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Attack of the Killer Bs

"At Duke, there is also, as the media tend to forget, a whole university beyond the English department."

—Duke University English professor Cathy N. Davidson (1991)

Fighting Words from Chicago

In 1973, Harper and Row published *Fellow Teachers* by sociologist Philip Rieff (1922–2006). Rieff had become a major name in intellectual circles for his work *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1966), a meditation on the ways in which Freudian psychology had altered the character of modern life. Its author, a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania, received both his undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of Chicago, the home of Robert Maynard Hutchins's famed Great Books program. All Rieff's work betrays a pessimistic, conservative sensibility; a recurring theme in his books, for example, is the tragic nature of contemporary Western life, given the demise of religious convictions.

Fellow Teachers ably demonstrates Rieff's intellectual temperament. The volume mounts a sustained attack on professors who use their classrooms as bully pulpits. In characteristically dense, puzzling prose, Rieff laments the Nietzschean dismissal of objective truth and its pernicious effects on university life. "If Nietzsche ever acted out," he wrote in a typically cryptic sentence, "then at least he did truth—which is repression successfully, though never finally, achieved—the honor of going mad."[1] Among other recommendations, *Fellow Teachers* counsels college professors to distance their courses from the hurly-burly of politics so that institutions of higher learning can maintain their

1. Rieff 1985: 7; see also 33.

intellectual integrity.[2] "Let position-taking be the discipline of parties, not of universities," Rieff asserts.[3]

The book pulls no punches. *Fellow Teachers* includes excoriations of the American counterculture ("college-trained primitives," in Rieff's polemical parlance),[4] popular antinomian academics ("gurus of experimental Life"),[5] research universities ("knowledge factories"),[6] and rock and roll ("crude, sensual music").[7] Rieff criticizes numerous touchy subjects, including black separatism and American society's ahistorical "barbarism."[8] Although pessimistic about the future health of American intellectual life, he advocates a university curriculum made up of transcendent authors and artists of the past: "Plato, Haydn, Beethoven, Freud, Weber: all our greatest teachers are always dead."[9]

Despite its author's fame, *Fellow Teachers* appears not to have registered much of an impact either on the academy or with the public at large. To this day, it is not among Rieff's better-known works. The volume, its spirited rhetoric and provocative ideas notwithstanding, never seems to have attracted significant attention.

In 1987, Allan Bloom (1930–92), a political philosopher at the University of Chicago, published a book that bears striking similarities to Rieff's *Fellow Teachers*. Like Rieff, Bloom had earned both his undergraduate and graduate degrees at Chicago. Like Rieff, Bloom possessed the sensibilities of a brooding traditionalist. And again like Rieff, Bloom had a penchant for writing abstruse prose. In comparison with Rieff, however, Bloom was an obscure figure; he was chiefly known as a charismatic teacher. His previously published works—translations of Plato and Rousseau and a volume on Shakespeare's politics—had not made the sort of splash associated with Rieff's *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*.

Yet Bloom's tome, *The Closing of the American Mind*, created a firestorm. It became a surprise smash in the publishing world, earning its author fame and fortune, praise and infamy. In addition to garnering sundry reviews in the popular press, the book, a mainstay on the *New York Times* nonfiction best-seller list in 1987 and 1988, turned Bloom into an instant celebrity—the subject of numerous biographical essays and a featured guest on television talk shows.[10]

2. See ibid., esp. 1–5, 52–53, 175.
3. Ibid., 175.
4. Ibid., 8.
5. Ibid., 97.
6. Ibid., 124.
7. Ibid., 174.
8. Ibid., 101–2 (black separatism), 39 ("barbarism").
9. Ibid., 10.
10. For numerous reviews and discussions of *The Closing of the American Mind*, see below.

The Closing of the American Mind, despite its likenesses to Rieff's *Fellow Teachers*, was one of the most influential and attacked books of its decade.

What explains the disparate fates of these similar works? *The Closing of the American Mind*, unlike Rieff's opus, hit bookshelves toward the commencement of the American culture wars and amounted to a seminal text in this prolonged conflict. This, as it turned out, made all the difference.

