

The Breakdown of Higher Education and Rules for Radicals

15 December 2023

Thoughts on two pertinent books:

- 1) Title: “The Breakdown of Higher Education” (can be found on <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1641770880/>)
Subtitle: “How it Happened, the Damage It Does, and What Can Be Done.”
Author: John M. Ellis
Publisher: Encounter Books 2020
ISBN: 978-1-64177-214-3
- 2) Title: “Rules for Radicals” (can be found on <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0679721134/>)
Subtitle: “A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals”
Author: Saul D. Alinsky
Publisher: Vintage Books 1989 – first published 1971
ISBN: 0-679-72113-4

That colleges and universities are decidedly left leaning and dominated by political activists can no longer be in doubt. Reading Ellis’s book and rereading Alinsky’s book brought deeper understanding of the problems and prompted some questions and possible actions which might help provide answers.

Ellis’s bona fides are impeccable. He has over 50 years in the academy. He explains how the 1960s set us up for the current situation: Vietnam eroded our trust in institutions; Baby Boomers came of college age; the Civil Rights movement ushered in identity politics; leftist/Marxist organizations like SDS that couldn’t win at the

ballot box concluded they needed to wrest control of the academy to indoctrinate minds; new courses like gender studies and African-American studies led to an influx of the new activist “professors” who came to replace true academicians over the years.

Ellis then articulates the damages: graduates who don’t know how to think; a citizenry without the accumulated wisdom of “The Western Canon”; graduates taught only the short comings of our country; gravitas replaced by silly, faddish ideas. The end result – campuses now are “the origin and stronghold of ideas based on contextual ignorance.”

His remedies are more tailored to public systems like the University of California, but one can analogize to private universities. Money is the big lever. Using university funds for political goals is tantamount to fraud and embezzlement. He advocates putting departments into “receivership”, thereby obviating tenure problems, and appointing new chairs to hire true academicians. Parents could be another key. In fact, enrollment of students has been dropping.

Alinsky’s book, first published in 1971, is now a Bible for leftists and activists. His ties to Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama cement his bona fides.

He reviews the curriculum and the tactics he used to educate organizers, radicals, and “agitators”, and lists his “13 rules for radicals” with examples from his personal experiences.

Ellis’s book is a clear call for action. It is well documented and flawlessly argued. It should be read by every parent, citizen, and alumnus. It should be given to Boards of Trustees, Regents, and big donors in the hope it will be read.

Alinsky's book helps us to understand the mind and the tactics of the radical left. These tactics could also be used to help alleviate the current problems on campuses and effect change.

Questions arise in the mind after reading the two in succession:

- Does diversity of opinion matter?
- How can the money lever be pulled to effect change?
- Can a monoculture be truly edifying?
- How can the plight be converted into a useful problem?
- How can "people power" be accessed?
- Can towns and city councils be converted into allies?
- What is the ESG score of university investments?
- Can diversity of faculty opinions be requested and assessed?
- How can you make the members of the academy live up to their own professed standards?
- How do you inform high school college admissions advisors and parents of prospective students about the lack of diverse opinions?
- Is Mr. Dudley "channeling" Trump by building a wall to conceal the recumbent statue of General Lee?
- Have ancestors of faculty/administration ever owned slaves? If so, should they resign?
- Does the university adhere to the Chicago principles, in fact?
- How can letters to the editor be used to educate the public?
- Can recent graduates be counted on to perpetuate a liberal democracy, in the truest sense of the word "liberal"?

If you read these books, you might have some more questions and ideas.

Walter Beverly, Washington and Lee University 1971

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