

The Counterrevolutionary Campus: Herbert Marcuse and the Suppression of Student Protest Movements

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ABSTRACT

With the recent surge of college protests against various forms of economic, political, social, and racial injustice, there have been persistent and pernicious reactions from other students, administrators and public figures that function to undermine the emancipatory impulses animating these demonstrations. The reactions are often justified under the banners of tolerance, chastising students to listen instead of protest. This article, focusing on Marcuse's concepts of repressive toleration and counterrevolution, evaluates the reactionary responses to these events, as well as the critical potential of this fledgling student sensibility, a burgeoning refusal represented by protest events at American universities. We maintain that many of the calls for tolerance are actually demands for silence and belong to a wider counterrevolutionary phase of late capitalism observed by Marcuse. Bedrock liberties are dialectically inverted whereby speech and toleration are repressively deployed against demands for justice. This article concludes by arguing that it is crucial to the success of this resurgent sensibility for justice—and progress toward a radical socialist movement that coincides with the emancipatory vision of Herbert Marcuse—that the counterrevolutionary character of the responses are demystified.

The Drowning of Dissent (Dialectics of Tolerance)

In May 2014, Condoleezza Rice, National Security Advisor and Secretary of State during the administration of President George W. Bush, withdrew from her invited role as commencement speaker at Rutgers University. Recalling her role as an architect of the Iraq War and its hideous carnage, student protestors began a preemptive campaign to pressure university administrators into rescinding the invitation. Rice eventually withdrew from participating in the university commencement. The media backlash against the students of Rutgers was swift. Right-wing commentators decried the intolerance of students who purportedly refused to listen to views that might challenge their own. Ross Douthat compared the Rutgers protest against Rice to North Korean uses of cyberwarfare for censorship.¹ David Webb described

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The research was conducted dually at Florida International University (Miami, FL) and Capital University (Columbus, OH).

¹Ross Douthat, "North Korea and the Speech Police," *The New York Times*, December 20, 2014, available online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/21/opinion/sunday/ross-douthat-north-korea-and-the-speech-police.html>.



the conjoined efforts of students and faculty as “intolerant,” using “a dangerous method,” and suggested that parents of the students “should be dismayed.”² If, however, one expected to find a more sympathetic perspective emanating from the so-called “progressive” wing of the American political spectrum, disappointment would likely follow. Writing in his column in *The New York Times*, Timothy Egan dismissed the student protestors as “bigots” and “forces of intolerance.”³ Nicholas Kristoff, another columnist at *The Times*, categorized the Rutgers protestors as part of a larger group of “sanctimonious bullies.”⁴ Even President Barack Obama concurred, using the occasion of his own commencement address at Rutgers to suggest protesters were reluctant to hear opposing views because they are “too fragile and somebody might offend your sensibilities.”⁵

The unifying feature in these reactions to the protests at Rutgers, the University of Missouri, Yale, Amherst College, and elsewhere, is that students display an attitude that is intolerant of free expression; in effect, they supposedly refuse to listen to other perspectives and drown out all dissent. This criticism, which we believe is an unfounded over-generalization, appears especially intense when directed at the campus-related activities of the racial justice organization, #BlackLivesMatter. Somehow, by asserting the critical fact that in American society (if not globally), black lives are legally, politically, economically, and culturally valued less than whiter lives, these campus activists are accused of asserting that black lives should matter *more* than other lives. Put differently, by criticizing the manifest trends in racialized policing and in the criminal (in)justice system, the student arm of BLM is portrayed as saying that all police officers are individually racist and are unworthy of life.⁶

There has been no explicit proposal for legally limiting free speech. Indeed, our point is just the opposite: it is exactly in those calls for the enlargement of free speech, for more tolerant leftist students, that a tactic of repression is unfolding. In the guise, therefore, of “free speech” and “toleration,” students on the left are called toward silence and acquiescence. It is this demand, which equates tolerance with passively listening to what is already recognized as harmful, that threatens to drown *dissent* against the Establishment, the constellation of corporate, military and state powers that administer and profit from late capitalism. The principle of toleration has become an instrument of reactionary forces in suppressing the radical Left. Dialectically understood, the banner of tolerance is being used as a means to neutralize the student opposition against an unjust and exploitative system; tolerance is ironically inverted into an instrument of oppression. This is the condition that Herbert Marcuse forewarned in one of his more controversial essays, “Repressive Tolerance.”

Writing in 1965, Marcuse examined the dialectical repercussions of an essentially unabridged, unrestricted toleration—a condition in which the demand for tolerance was all but

²David Webb, “Rutgers University Intolerance Symptom of Societal Dismay,” *Breitbart News Network*, May 7, 2014, available online at: <http://www.breitbart.com/blog/2014/05/07/rutgersuniversityintolerancesymptomofsocietaldismay/>.

³Timothy Egan, “The Commencement Bigots,” *The New York Times*, May 15, 2014, available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/16/opinion/egan-the-commencement-bigots.html?_r=0.

⁴Nicholas Kristoff, “Mizzou, Yale and Free Speech,” *The New York Times*, November 11, 2015.

⁵Maxwell Tani, “Obama Chides Rutgers Students for Pressuring Condoleezza Rice to Back out of Commencement Speech,” *Business Insider*, May 15, 2016, available online at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/obama-rutgers-condoleezza-rice-commencement-speech-2016-5>.

⁶These reactions are represented by the counter-memes #AllLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter, respectively. Erin Logan, “Mike Huckabee Unwittingly Proves That Proponents of All Lives Matter Are Racist,” *Huffington Post*, October 15, 2015, available online at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/erin-logan/mike-huckabee-unwittingly_b_8298502.html (accessed April 3, 2016); Yamiche Alcindor, “‘Blue Lives Matter’ Billboards Pop Up across USA, Stir Controversy,” *USA Today*, October 10, 2015, available online at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/10/10/blue-lives-matter-billboards-spark-controversy/73728520/>. See also: available online at: <http://bluelivesmatterny.org/>.



boundless. Marcuse held that advanced industrial nations in the West proceeded under the false premise that a free society could only be realized if it permitted nearly absolute toleration. The exercise of free speech, for example, to protest the war in Vietnam was apparently only guaranteed if it also allowed the National Socialist Party of America to March in the predominantly Jewish city of Skokie, Illinois. In that regard, toleration was extended so far as to permit what any reasonable person could recognize as being necessarily harmful. Thus, the apparently slavish liberal insistence on absolute toleration had been extended so far as to become an instrument of repression. As Marcuse writes:

The toleration for the systematic moronization of children and adults alike by publicity and propaganda, the release of destructiveness in aggressive driving, the recruitment for and training of special forces, the impotent and benevolent tolerance toward outright deception in merchandising, waste, and planned obsolescence are not distortions and aberrations, they are the essence of a system which fosters tolerance as a means for perpetuating the struggle for existence and suppressing the alternatives.⁷

Under the banner that nearly everything must be permissible, all manner of destructive behaviors find adequate space to flourish. For Marcuse, capitalism is predicated on the repression of *Eros*, and the largely free reign of the death instinct.⁸ That which is tolerated, more often than not, is violent and bellicose. At the point where it becomes its own end, rather than an instrument for the achievement of a rational, humane, and pacific civilization, tolerance—like any other tool—accommodates decidedly deleterious forms. For Marcuse, tolerance taken to its extreme, tolerance as its own objective, becomes dialectically inverted. It becomes repressive. Rather than an instrument for freedom, it lapses under the weight of bellicosity in advanced industrial society, emerging as an absurdity that results in a totalitarian scene. As Marcuse maintained, “Tolerance is extended to policies and conditions, and modes of behavior which should not be tolerated because they are impeding, if not destroying, the chances of creating an existence without fear and misery.”⁹

Marcuse’s essay represents a criticism of tolerance as an end unto itself, especially under the violent and exploitative conditions of capitalism. Since their views are frequently predicated on aggression, sexual repression, and discrimination, conservative and reactionary elements have distorted his critique as a categorical attack on free speech. Accordingly, Bauer portrays Marcuse as making a “case for repression—of thought, conscience, speech, and science.”¹⁰ However, in his essay, Marcuse wrote that a liberating tolerance:

[W]ould include the withdrawal of toleration of speech and assembly from groups and movements which promote aggressive policies, armament, chauvinism, discrimination on the grounds of race and religion, or which oppose the extension of public services, social security, medical care, etc. Moreover, the restoration of freedom of thought may necessitate new and rigid restrictions on teachings and practices in the educational institutions which, by their very methods and concepts, serve to enclose the mind within the established universe of discourse and behavior — thereby precluding a priori a rational evaluation of the alternatives. And to the degree to which freedom of thought involves the struggle against inhumanity, restoration of such freedom would also imply intolerance toward scientific research in the interest of deadly “deterrents,” of abnormal human endurance under inhuman conditions, etc.¹¹

⁷Herbert Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, and Herbert Marcuse (eds), *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 83.

⁸Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 86.

⁹Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 82.

¹⁰Fred Bauer, “The Left and ‘Discriminating Tolerance,’” *The National Review*, June 22, 2015, available online at: <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/420094/left-and-discriminating-tolerance-fred-bauer>.

¹¹Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 100.



Thus, his “repression of thought, conscience [and] speech,” as Bauer describes it, pertains to those thoughts and words that promote destruction, bigotry, racism and deprivation. Any science repressed is that which is geared toward developing technologies of war, environmental catastrophe and human exploitation. Most absurd, however, is the suggestion that Marcuse favored institutional power to enact a program of censorship against right-wing and establishment views.¹² As example of this distorted view, Phillips writes, “The modern university with its vigilant policing of ideas and its politically driven censorship policies, was given its intellectual legitimization by Marcuse.”¹³ This is particularly remarkable, given Marcuse’s explicit insistence that “at present, no power, no authority, no government exists which would translate liberating tolerance into practice.”¹⁴ Indeed, the withdrawal of toleration for bellicose, bigoted and destructive speech that Marcuse advises has nothing to do with official, governmental, or institutional censorship. He never makes any demand for the exercise of state power, and in all of his works remains deeply suspicious of what he labeled “the Establishment,” the complex of government, corporate, military, and institutional powers that preside over late capitalism. Rather, the withdrawal of toleration for violence belongs to an organic, democratic movement of conscientious individuals, a rejection of prevailing values called “the Great Refusal.” Citizens of conscience, not the state, which in the Marxist view only serves to manage the interest of the ruling class, will refuse to listen, will actively protest, the speeches of warmongers.¹⁵ The tactics employed by “oppressed and overpowered minorities” will constitute “extralegal means.”¹⁶ Students, not administrators, will refuse to passively accept Establishment views, views that promote war after war, and a perpetual condition of exploitation.

This leftist refusal is exactly what has once again come under assault by the Establishment, whose agents are using the premise of toleration to silence dissent on college campuses. Thus, we argue that repressive toleration not only persists, but now counts among the arsenal of the Establishment as an instrument of what Marcuse observed as *counterrevolution* in advanced industrial society. That is, under the demand that they should be more “open-minded,” leftist students are being instructed to listen passively, and voice no opposition to that which is intolerable. In the following section, we document the right-wing reactions to student protests of racism and injustice on college campuses. We then turn to outline the relationship between the repressive toleration thesis and its incorporation into the ongoing counterrevolution of late capitalism.

#BlackLivesMatter and the New Student Protest Movements: Refusing to Tolerate Intolerance

While this paper explores the enduring relevance of Marcuse’s concept of repressive toleration and its connection to counterrevolution in the twenty-first century, our aim is to

¹²Lichtman appears to imply that “Repressive Tolerance” represented a lurch toward authoritarianism in Marcuse’s thought. However, Marcuse’s insistence on the application of “extralegal means,” on defensive violence, and his persistent condemnation of the capitalist state strongly suggest otherwise. Richard Lichtman, “Repressive Tolerance,” in Robert Pippin, Andrew Feenberg, and Charles P. Webel (eds), *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia* (South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1988), p. 190.

¹³Robin Phillips, “The Illusionist: How Herbert Marcuse Convinced a Generation that Censorship is Tolerance and Other Politically Correct Tricks,” *Salvo* 20 (2012), available online at: <http://www.salvomag.com/new/articles/salvo20/herbert-marcuse-censorship-is-tolerance.php>.

¹⁴Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 81.

¹⁵Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, in A. J. P. Taylor (ed), *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 82.

¹⁶Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 116. Here, Marcuse (*Ibid.*, 117) leaves open the possibility that these extralegal means may well include defensive violence on the basis of a natural right of resistance.

examine one set of cases specifically to make our broader point: tolerance has been inverted to serve the interests of the powerful Establishment in silencing the active dissent of the Left. We ask readers to keep in mind that these examples, both the ones detailed in this section and mentioned elsewhere, are interconnected—that is, part of a broader counter-revolutionary situation. As we are writing, Republican presidential candidate and billionaire Donald Trump, along with “liberal” pundits like Bob Beckel and Van Jones, are complaining on CNN about the disruption of one of Trump’s infamous rallies by protesters in Chicago as a violation of Trump’s right to speech by intolerant political opponents.¹⁷ These protests and the responses to them are neither isolated occurrences nor are they exceptional. These protests and the movements they are connected to (whether to #BlackLivesMatter, MoveOn.org, or the Bernie Sanders campaign) likely have their roots in Occupy Wall Street, but have been carried through to the protests in Ferguson, Missouri and the string of student demonstrations on a number of college campuses over the past couple of years, each with related demands—and importantly for our argument, have elicited similar reactionary responses. It is to the broad leftist student demonstrations, especially the intersectional anti-racist organization #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) that we now focus our analysis. Because of its prominence in American public discourse, and position at the forefront of leftist political activism, BLM has drawn our attention. It has become the object of conservative scorn, and, as we discuss, demands for silence disguised as calls for greater tolerance.

The foundations of BLM cannot be isolated to a single event. It is a movement and now an organization that finds its roots in a diverse milieu of social justice organizations. Its founders, three black women of different sexual identities (a fact that seems to have inspired the intersectionality of BLM), participated in Occupy Wall Street, which for the first time in a long time (at least in the US) legitimized organized and sustained radical protest.¹⁸ Though the momentum of Occupy has certainly dissipated, the recent successes of Left organizations, parties and candidates both domestically and internationally speak to the endurance of the cause of resistance to oppressive forces, specifically of neoliberal capitalist austerity, but also racism and other important forms of oppression. Through the outrage that emerged from the murders of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray and many others, BLM emerged as an organizational representative of people around this country saying enough is enough.

A new generation of young people were learning the value and difficulties of peaceful protesting, both by seeing it on TV and by being involved themselves. In each case, the corporate media described the protesters pejoratively as thugs and rioters, even before any rioting took place. They were agitators. They were lazy people with no respect for the rule of law. They hated the police and wanted to do violence to them in some kind of childish fit after not getting what they wanted. It wasn’t just #AllLivesMatter, which for all its racial ignorance and deployment by actual racists, at least meant to include non-whites, but also #BlueLivesMatter. As if almost intentionally missing the point of #BlackLivesMatter, these counterrevolutionary denigrations of resistance to decades and indeed centuries of racial oppression insinuate that poor black communities needed a greater respect and tolerance for white people and the police. Bound up in the tortured and misleading accusations of political correctness, those calling for tolerance on the part of young black protesters

¹⁷This is despite the fact that Trump voluntarily canceled the event and has displayed violent rhetoric toward peaceful protesters in the recent past in addition to calling on his supporters to respond with physical violence, which they have obliged on a number of occasions.

¹⁸Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket, 2016), pp. 166–167.



overlooked, preemptively, the possibility that these people, that all people in this country and around the world who care about justice, have legitimate grievances (to say the least), and that those grievances cannot be solved by calls for *more* tolerance, and in fact that it is precisely the tolerance of racism and state violence that has gotten us to this point.

BLM has since extended itself into a series of campus-based student initiatives, which were—as far as the evidence suggests—organically spawned and not the result of outside “professional organizers,” which as we will address in the final section of this article, probably hurt the students’ attempts at effective organizing. While they were certainly very new to organizing protests, the fact that the student protests were so often effective at achieving at least their immediate aims (the long-term consequences remain to be seen), speaks to the courage, intelligence, and motivation these young people possess. Let’s turn to a few of the more well-known examples: the University of Missouri, Yale University, and the University of Illinois, Chicago.¹⁹

At the University of Missouri, we saw for the first time since Occupy, students coming together on a campus in connection with a broader political movement, in this case BLM. What is interesting is that the protests at the University of Missouri did not begin with racial issues, but rather with austerity and sexism. First, graduate students had their health insurance cut. Then the university cut ties with Planned Parenthood. Both sparked protests, and then, along with a series of racially charged incidents with practically no response from university administrators, three “Racism Lives Here” protests were convened in September, October, and November of 2015. In addition to calling for a stronger response from the university when it comes to racial bias incidents, they also called for an expansion of the number of black faculty. The story got additional national attention when the University of Missouri football team threatened to sit-out of their scheduled game against Brigham-Young if the university leadership did not resign. Eventually, both Chancellor Loftin and President Wolfe resigned.²⁰

What does repressive tolerance look like? Perhaps it looks like the respective responses of university administrators, some presidential candidates and elected officials—including Barack Obama. The university’s response was initially one of neglect, and then resignation once a sizeable faction of the faculty adopted a posture of solidarity with the students. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump called the protesters “disgusting” and their actions “disgraceful.”²¹ Breitbart News even went so far as to compare the protesters to

¹⁹A list of student demands from various American universities can be found at thediems.org. They broadly include calls for greater diversity among students and faculty, additional resources devoted to protecting students and faculty of color from racial violence, additional resources for academic fields focused on minority cultures, and official statements of apology for previous instances of racism (such as buildings named after slave owners, segregationists, or racially insensitive mascots).

²⁰Elsewhere, official responses to student protests have varied. Officials at Duke recently announced an end to negotiations with students occupying administrative buildings. Ohio State administrators, citing feelings of fear among employees, threatened to forcibly remove and arrest students occupying buildings there. John Eligon, “At University of Missouri, Black Students See a Campus Riven by Race,” *The New York Times*, November 11, 2015, available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/12/us/university-of-missouri-protests.html?_r=0. Tom Ciccota, “Duke Administrators on Students Protestors: ‘We’re Done with Student Demands,’” *Breitbart News*, April 7, 2016, available online at: <http://www.breitbart.com/tech/2016/04/07/duke-administrators-were-done-with-demands-in-response-to-student-protestors/>. Conor Friedersdorf, “Ohio State Turns the Concept of ‘Safe Space’ Against Student Protesters,” *The Atlantic*, April 14, 2016, available online at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/04/ohio-state-turns-the-concept-of-safe-space-against-student-protesters/478221>.

²¹Paula Chavez, “Donald Trump Calls The University of Missouri Protesters ‘Disgusting’ and ‘Disgraceful’,” *ABC News*, November 12, 2015, available online at: <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/donald-trump-calls-the-University-of-Missouri-protesters-disgusting-disgraceful/story?id=35159099>.

terrorists suggesting that they coveted media attention analogous to that of Islamic terrorists.²² These are perverse, but perhaps expected from such sources. However, the more subtle and potentially pernicious example of repressive tolerance came from the president, conveying to George Stephanopoulos, that protesters have the right to protest but that they needed to be willing to listen to the other side.²³ This is a veiled call for deliberative tolerance: a nice idea, but one that the protesters themselves thought of and demanded many times. After several requests, the student organization "Concerned Student 1950" was granted a meeting with administration officials. Though the exact content of the meeting is not known, the results of the dialogue seem to have been largely fruitless.²⁴ Furthermore, it remains unclear about who this "other side" is that has been ignored. Was the president of the United States, for example, really calling on students who had suffered discrimination to listen to demands of white supremacists or other more mundane interlocutors whose goals were to simply reject that they had experienced bias and racism, and that the faculty lacked substantial racial diversity? We have trouble imagining that the first black president of the United States, whose citizenship was continually doubted, lacked similar experiences of injustice to the students. They have been listening to that "other side" their whole lives, as did their parents, and their parents before them. The demand that the oppressed tolerate oppression is the essence of repressive tolerance.

Beyond the immediate reactions of the media and the university administration, to say nothing of a number of white students who weren't happy for some reason, the football players who organized resistance to the university administration in support of the protesters were targeted by the Missouri state legislature. Supposedly based on the argument that student-athletes must remain apolitical and tolerant of existing university policies, state legislators have actually attempted to pass a bill that would revoke a student-athlete's scholarship if they refused to play.²⁵ If this policy were to become law, it would amount to a clear example (which the attempt itself fairly obviously is) of the state demanding that student-athletes tolerate intolerance from their university administrations—in other words, legally enforceable repressive tolerance.

Yale experienced similar events, though the initial catalyst was marginally different and the form that the repressive tolerance assumed largely pertained to debates around so-called "political correctness." The student protests arose after two emails were distributed to students around Halloween in 2015. The first email was sent by the Yale Intercultural Affairs Council asking students to be cognizant of the racial and cultural wounds their costumes may inflict and to be sensitive to the feelings of students who might be offended. Irked by that message, a member of the faculty affiliated with Yale sent out her own email to the student body, stating, "[I]f you don't like a costume someone is wearing, look away, or tell them you are offended. Talk to each other. Free speech and the ability to tolerate offense

²²Lee Stranahan, "FAIL for The University of Missouri Student Protests: Black Student Applications Down by 19%," *Breitbart*, January 6, 2016, available online at: <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2016/01/06/fail-the-University-of-Missouri-student-protests-black-student-applications-19/>.

²³Josh Feldman, "Obama to The University of Missouri Students: Protest But Don't Shut Down Speech You Disagree With," *Mediaite* (video from article sourced from ABC News), November 15, 2015, available online at: <http://www.mediaite.com/tv/obama-to-the-University-of-Missouri-students-protest-but-dont-shut-down-speech-you-disagree-with/>.

²⁴Thomas Dowling, "One Month Later, What's Next for University of Missouri Protesters?" *USA Today*, November 27, 2015, available online at: <http://college.usatoday.com/2015/11/27/whats-next-university-of-missouri/>.

²⁵Nora Caplan-Bricker, "If You're Really Concerned About Free Speech on Campus, This Missouri Bill Should Alarm You," *Slate*, December 15, 2015, available online at: http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2015/12/15/missouri_legislators_want_to_revoke_student_athletes_scholarships_if_they.html.



are the hallmarks of a free and open society." Protests against the faculty member ensued shortly thereafter.²⁶

As with the University of Missouri, there is a lengthy history of racism and injustice as policy at Yale where there still stand statues, monuments, and buildings dedicated to slave-owners. The protesters contended there have been innumerable examples of blatant sexism and racism on campus over the years that the Yale administration has simply ignored. The night that the infamous emails were sent out, it was widely reported that a fraternity refused entry to several black female students because the party was "for whites only." The Yale administration's response: silence.²⁷

The protests were not about the right of any person to express his or her views, but instead a profound sense of dismay at a university official's casual dismissal of quite reasonable concerns over racially sensitive issues. This was about the university, not the individual right of one person to speak their mind (though there are certainly cases of leftist activism wherein the right of an individual to speak has been illegally contravened or at least attempts to do so have occurred).²⁸

Former neurosurgeon and Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson called the protesters at his alma mater "infantile" and claimed that perhaps as a society we have become "a little bit too tolerant."²⁹ He is not far off (just in the wrong direction). However, we ought to recall how Ben Carson was completely silent when a huge number of fraternity members on Yale's campus paraded about campus chanting and holding signs that said "No means yes, yes means anal," not what one would call a glowing endorsement of women's rights and consent more broadly. One might judge by Carson's silence that privileged white men on campus vocally advocating rape and forcible sodomy ought to be tolerated, yet calls by the historically oppressed and their allies for justice are unacceptable. No one was calling for a ban on costumes, but rather encouraging sensitivity for oppressed peoples, and outrage that recognition of historical injustices was so quickly trivialized by a representative of the institution. Accepting a demand to be silenced, in effect submitting to silence, as an oppressed people, is a repressive brand of tolerance that dialectically inverts the true value of tolerance.³⁰

Besides the hypocritical critiques from right-wing pundits and presidential candidates, what the Missouri, Yale, and other cases show is the pejorative use of political correctness deployed as a label portraying the protester as having only trivial complaints. This is a hallmark of contemporary repressive tolerance. It is a gesture of malice that obscures real concerns, real injustices, behind claims of policing language and limiting free speech. From this view, if it was not for the purported intolerance of political correctness, and its word-police,

²⁶Nora Caplan-Bricker, "The Yale Student Protests Are the Campus PC Wars at Their Best," *Slate*, November 10, 2015, available online at: http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2015/11/10/yale_student_protests_why_they_are_the_campus_pc_wars_at_their_best.html.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Though there a few similar examples, one specific case involved a professor accosting a journalist attempting to cover the protests. Austin Huguelet and David Victor, "'I Need Some Muscle': Missouri Activists Block Journalists," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2015, available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/10/us/university-missouri-protesters-block-journalists-press-freedom.html?_r=0.

²⁹Nick Gass, "Ben Carson Slams 'Infantile' College Protests," *Politico*, November 12, 2015, available online at: <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/11/ben-carson-college-protests-215782>.

³⁰"Tolerance is first and foremost for the sake of the heretics—the historical road toward *humanitas* appears as heresy: target of persecution by the powers that be." Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," p. 91.

real injustices (more real, somehow, than systematic racial abuse) could be rectified. In truth, the invocation of political correctness is used to suppress complaints of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression by characterizing them as, to use Carson's word, "infantile."

Though we only have space to get into the details of a few examples here, there are somewhere around seventy-five schools that have had protest movements of varying size related to issues primarily of racism and sexism (some of the more widely publicized instances include Smith College, Amherst College and Ithaca College). At the same time, we have also seen the rise of a number of white student unions and white power organizations on college campuses (and in the US in general, especially since the election of President Obama in 2008 and the more recent presidential candidacy of reality TV star and business mogul Donald Trump).³¹ Repressive tolerance demands that oppressed people tolerate these organizations to the point where their own voices are threatened to be silenced, and silenced as university or state policy.

Most recently, we have seen the demand for greater tolerance applied to students protesting on the national stage, specifically in the arena of electoral politics. On March 11, 2016, Donald Trump canceled a planned campaign rally on the campus of the University of Illinois, Chicago in the face of massive organized protests. As the events unfolded, the results were predictable. Both the media and the presidential campaigns labeled the protesters as professional agitators restricting the legitimate free speech of a political candidate.³² This was followed the next day by editorials across the political spectrum, some expressing varying degrees of support for the spirit of the protest, but nonetheless making precisely the vacuous and legally unsustainable claim that a peaceful protest in opposition to another organized assembly of people was tantamount to restricting the first amendment rights of others.³³ Trump himself claimed that his right to free speech had been violated by the students.³⁴ Even Trump's political opponents have called the protests infringements of free speech. Perhaps most revealing is that the mainstream media coverage failed to include (inclusion being a symbol of tolerance) commentators discussing how protesters had their speech infringed by being assaulted, kicked out, and even arrested during these rallies. BLM and the student protesters are demanding an end to legalized oppression, and at the very least, legalized intolerance—intolerance as policy. As Marcuse himself points out, tolerance can only be a virtue when it is contextualized within a social structure where there are free-thinking self-reflective agents, and where the laws and policies themselves do not violate the spirit of tolerance—that is, when intolerance is not the more common result and is not a result that becomes further institutionalized. This is precisely what BLM and the associated student protest movements are addressing. Without explicitly using the label, they are resisting repressive tolerance and have begun to associate that repressive tolerance within a broader racist, sexist, heteronormative capitalist structure. It is this last element, however, the relationship between (hetero)sexism, racism, state violence and the broader capitalist

³¹Daniel Victor, "'White Student Union' Groups Set Off Concerns at Campuses," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2015, available online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/25/us/white-student-union-groups-set-off-concerns-at-campuses.html>; Krystie Yandoli and StudentNation, "The Danger of White Student Unions," *The Nation*, September 11, 2013, available online at: <http://www.thenation.com/article/danger-white-student-unions/>.

³²Live CNN broadcast of CNN Tonight with Don Lemon (guests included Van Jones and Bob Beckel among several other more conservative commentators, as well as representatives from the Rubio campaign and Donald Trump himself). March 11, 2016.

³³Marc Randazza, "Defend Donald Trump's Right to Free Speech," *CNN*, March 14, 2016, available online at: <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/12/opinions/defend-trump-free-speech-opinion-randazza/index.html>.

³⁴Live CNN broadcast of CNN Tonight with Don Lemon, March 11, 2016.



system that both BLM and the student protest organizations have failed to account for the most. This is precisely where we can observe the enduring relevance of Herbert Marcuse's thought, not only as a diagnostic tool for counterrevolutionary tendencies that are mostly only superficially different from the kinds of oppression and resistance that he was writing about in the 1960s and 1970s, but also as a critique of the Leftist responses to counterrevolution. Before explaining how Marcuse can serve as a guide for more successful, organized radical Left circumvention of counterrevolution, we describe the connection between repressive tolerance and counterrevolution that Marcuse initially theorized.

Counterrevolutionary Tolerance

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse argued that the extraordinary array of consumer goods produced by advanced industrial societies served as a suppressive power. Refrigerators, television sets, automobiles: the effect of these wares was to close down the universe of discourse, to render the scene of capitalism the only remaining comprehensible existence within the mind of the individual. In that sense, the Establishment, the conglomeration of political, military, and corporate entities who maintained capitalism, effectively created a system that foreclosed as many alternatives as possible to the present system. By manipulating the needs of the individual, by installing false needs for the products of the system, the Establishment had ensured a "one-dimensional society." Here, Marcuse claims:

Thus emerges a pattern of *one-dimensional thought and behavior* in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe. They are redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension.³⁵

As individuals' needs become integrated into the system of commodity production, they surrender the capacity to imagine any other world than the one they occupy. The one-dimensional society has as its ultimate goal, the production of the "One-Dimensional Man."

In order to ensure the continuation of the one-dimensional society, the Establishment adopted a series of tactics, some violent, some ideological, designed to preempt the fomentation of dissent before it could ever begin—*counterrevolution*. By dangling the lure of its wares, advanced industrial society had conscripted the middle-class as a bulwark against the radical potential that might emerge from dissatisfied elements.³⁶ The system generated false needs that were adopted by the middle-class, which, in turn, became a stabilizing, and largely conservative appendage of the Establishment.³⁷ Elsewhere, in developing nations and ghettos of the industrialized nations, the counterrevolution was manifested in the all-too familiar visage of "torture," slaughter of students, mass imprisonments and assassination of militant figures.³⁸

Marcuse observed two crucial aspects of the ongoing counterrevolution. First, as he wrote, "The counterrevolution is largely preventive and, in the Western world altogether preventive."³⁹ As he put it, in the advanced industrial nations, there was no revolution to be turned back, no serious threat to the system that demanded reaction. The counterrevolution was

³⁵Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 12.

³⁶Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 15.

³⁷Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press 1972), p. 9.

³⁸Ibid., 1.

³⁹Ibid., 1-2.



preventative; it was designed to ensure that no such discontent could even find sufficient soil in which to germinate. Secondly, while it certainly accommodates violent tactics, the counterrevolution primarily operates by undermining the faculties of dissent, or, as Marcuse explains, "The theory of the counterrevolution sanctions the total dependence of men on a few 'sovereigns' by engaging in a total defamation of human reason."⁴⁰ Therefore, the ongoing counterrevolution functions by neutralizing the possibility for dissent before it can ever arise, striking at the viability for human reason to determine its own needs as opposed to those imposed by the capitalist system.

For the most part, then, the counterrevolution employs a multitude of tactics designed to undermine the faculty of reason, thus stifling the possibility for dissent against an unjust and repressive system. Integral to this strategy, the character of free thought, speech, and feeling have become perverted, not to serve a decidedly critical function, but one that reflects Establishment values. As Marcuse alerts us, "Once institutionalized, these rights and liberties shared the fate of the society of which they had become an integral part."⁴¹ "Liberty," he explains, "can be made into a powerful instrument of domination."⁴² In that sense, the individual assuredly claims to be free in a system that is deceptively authoritarian and whose values are totalitarian because he or she possesses the right to speech. However, given that the universe of discourse has been made one-dimensional, the right to speech is constrained in advance. Speech, normally, has little material effect in this one-dimensional society, especially when uttered by a One-Dimensional Man. Liberty, for Marcuse, ought to be expressed in a genuine challenge to the prevailing system, "it emerges in the struggle against violence and exploitation where this struggle is waged for essentially new ways and forms of life."⁴³ This "Great Refusal," Marcuse wrote, "is the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom."⁴⁴ Thus, authentic liberation follows from a comprehensive rejection of the Establishment's values and the palliatives produced by capitalism.

The reactionary backlash toward student protestors at Rutgers, Yale, the University of Missouri, and elsewhere has proceeded under a pretense of tolerance that betrays its decidedly repressive character. The conservative economist Thomas Sowell refers to "storm trooper tactics by bands of college students making ideological demands" apparently encouraged by "intolerant professors."⁴⁵ Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg described modern college campuses, particularly those in the Ivy League, as havens of a left-leaning "McCarthyism."⁴⁶ Bloomberg invoked the experience of Commissioner Raymond Kelly, who was forced to cancel his lecture at Brown University amidst student protests against the New York City Police Department's "stop-and-frisk policy and its surveillance of Muslims."⁴⁷ Kyle Winfield of *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* decried the liberal "refusal to consider other opinions, and a steady

⁴⁰Herbert Marcuse, *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press 1972), pp. 114–115.

⁴¹Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 1.

⁴²Ibid., 7.

⁴³Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p. 25.

⁴⁴Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 149.

⁴⁵Thomas Sowell, "A Resurgence of Intolerance," *Townhall*, December 1, 2015, available online at: <http://townhall.com/columnists/thomassowell/2015/12/01/a-resurgence-of-intolerance-n2086969>.

⁴⁶Annie Karni, "Former Mayor Michael Bloomberg Slams Intolerance by Liberals on College Campuses during Fiery Harvard Graduation Address," *New York Daily News*, May 29, 2014, available online at: <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/bloomberg-slams-intolerant-behavior-liberals-colleges-fiery-harvard-speech-article-1.1810781>.

⁴⁷Karni, "Former Mayor Michael Bloomberg Slams Intolerance by Liberals on College Campuses During Fiery Harvard Graduation Address," Available online at: <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/bloomberg-slams-intolerant-behavior-liberals-colleges-fiery-harvard-speech-article-1.1810781>.



retreat into the safety of ideological conformity" by students of Smith College who protested a speech by Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund.⁴⁸ Rampbell wrote that left-wing students are "more hostile to free speech than earlier generations."⁴⁹ Her claim was based on a UCLA survey of freshmen that found nearly seventy-one percent supported the prohibition of racist or sexist speech on college campuses.⁵⁰

But what, precisely, have the students in these cases done? They have protested, sometimes loudly. In a case Chait points to as emblematic of left-wing intolerance, they left messages at the door of a conservative columnist on the campus of the University of Michigan.⁵¹ In a case Friedersdorf labeled "flagrant intolerance," students called for the revocation of campus housing for two faculty members.⁵² In every case that has been maligned as leftist intolerance, the students have been guilty of speaking, protesting or expressing themselves, usually against Establishment figures such as Rice or Lagarde, promoters of racist policy such as Kelly, or directly against unjust policies. Demonstrations and disruptions did nothing to prevent Rice, Lagarde, Kelly or others from speaking. They were free to speak, and free to be spoken to, had they the courage. In every case, the Establishment figures elected to withdraw from their respective invitations.

Claims that leftist students are intolerant, in fact, betray intolerance against the voice of the leftist students, as though they ought to recognize themselves as subordinate, and passively listen to their superiors. Calls for student protestors on the left to become more tolerant are tantamount then to calling for their silent compliance. Rice, Lagarde, and Kelly wish to speak. So do the student protestors. The core issue is not really tolerance; it is obedience hidden behind a repressive demand for "toleration." The students at Rutgers, and beyond, know full well what Condoleezza Rice represents; they simply have no need to hear it again. To reiterate, Marcuse argued liberating intolerance would proceed by the use of "extralegal means":

Tolerance would be restricted with respect to movement of a demonstrably aggressive or destructive character (destructive of the prospects for peace, justice, and freedom for all). Such discrimination would also be applied to movements opposing the extension of social legislation to the poor, weak, disabled....To tolerate propaganda for inhumanity vitiates the goals not only of liberalism but of every progressive political philosophy.⁵³

Why should the students, or anyone else for that matter, tolerate speech by Condoleezza Rice, an architect of volitional war? Why should they restrain their voices of dissent against Christine Lagarde, when the International Monetary Fund manages wealth for transnational capitalism? Why should they sit in silence as Raymond Kelly makes the case for policies targeting African Americans, Latinos, and Muslims? What case is there to be made from someone who should probably stand trial at the International Criminal Court? In that sense,

⁴⁸Kyle Wingfield, "Closed Campus: The Academic Left's Intolerance," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 13, 2014, available online at: <http://www.ajc.com/weblogs/kylewingfield/2014/may/13/closedcampusacademicleftsintolerance/>.

⁴⁹Catherine Rampell, "Liberal Intolerance Is on the Rise on America's College Campuses," *The Washington Post*, February 11, 2016, available online at: http://tdn.com/news/opinion/rampell-liberal-intolerance-on-the-rise-at-colleges/article_5421d396-96b2-5c04-8da3-1e6ccf13b018.html.

⁵⁰Kevin Eagan and Ellen Bara Stolzenberg, Abigail K. Bates, Melissa C. Aragon, Maria Ramirez Suchard, and Cecilia Rios-Aguilar. "The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2015," *Higher Education Research Institute*, (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, 2015), p. 47.

⁵¹Jonathan Chait, "Not a Very P.C. Thing to Say," *New York Magazine*, January 27, 2015, available online at: <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/01/not-a-very-pc-thing-to-say.html>.

⁵²Conor Friedersdorf, "The New Intolerance of Student Activism," *The Atlantic*, November 9, 2015, available online at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/the-new-intolerance-of-student-activism-at-yale/414810/>.

⁵³Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," p. 120.



leftist students are not so much being asked to let others speak. Rather, they are being instructed to listen passively, listen to views they already understand are noxious.

Students organizing and protesting against the broader terrain of oppression, such as the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, have been subject to egregious official silencing by universities across the United States.⁵⁴ Relying on the strategy of disinvestment, which was successfully deployed against the apartheid regime of South Africa beginning in the 1970s, leftist university students have been at the forefront of what has become known as BDS: calling on universities to boycott, divest, and sanction, to effectively disengage from and isolate Israel until it ends its fifty-year occupation of Palestinian land. While supporters represent diverse backgrounds, “the BDS movement is anti-Semitic at its very core,” according to Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League.⁵⁵ Charles Krauthammer dismissed the movement as “an exercise in radical chic....with a dose of edgy anti-Semitism.”⁵⁶ A group of sixty Black representatives from the Democratic Party signed an open letter calling the critique of the Israeli occupation, especially as represented by BDS, an example of “anti-Semitism.”⁵⁷ Addressing the Columbia Center for Law and Liberty, former president of Harvard University and Obama Administration Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers called BDS “a consequential abdication of moral responsibility” and “anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent.”⁵⁸ This labeling should be interpreted as it was designed by its authors to function: as an attempt to silence those calling for equality of treatment for all peoples. After all, who wants to be labeled anti-Semitic? Indeed, anti-Semitism sits at the zenith of intolerances. Charged with this excoriating epithet, supporters of BDS would have to spend time responding to the accusation, or mute if not outright abandon the strategy altogether. As with BLM, students in support of BDS are struck with accusations of intolerance in order to facilitate their silence. Repressive tolerance is a powerful tool for disrupting leftist movements.

The demand for university students on the Left to become more tolerant is not a call for the inclusion of additional points of view. It is, instead, a call to silence, a call for exclusion of the students’ systemic critique, an effort to disrupt localized refusals before they can coalesce into a Great Refusal. “Tolerance” of other views is paid for by silencing student voices. It is a rather dialectical conversion of tolerance to its other—*intolerance* in the guise of greater inclusivity. Precisely, then, because it perverts the idea of liberty into another form of domination, repressive tolerance has become another instrument of counterrevolution. Marcuse expressed consternation over threats to the cohesiveness of the New Left, observing that it had been “weakened to a dangerous degree” by tactics that had amplified internal fragmentation and enhanced “ideological conflicts within the militant opposition and the lack of organization.”⁵⁹ The silence following from repressive tolerance disrupts the intellectual

⁵⁴Mark Mondalek, “Who’s Afraid of BDS?” *Jacobin*, April 1, 2016, available online at: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/04/israel-palestine-boycott-divestment-sanction-sheldon-adelson/>.

⁵⁵Abraham Foxman, “An Open Letter on Academic Freedom and University Responsibility,” *Anti-Defamation League*. Available online at: <http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/press-center/NYT-Ad.pdf> (accessed July 3, 2016).

⁵⁶Charles Krauthammer, “Poison of Anti-Semitism Continues to Proliferate,” *Houston Chronicle*, January 2, 2014, available online at: <http://www.chron.com/opinion/outlook//opinion/outlook/article/Krauthammer-Poison-of-anti-Semitism-continues-to-5128807.php>.

⁵⁷We assume they meant “anti-Jewish” considering Arab Palestinians are also a Semitic people. This letter was published in response to calls by Senator and Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and his representative on the Democratic Party’s platform committee Cornel West for treating Israeli and Palestinian people and demands equally. Available online at: <http://d1u7i8c4jvjs7.m.cloudfront.net/Bakari-Sellers-Letter-to-DNC-on-Israel-Platform-Statement.pdf>.

⁵⁸Lawrence H. Summers, “Academic Freedom and Anti-Semitism,” larrysummers.com January 29, 2015, available online at: http://larrysummers.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/AcademicFreedomAndAntiSemitism_FINAL1-2.pdf.

⁵⁹Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p. 36.



coalescence of the Great Refusal, stifles reason and neutralizes dissent before it can even begin. As Marcuse admonished, "Thus, within a repressive society, even progressive movements threaten to turn into their opposite to the degree to which they accept the rules of the game."⁶⁰ Sit quietly, listen, and be tolerant: that is the refrain of the Establishment. Repressive tolerance is not a force for merely stupefying the population. With renewed discontent on college campuses, it has become a means to undermine the dissent of the educated, a means to prevent an organized, unified questioning of the Establishment and its system, a tactic of the counterrevolution.

Conclusion: Liberating Tolerance and Building a New (Transnational) New Left

Repressive tolerance is deployed to silence dissenters and prevent those who, by class position, have material interests aligning with emancipatory movements from joining them. In essence, repressive tolerance becomes a counterrevolutionary tool, turning potential allies into ardent enemies. The attempt to silence protestors is an attempt to disrupt solidarity. Thus, we can observe that the relevance of Marcuse in the twenty-first century is located not just in the usefulness of his concepts and the persistence of the same processes and patterns of injustice he observed. He also offered a tactical solution: liberating tolerance. For Marcuse, liberating tolerance is the only promising alternative (and indeed the only peaceful one with a hope of success) to the "natural right" to violent resistance to oppression.⁶¹

Liberating tolerance is a tool not a goal: liberating tolerance is not a tolerance to base a new, just society on; it is a tolerance to allow the possibility of establishing a new, just society. It is a partisan tolerance for a certain historical conjuncture when liberal tolerance (1) lacks the foundational sources of its legitimacy in the informed, free thinking, self-reflective autonomous character of the citizenry, and (2) allows regression and intolerance to consistently prevail. In other words, when the citizenry generally lacks the capacity to recognize the fascist nature of intolerance, and intolerance becomes more persuasive than tolerance, justice, and freedom on such a massive scale that tolerance, justice, and freedom are institutionally threatened, liberal tolerance no longer serves as protection against intolerance.⁶² Liberating tolerance resists the perversion of tolerance by the forces of intolerance. It is a thoughtful yet visceral rejection of intolerance, regression, and injustice. As Marcuse himself made clear, liberating tolerance is a refusal to tolerate the intolerable and a refusal to castigate those who are speaking out against institutionally and historically supported forms of oppression and suppression, not the illegalization of certain kinds of speech or constitutionally protected organizing; it is a new way of thinking about tolerance that actually resuscitates the original goal of (liberal) tolerance—the ability of all people to have their voices heard, especially those that are speaking out against oppression and intolerance.⁶³

An essential part of the effective cultivation of liberating tolerance and the building of a successful counter-counterrevolutionary movement, the nascent seeds of which are developing on college campuses across the country, is solidarity among a variety of organizations

⁶⁰Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p. 83.

⁶¹Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," p. 116.

⁶²Ibid., 88–97, 106.

⁶³Ibid., 109, 119–123.

that are not just based on college campuses. We are seeing this with BLM. What we are also witnessing with BLM, though certainly not enough of, is transnational solidarity with other social justice movements around the world, including the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions against Israel (BDS) movement and other pro-Palestinian, anti-Israeli occupation groups. Angela Davis—whose career, stemming from her experience as one of his doctoral students, itself testifies to the enduring relevance of Marcuse's legacy—has written about a case where Palestinian activists used social media to instruct BLM protesters how to defend themselves against tear gas; it turns out the tear gas canisters used against the American student protesters were the exact same type used by the Israeli Defense Force against Palestinians.⁶⁴ Highlighting the counterrevolutionary similarities between the oppression of racial, sexual and ethnic minorities in the United States with the neo-imperial oppression experienced by people like the Palestinians, but countless others around the world, must be the basis of a new necessary solidarity aimed toward the building of another New Left, one that succeeds where failures have previously resulted.

The recognition of repressive tolerance as a tool of counterrevolution calls for a careful examination of leftist strategy. For example, so-called "microaggressions," or "trigger warnings," should be taken seriously.⁶⁵ However, we should and need to ask ourselves: in a world of pervasive macroaggressions and trigger-pulling, in a world of wretched poverty, torture, and disappeared dissidents—if these concerns should take center stage. We ought to reflect and ask if identity concerns are more important than class or economic concerns. Marcuse would surely argue that class remains a crucial component alongside other dimensions of identity and oppression (for example, race, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, religion). He would demand that we act locally but organize globally, and that we refuse the lure of divisive identity politics, without eschewing the central importance of criticizing racialized, gendered dimensions to capitalist oppressions. We must principally and aggressively resist the demand that we tolerate the expressions or enactments of these oppressions under the guise of liberal toleration. In response to this revolting, nauseating, murderous demand, we must revolt in all the ways we can, and that is precisely what #BlackLivesMatter, the Black Liberation Collective (a nascent, more radical national student organization, distinct but related to BLM and includes many of the campus protesters from around the United States), and the broader student movements are aiming and struggling for (even if right now what they are struggling for is precisely that focused vision).

The claim that free speech is under assault is often deployed as a tool of repressive toleration by the Right. Perhaps we need some more hashtags: #BlackVoicesMatter or #BlackProtestsMatter (though the label "black" here, as it is with BLM, is meant to be inclusive, not exclusive. There are numbers of white and non-black allies of the organization, as can be seen in any cursory examination of these various protests. This is explicitly laid out in the official platform of the BLM organization. This is the case for BDS as well; it is not about

⁶⁴Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*, (Chicago, IL: Haymarket, 2016), p. 140.

⁶⁵A call for trigger warnings and a critique of microaggressions have often been present in these student protest movements. Trigger warnings refer to prefatory cautions given to an audience concerning the possibility that certain content to be discussed may be traumatic for certain people depending on their experiences (for example, an academic discussion about rape might be traumatic to rape survivors or more relevant here, discussions of racial injustice being traumatic to those who have been its victims). Microaggressions refer to often subtle expressions of exclusion or inferiority deployed by those with unacknowledged privilege at people who belong to historically-oppressed social classes. See Susan R. Robbins, "From the Editor—Sticks and Stones: Trigger Warnings, Microaggressions, and Political Correctness," *Journal of Social Work Education* 52:1 (2016), pp. 1–5.



identity so much as it is about defending the humanity of all).⁶⁶ We need more than just hashtags though. Much more. We have seen the foundations of more. BLM's platform does not, however, include any mention of capitalism or economic exploitation, despite the fact that the leadership of the organization has spoken out against racialized capitalism.⁶⁷ The Black Liberation Collective already includes a critique of capitalism alongside other forms of oppression in their platform.⁶⁸ These are the early and precarious stages of a potentially emergent cohesive Left for the twenty-first century. Through Marcuse's critical gaze, we can observe what these students and activists have already realized, what is truly intolerable: the demand that we all tolerate the intolerable. Today, the path to liberating tolerance requires the refusal to accept such silencing.

Importantly, we must not limit ourselves to merely critiquing existing oppressions, or just suggest principled radical reforms that could move us toward an emancipated, just (global) society. As many on the Left have attempted, though sadly without much wider recognition, we need to start building these alternative futures in the counterrevolutionary present wherever and whenever possible. This means first building racially, sexually and gender inclusive communicative and organizational bridges between both nascent and longer established social movements and class-based organizations, including the too often forgotten Left political parties.⁶⁹ Liberating tolerance could tear open avenues for the development of the "new sensibility" Marcuse heralds in his late work. We see this as crucial for the possibility of a new society, a free, just, and rational society antipodal and antithetical to the unfree, unjust, and irrational confines of neoliberal capitalism. College campuses have, since Marcuse's time been a potentially key environment for the cultivation of this "new sensibility"—a sensibility, a mentality, oriented toward care, compassion, love, justice, cooperation and indeed active disgust at their inverses.⁷⁰ BLM and BDS and other less well-known organized movements offer us a new hope and opportunity to revitalize a youthful emancipatory disposition with sustainability.

Liberating tolerance against repressive tolerance has the potential to open up the material and ideological space for precisely these developments, against every wish of the counter-revolutionary forces that militate against progress through the silencing of the exuberant dissent we are witnessing across college campuses in the United States and around the world. We write in support of these students and their rejection of white supremacy, racial injustice (on campus and beyond), police brutality as standard practice, especially against minorities, and their calls for an egalitarian educational experience, including the extension of that experience for all people in the United States and around the world. Beyond Herbert Marcuse's words, we have his emancipatory democratic impetus—we hope to have embodied that impetus here and shown it to be more relevant than ever.

⁶⁶#BlackLivesMatter Organization, "Guiding Principles," Available online at: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/guiding-principles/> (accessed April 3, 2016).

⁶⁷Mychal Denzel Smith, "A Q&A With Alicia Garza, Co-Founder of #BlackLivesMatter," *The Nation*. March 24, 2015, available online at: <http://www.thenation.com/article/qa-alicia-garza-co-founder-blacklivesmatter/>.

⁶⁸Black Liberation Collective, "Our Principles," Available online at: <http://www.blackliberationcollective.org/our-beliefs/> (accessed April 3, 2016).

⁶⁹These parties need not be based on existing organizations or strategies, but groups like Socialist Alternative, Democratic Socialists of America, Solidarity, and even the left-moving US Green Party offer a potentially fruitful beginning.

⁷⁰Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation*, pp. 20–25.

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