This chapter presents a brief intellectual history of the American academic culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s, situating these quarrels in the wider ideological conflicts of the period and assessing their strengths and weaknesses. This history provides some of the requisite background for our further discussion of debates that roiled classical studies in the US at the time. Most important, it delineates the oddly marginal role of the classics in the disputes over the character of American colleges and universities. Although one might presume that Greco-Roman antiquity—given its historic importance to Western higher education—would have played a major part in such struggles, in reality the classics were an afterthought, a subject of pressing concern to neither side of the debate.

The Casus Belli

To this day, scholars disagree on the origins of the American culture wars. According to James Davison Hunter, a formative and helpful writer on the topic, these struggles earned their name on the basis of their connections with the late-nineteenth-century German Kulturkampf.[11] Though we lack precise dates for the American culture wars, they arguably heated up in the early 1980s and subsided, though never definitively concluded, with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

The culture wars were a period in US history when domestic concerns came to the fore. In essence, they pertained to conflicting visions of America among the populace at large. What sort of moral universe did Americans seek to inhabit? What was good and bad about American culture? What was the correct approach to the ordering of society? In what ways did Americans want to live? These were among the grand questions that animated the culture

On the book's sales figures, see Piereson 2007: 7–8. In 1987 and 1988, the book spent a combined forty-five weeks on the *New York Times* nonfiction best-seller list, including numerous weeks as the top-selling nonfiction title in the country.

11. Hunter 1991: xii. Bruce L. R. Smith, Mayer, and Fritschler (2008: 11) assert that Hunter's book is responsible for the label *culture wars* typically applied to America in the 1980s and 1990s.

wars' impassioned debates.[12] Though such concerns are by no means unique to the 1980s and 1990s, the tensions of the McCarthy era and the upheavals associated with the Vietnam War rendered them especially salient during this period.

Although this chapter tracks the late-twentieth-century clashes over American colleges and universities, these academic feuds took place within the context of a broader US culture war. This larger conflict pertained to numerous heated topics: affirmative action, abortion, gay rights, multiculturalism, school prayer, public funding for the arts, inter alia. Its combatants—whom Hunter labels the *orthodox* and the *progressives*—were predominantly elites with polarizing views on the issues up for debate.[13] Though it appears as if most Americans found themselves somewhere in the ideological middle of these struggles, the more partisan combatants, with ready access to mass media, drove the conflict.[14]

What explains the prominence of cultural skirmishes in late-twentieth-century America? Different scholars suggest disparate reasons. According to journalist and sociologist Todd Gitlin, himself a participant in the struggles, these battles dominated American politics as a result of the failures of communism and the Soviet Union's demise.[15] In such a context, the lack of major external threats to US hegemony compelled Americans to turn inward and occupy themselves with various domestic matters. Although the culture wars flourished during a period of American unipolar dominance, one can note problems with Gitlin's thesis. The germination of these debates, for example, predates the fall of the Berlin Wall. Arguably, moreover, the American reaction to communism amounted to one element of the culture wars themselves.[16] We need not surmise that these struggles were disconnected from international affairs.

Hunter asserts that the rows were of domestic origin. In the past, he maintains, America was wracked by interreligious disputes—clashes between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. By the early 1980s, however, these old fault lines gave way, in part as a result of American society's increasing religious tolerance.

12. For a thorough discussion of the nature and stakes of the American culture wars, see Hunter 1991.

13. On the labels, see ibid., 43–45.

14. On the dominance of elites in the debates, see ibid., 59, 159–60.

15. Gitlin 1995: 3, 186. Gitlin offered this thesis in part as a means to criticize conservatives: the American Right, lacking the bugbear of communism, searched for a domestic common enemy. For similar contentions, see Barbara Ehrenreich 1992: 333; Gitlin 1992: 185. This view gains credence from Will's (1992b: 25) view that Lynne Cheney, chair of the National Endowment of the Humanities during the George H. W. Bush administration, was "secretary of domestic defense" in the battle over the university.

16. As Hunter (1991: 116–17) contends.

In their place appeared intrareligious disputes: competing moral visions from within the religious traditions themselves. Thus, Hunter avers, the culture wars pitted intellectually and morally "orthodox" Protestants, Catholics, and Jews against their intellectually and morally "progressive" coreligionists. The debates therefore surrounded rival—and irreconcilable worldviews.[17] Though Hunter's thesis has much to recommend it, one can point to some problems. As a religious studies scholar, he may have overplayed the spiritual origins and nature of the conflict. The debates surrounding American higher education during the culture wars, for example, seem overwhelmingly secular in character. One can imagine people of disparate religious commitments siding with various positions advanced in the academic disputes.

Political scientist Ronald Inglehart presents a different explanation for the culture wars' rise—and, more expansively, for similar societal struggles in numerous postindustrial nations. Through recourse to the World Values Survey, Inglehart's book *Modernization and Postmodernization* (1997) tracks changing worldviews in forty-three countries from the 1980s to the 1990s. Its author contends that the increasing safety and security of post–World War II life in advanced societies led to "a gradual shift from 'Materialist' values (emphasizing economic and physical security above all) toward 'Postmaterialist' priorities (emphasizing self-expression and quality of life)."[18] This shift, which Inglehart labels *postmodernization*, seems to fit with the prominence of moral concerns in the national dialogue during the American culture wars. These conflicts, then, may be part of wider changes that occurred in numerous postindustrial societies. Although Inglehart musters much evidence to support his contentions, his thesis is not unassailable. When the culture wars first brewed in the early 1980s, the Soviet Union remained a serious threat to American security.

En Garde, Professor!

One might presume that the battle over American higher education would have been a comparatively minor skirmish in the culture wars. After all, in the US, attending colleges and universities is not mandatory. In regard to the battles over the university, moreover, differing worldviews did not necessarily lie at the root of the disagreements. The rifts between sides on the topic of, say, abortion

17. Ibid., 35 47.

18. Inglehart 1997: 4. Cf. Hunter (1991: 62), who discusses the importance of America's transformation from an industrial to an information-based economy as a major factor in the culture wars' germination.

were likely deeper than those pertaining to the literary canon. Few among the academic "orthodox," moreover, appear to have been evangelical Christians;[19] some in fact were self-professed political moderates, liberals, or leftists. Surely, then, disputes over high school curricula would have dwarfed those associated with American higher education.

And yet the fight over the university, though transcending firm labels such as *orthodox* and *progressive*, generated much acrimony. The academic feuds, which pitted scores of intellectual and pedagogical traditionalists against their antitraditionalist foes, amounted to some of the most publicized and raucous battles in the culture wars.

Return of the Purple Decade

The heat surrounding the academic culture wars in large part stemmed from the fact that these conflicts compelled antagonists to take stock of the changes in American higher education and intellectual life that resulted from the turbulence of the late 1960s and 1970s. These years had witnessed numerous student revolts, demands for more "relevant" coursework, and the creation of new disciplines associated with the politics of the New Left: women's studies, black studies, Latino/a studies, and so forth.[20] Combatants in the academic culture wars tended to look back on these years with great emotion: to such participants, that era amounted either to a welcome broadening of American academia or to a disgraceful capitulation to politicization and intellectual debasement.

Much of the tumultuousness of the academic culture wars pertained to the rise of postmodern thought in the West.[21] One can detect some important changes in many humanities and social science disciplines since the 1960s, in part as a consequence of the influence of the postmodern movement on numerous academics and intellectuals.

Postmodern thought has its origins in the political, social, technological, and military upheavals of the 1960s. The horrors of the Vietnam War, the failure of the protests of 1968, and the rise of new social movements influenced many thinkers associated with the political Left at this time to reconsider their

19. Evangelical leaders played a prominent role in other aspects of the culture war debates: e.g., Gary Bauer, Rev. Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson.

20. See chapter 2.

21. General discussions of postmodernism are legion. Attempts to define such a broad movement are perhaps doomed to failure, especially given its antifoundationalist bona fides. For helpful explications of postmodernism, see Docherty 1993; Eagleton 2008: 200–204.

faith in progress, reason, and science.[22] To such figures, the evils of Western involvement in Vietnam and the saliency of the feminist, civil rights, and Black Power movements demonstrated that modern industrialized nations were hardly beacons of beneficent change. Rather, these thinkers supposed that the modern West was brutal in its treatment of non-Westerners and that faith in rationality and objectivity had led not to progress but to misery.[23]

Such conclusions helped spawn the popularity of postmodern thought throughout portions of Western academia. Many intellectuals associated with postmodernism criticize Enlightenment reason, narratives that stress continual societal progress, and individual freedom.[24] Much postmodern thought has firmly embraced relativism. A number of postmodern theorists, mostly associated with literary criticism, have questioned the distinction between fact and fiction.[25] They tend to suppose that pretensions to objectivity mask issues of power.[26] Academics may pretend that their investigations are "scientific," but many postmodern thinkers believe that these academics are merely plumping for their own perspectives.

This movement has naturally proved critical of the ideal of scholarly objectivity associated with the professionalization of Western academia in the nineteenth century.[27] Its followers often disparaged the dominance of the Western literary canon in general education courses required for undergraduates at many American colleges and universities prior to the late 1960s. Although such classes supposedly introduced students to the most profound and aesthetically rewarding works in human history, many postmodernists saw such courses' almost unvarying focus on dead, white, male authors as marginalizing women and minorities.[28]

Throughout the American academy, the popularity of postmodern thought thus contributed to the demise of the Great Books approach to general education.[29] It also influenced many professors of the humanities to reenvision their

22. See Lucy 1997: esp. 20. For an influential theory of postmodernity from a major figure in the movement, see Lyotard 1984. On the importance of the student movement of 1968 to the influence of postmodernism, see Windschuttle (1996: 11), a polemical critic of postmodern approaches to historiography.

23. See Iggers 1997: 98.

24. See, e.g., Eagleton 2008: 200: "Postmodernity means the end of modernity, in the sense of those grand narratives of truth, reason, science, progress and universal emancipation which are taken to characterize modern thought from the Enlightenment onward." See also Iggers 1997: 9–10, 13–14, 145–47.

25. For a discussion of some such thinkers, see, e.g., Iggers 1997: 9–14, 100.

26. See Eagleton 2008: 201.

27. See chapter 2.

28. For extended discussion of this topic and its influence on classics, see Knox 1993: 25–67.

29. On the history of the Great Books tradition, see chapter 2.

role as scholars and to focus their concerns on issues pertaining to identity politics. By the mid-1980s, in numerous humanistic disciplines, scholarly work devoted to the study of race, class, gender, and sexuality was notably popular. Deconstruction, cultural studies, poststructuralism, reader response theory, postcolonial studies—these and other elements associated with the postmodern movement seemed to become all the rage.[30] Insofar as the academic culture wars allowed Americans to come to terms with these profound alterations in US intellectual life, it should not prove surprising that they generated much acrimony.

"The Flagship of the Humanistic Fleet"

As is the case with the culture wars generally, it remains impossible to suggest a definitive date for the commencement of the battle over American academia. Jeremiads about the sorry state of the academy have a long history in the United States, and one can find precursors to many of the broadsides that featured prominently in the debates.[31] William F. Buckley Jr.'s *God and Man at Yale* (1951), a polemic that helped turn its author into arguably the most influential conservative intellectual of the late twentieth century, seems to have been an especially important forerunner.

One could argue, however, that the academic culture wars first began to brew in 1982. In September of that year, *Harvard Magazine* published Walter Jackson Bate's "The Crisis in English Studies." Although a university's alumni magazine seems an unlikely forum for an article of seminal importance to the feuds over American higher education, Bate (1918–99), a literary critic at Harvard, touched a nerve with his piece, the impact of which reverberated throughout the conflict.[32] The article contains many features typical of tracts in the academic culture wars. For example, though Bate contended that a debilitating catastrophe plagued the humanities, his piece concentrates solely on the discipline of English literature. He justified this focus partly on the basis of the dominant role of the English department in the contemporary university; to Bate, the study of English literature was "the flagship of the humanistic fleet."[33]

30. For a useful explanation of these ideas and their development, see Eagleton 2008.

31. From just the mid-twentieth century, e.g., Buckley 1951; Nisbet 1971; Wilson 1973: 154–202; Rieff 1985. For a discussion of some early twentieth-century polemics on the topic, see Jacoby 1994: 6–8.

32. Bate 1982. Numerous contributions to the academic culture wars cited this article: e.g., William J. Bennett 1984: 18–19; Cheney 1988: 5; George Levine 1989: 123; Atlas 1992: 28–29; Kramer 1995: 75.

33. Bate 1982: 46.

This echoes a theme detectable throughout the conflict: when many spoke of a crisis of the humanities, they often meant a crisis in English departments. Scores of contributions to the battle over the university from a variety of ideological angles home in on English and, to a lesser extent, comparative literature.[34] Though some polemics touched on other disciplines as well,[35] English studies remained the touchstone.

Bate's article amounts to a plea to return to the old spirit of litterae humaniores and opposes the specialization and professionalization associated with the German-influenced research university. Although Bate found literary scholars' preoccupations with gender, ethnic, and sexual matters deleterious, he viewed the spread of gay studies and other fashionable approaches to literature as symptoms of broader problems associated with the professionalization of the discipline.[36]

Reclaiming the Great Books

Two years after Bate's article appeared, the Reagan administration involved itself in the struggle over the American university. In 1984, William J. Bennett, then the chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, published a report entitled *To Reclaim a Legacy*. Bennett, who holds a doctorate in political philosophy, was aided by a "study group" of thirty-six academics and intellectuals, among whom was one classicist, scholar and translator William Arrowsmith (1924–92).

According to Bennett, educators "too often have given up the great task of transmitting a culture to its rightful heirs."[37] He argued that humanistic education in the US was in dire straits: few American colleges required the study of foreign languages, American history and literature, and "the civilizations of classical Greece and Rome."[38] The report also stresses the precipitous decline in the number of humanities majors since the early 1970s, blaming it in part on "a failure of nerve and faith on the part of many college faculties and administrators."[39]

34. E.g., Berger 1988; Cheney 1988; Abowitz 1989; George Levine et al. 1989; Lehman 1991; Atlas 1992; Bromwich 1992 (though not entirely); Graff 1992a; Searle 1994; Ellis 1997; Kermode 1997; Menand 1997.

35. E.g., Sommers 1994; Patai 1998 (on women's studies); Teachout 1995 (on African American studies).

36. Bate 1982: 48–53.

37. William J. Bennett 1984: 1.

38. Ibid., 1–2.

39. Ibid., 2. For a discussion of the decline in the number of humanities majors since the 1970s, see chapter 6.

Bennett suggests some remedies for the pitiful state of the collegiate humanities in America. In addition to invoking Victorian education reformer Matthew Arnold, he proposed that "the study of the humanities and Western civilization must take its place at the heart of the college curriculum"[40] and must grapple with "life's enduring, fundamental questions."[41] Bennett supported a Great Books approach to humanistic study: college courses should expose students to the masterworks of Western thought.[42] The report also argued in favor of student proficiency in a foreign language, though it did not stress which one.[43]

Although Bennett anchored his vision of the humanities in Western intellectual history, he presented a more capacious conception of higher education. In addition to a focus on the West, he maintained, the report's "study group members recommended that undergraduates have some familiarity with the history, literature, religion, and philosophy of at least one non-Western culture or civilization."[44] Nevertheless, Bennett's critics often charged him with an ethnocentric dismissal of other cultures.[45] In addition, Bennett did not favor a fixed core curriculum, but stressed that an institution's "syllabi should change from time to time to take into account the expertise of available faculty and the result of continuing scrutiny and refinement."[46] Though it complains about ideological instruction and the perniciousness of relativism, the report, as befits a government study, comes across as a mild addition to the academic culture wars.[47] On the whole, *To Reclaim a Legacy* seems concerned with providing a Great Books–inspired rationale in favor of humanistic studies to combat technical and vocational education.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 3.

42. On the Great Books tradition, see chapter 2. Bennett explicitly rejects the old classical curriculum: "The solution is not a return to an earlier time when the classical curriculum was the only curriculum and college was available to only a privileged few" (ibid., 29).

43. Ibid., 9.

44. Ibid.

45. For criticism of Bennett's report, see Hirsch 1986: 118–19; George Levine 1989: 121–22, 128; Hardin 1990: 2; Bromwich 1992: 83–97; Dasenbrock 1992: 207; Franklin 1992: 209–10; Henry Louis Gates 1992c: 89, 103, 111; Pratt 1992: 9; Scott 1992: 213; Baker 1993: 272; Edmundson 1993a: 4. Cf. Hartman 2015: 226–27. For criticism of Bennett's detractors, see Barchas 1989–90: 29; Roger Kimball 1990: 4–8.

46. William J. Bennett 1984: 9.

47. This is certainly the case in comparison with some of the responses to the report. E.g., Henry Louis Gates (1992c) asserts that Bennett and Bloom represent the "antebellum aesthetic position" (89) and contends that Bennett believes "black people can have no canon, no masterpieces" (103). According to Baker (1993: 274), pedagogical traditionalists such as Bennett sanction campus violence against minorities.

Education, Democracy, and Allan Bloom

Bennett's report remained an important text throughout the culture wars—much cited and much maligned. But its influence paled in comparison with Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, which first appeared in bookstores in February 1987. By this time, the academic feuds were heating up. In 1985, the conservative group Accuracy in Academia was founded to monitor ideological imbalance and radical hijinks on American campuses. During the same year, prominent and controversial poststructuralist literary scholar Stanley Fish began a stint in Duke University's English department and commenced with a much-discussed plan to recruit modish professors there.[48] Around this time, demonstrations popped up on campuses throughout the nation, as many students urged their institutions to divest from apartheid South Africa. In the month prior to the release of Bloom's polemic, much-ballyhooed protests regarding Stanford University's Western Culture program came to a head, thanks to a rally led by Jesse Jackson against the perceived racism of this yearlong, mandatory Great Books sequence.[49] For the first time since the anti-Vietnam agitations on American campuses during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the American media and the American people in great numbers were turning their attention toward the nation's colleges and universities, and the time was ripe for a spirited work on the plight of higher education in the United States.

All the same, *The Closing of the American Mind* must be considered one of the most improbable best-selling books in American history. Bloom deemed his dense and lengthy tract, with a supportive preface by novelist Saul Bellow, "a meditation on the state of our souls, particularly those of the young, and their education."[50] The work explicitly focuses on students attending the most pres-

48. Commentaries on Duke's English and literature departments were legion. See, e.g., Berger 1988; Sykes 1988: 191–95; Adler et al. 1990; Roger Kimball 1990: xiii–xiv, 142–65; Cathy N. Davidson 1991; D'Souza 1991: 157–93; Atlas 1992: 54. Cf. Bartlett 1992: 122–23; Hartman 2015: 224. For discussions of Duke's Black Faculty Initiative, see Himmelfarb (1988); C. Vann Woodward (1992: 37–38).

49. The brouhaha surrounding Stanford's dropping of its Western Culture sequence in favor of a new program called Cultures, Ideas, and Values (CIV) earned a great deal of attention. For (often highly partisan) discussions of this change, see, e.g., anonymous 1998a, b; William J. Bennett 1988; Cheney 1988: 13; David Gates and Clifton 1988; Himmelfarb 1988; Workman 1988; Bloom 1989, 1990: 26, 31; Hook 1989: 31–32; Barchas 1989–90; Roger Kimball 1990: xii, 2–3, 27–32; Lindenberger 1990: 148–62; Searle 1990: 38–39; Sykes 1990: 61–65; D'Souza 1991: 59–93; Hunter 1991: 215–16; Martin Anderson 1992: 148; Atlas 1992: 32–35; Graff 1992a: 22; Mowatt 1992; Pratt 1992; Frank 1993: 148; Jacoby 1994: 104; Lawrence W. Levine 1996: 68–73. Cf. Hartman 2015: 227–30.

50. Bloom 1987: 19. For Bloom's earlier thoughts on the troubles plaguing liberal education in contemporary American universities, see Bloom 1982; 1990: 348–87. Many ideas in these essays recur in *The Closing of the American Mind*.

tigious American universities.[51] It diagnoses their supposed soullessness and details the philosophical and historical roots of their malaise. Inspired by Plato's views on education,[52] Bloom contends that the university in a democratic society must be a space where one can challenge the prevailing nostrums of democracy itself. By encouraging tendencies alien to democracy, higher education can balance students' souls and strengthen their societies. Thus, according to Bloom, the university must encourage elitist philosophical contemplation anathema to the pragmatic leveling of American democracy.

Unfortunately, argued Bloom, American colleges since the late 1960s had failed in this regard. Instead of serving as a check on the potential excesses of American life, these institutions encouraged democratic leveling and had become hostages of a specific, radical political movement.[53] In the book's lengthiest section, Bloom details the largely German ideas responsible for this catastrophe.[54] He asserts that a Nietzschean American Left infected society with a toxic relativism and mounted a politicized assault on American higher education. With great vitriol, Bloom likened this attack to the Nazis' destruction of the German university in the 1930s.[55] American institutions of higher learning, Bloom believed, now encouraged unbalanced souls in the young, thereby threatening the health and vibrancy of the nation's democracy. To remedy this, Bloom advocated a return to the Great Books tradition—a core curriculum based on the masterworks of Western culture.[56]

The Closing of the American Mind is hardly easy reading. Various features of the work render it difficult to assimilate. Bloom, a Straussian academic who never previously sought the limelight,[57] possessed a cryptic, occasionally indecipherable prose style. His book, moreover, presents long disquisitions on the thought of Locke, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Weber, Heidegger, and various other intellectual luminaries, often without offering sufficient context and explanation for the general reader. It is hard to imagine that Bloom aimed to court massive publicity with chapter titles such as "The Nietzscheanization of the Left or Vice Versa," and "From Socrates' *Apology* to Heidegger's *Rektoratsrede*."

With an eye toward potential sales, Robert Asahina, Bloom's editor at Simon and Schuster, decided to place the author's curmudgeonly estimations of

51. Bloom 1987: 22.

52. See Wake 1991.

53. Cf. Bloom 1990: 237, where he suggests that his teacher, Leo Strauss, harbored similar views.

54. Bloom 1987: 141–240. Cf. Bloom 1990: 379–80.

55. Bloom 1987: 221, 314.

56. Ibid., 343–44. Cf. Bloom 1990: 359–60.

57. For Strauss and his influence, see, e.g., Bloom 1990: 11–12, 235–55.

contemporary college students—with their nihilistic relativism, their libidinal rock music, and their lax sexual habits—at the book's front.[58] This strategy undoubtedly contributed to the work's financial success, but rendered it a more difficult read. After all, *The Closing of the American Mind* details the supposed effects of the New Left's takeover of the university before it discusses the history and intellectual pedigree of the takeover itself.

For this reason, it should not prove surprising that many reactions to the book ignored or misunderstood its thesis and fixated on Bloom's sporadically intemperate and overwrought rhetoric.[59] Bloom peppered *The Closing of the American Mind*, especially its first chapters, with candid and crabby assessments of black culture, rock music, feminism, and affirmative action. It comes across as a deeply personal book: a summation of the author's teaching career that demonstrates the grave impact the radical student assaults on Cornell University in 1969 had on Bloom, then a young faculty member.[60]

After some initially supportive reviews, the book became the object of numerous, sometimes savage, attacks.[61] Many reviewers (especially those within the academy) pilloried Bloom as authoritarian, racist, sexist, elitist, and homophobic.[62] In an especially bellicose response to the work, David Rieff linked Bloom to Oliver North and declared that "men like Professor Bloom, their paychecks assured by right-wing foundations that have also been active in supporting the Contras, publish books decent people would be ashamed of having written."[63] This seems an interesting reaction, since Rieff's father, Philip Rieff, previously composed a book that offers many similar arguments.

There is much to criticize in *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom had

58. Piereson 2007: 8. See also Bloom 1993: 7. For discussions of Bloom's biography, the origins of the book, and its sales figures, see London 1993; James Miller 1997; Piereson 2007; Hartman 2015: 230–38. For a useful nonpartisan summary of its theses, see Wake 1991.

59. See Butterworth 1989.

60. For his discussion of the disruptions at Cornell, see Bloom 1987: 347–56. Cf. Bloom 1990: 368–69.

61. