address this naïveté, I have two suggestions.

First, reorient higher education away from a reward system that solely idealizes original research and scholarly publication. Some of us need to engage in original research and publish our scholarship. But there also need to be rewards — promotion, tenure — for dedicated teachers. We should not load teaching on to the backs of poorly paid adjuncts without job security.

Second, professors need to enter politics, starting on the local level, as some have already done. Conservative professors (with various levels of support for education) have entered politics with notable success. They need competition from professors who value higher education.

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Shattering Groupthink

By Mark Bauerlein

If they are serious and brave, our more intellectual academics must be naturally attracted to Donald Trump. He has done exactly what intellectuals are supposed to do. Our society, including higher education, has hardened into codes of propriety that used to promote mutual respect but now serve to punish dissenters. They are stifling and illiberal.

Donald Trump found the pressure points and pushed hard. He expounded what many people believed but wouldn't say because they feared reprisal. He broke taboos and took the blame, but forged ahead "ready to stand alone, curious, eager, skeptical," as Irving Howe described the intellectual in "This Age of Conformity."

Trump's idiom was sometimes crude and simple, but it opened prospects that liberalism thought it had closed, such as a wall along the southern border. The image was blunt, but it posed a deep question of how a nation defines itself. More importantly, it spoke to a deep longing among patriotic citizens for a secure patrimony. Globalization and multiculturalism had taught them to choke down that natural sense of home and "America first." The universities, too, made them feel guilty for their patriotism.

The principled academic doesn't like those proscriptions. The true intellectual relishes the freedom to say such things and let the evidence and arguments fall out accordingly. The mandarins who reviled Trump aim to end the discussion. Their solemn citations of tolerance and inclusiveness are anti-intellectual, not to mention wholly ironic. It is not coincidental that today's universities, where multiculturalism has the strongest influence as official doctrine, are governed less by professors and more by bureaucrats answering economic and therapeutic imperatives.

This is to say that President Trump and his political incorrectness, his Twitter sallies and rambling speeches, his general disrepute among the educators will all improve the discursive health of higher education. Trump's Department of Education will issue a set of "Dear Colleague" letters that cancel the letters sent out by the Obama administration. Those new directives will draw back the threats implicit in the Obama approach that have produced the hypersensitive climate that currently obtains and has led to more diversity and antidiscrimination hires, more time spent on federal reporting and investigations, and bad disciplinary procedures. College leaders will (silently) thank President Trump for saving them lots of money and labor.

More important, however, will be the example President Trump sets. Everybody from Bill Maher to Bill O'Reilly laughs at and sighs over the safe-space delicacy of undergraduates at selective colleges. Students need to develop thicker skins and more resilience. Our college leaders won't help, though. As the election results came in, the head of Amherst College wrote to the professors that students were suffering "understandable feelings of anxiety and stress," and she wanted to clarify that "they will not be prepared to function well in tomorrow's classes."

This is the favored procedure: Empathize and ease the workload (Amherst profs were given the option of canceling classes and extending deadlines). Trump's brusque manner and "greatness" goals expose that approach as but a managerial game that keeps the customers happy and the money flowing.

Higher education should be a raucous, capacious marketplace of opinion. Right now, it is an uptight, querulous schoolyard. With four years of Mr. Trump in the White House, it might grow up.

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Burn With Pride

By Amy Kittelstrom

The moment I became seriously concerned about this election came a few weeks ago at the YMCA, when a Trump ad aired while I was exercising. The ad showed a series of statements made by Hillary Clinton, from the "superpredator" slur to the "deplorables" gaffe, ending with the damning tagline: "ELITIST ARROGANCE." The complaint was all he really had, and that was all it took.

Trump's triumph may not be the fault of academics, but it is our problem. The anger of his less-educated supporters is directed at us, too, not only at "career politicians," immigrants, and inner-city black Americans who dare to claim that their lives matter. He has plenty of educated supporters as well — more white college graduates voted for Trump than Clinton — including the longtime enemy of higher education Peter Thiel, who became a billionaire after taking his bachelor's and law degrees from Stanford. Why does Thiel not credit his education with any value? Why do his fellow Trumpites disdain studiousness, evidence-driven argumentation, standards of reason, and truth itself? And what can we do about it?

Over a century ago, the Harvard philosopher William James addressed a Radcliffe audience on "the social value of the college-bred," a tiny percentage of the American population at the time. "Democracy is on its trial," James warned, liable to prefer inferior policies and candidates to better ones, so he wanted the educated elite to stand for "critical sense and judgment" in the service of "truth and justice," spreading these values in an American culture that was vulnerable to baser motives, especially self-interest. "Vulgarity enthroned and institutionalized," James worried, "elbowing everything superior from the highway" would become America's future unless intellectuals conquered "stupid prejudice and passion" with humanism by teaching historical perspective in every discipline.

College graduates should, in James's pre-19th Amendment language, "know a good man when we see him" and help others recognize quality as well.

Vulgarity won the election of 2016. Colleges and universities now process over a third of Americans on their way to adulthood, but educators have not taught the public "the admiration of what is really admirable" and the "disgust for cheapjacks" James recommended. The decline in the social value of higher education over the 20th century — perpetrated by a combination of consumer culture, Republican strategists, and compliant academicians who allowed the B.A. to become a vocational degree — favors entertainment over knowledge, prejudice over reason, and blame over understanding.

But because democracy is not entirely dead yet, we academics still have a chance to become the cultural force James urged. We must sell Americans on the intellectual values that drive research in whatever field: openness to new evidence, sober analysis, deliberative dialogue, the inclusion of diverse perspectives, constructive criticism, objectivity, and secularism — which signifies not anti-religion but only the old, unrealized democratic commitment to a public sphere in which no doctrinal positions are privileged. People who claim to know the mind of God are unfit for civil discourse.

Elitist arrogance? Try intellectual pride. Let us burn with it, and spread it, far beyond the liberal enclaves in which too many of us live. Unthinking Americans have enthroned the king of vulgarity, and only thinking Americans can wrest the scepter from his greedy grasp.

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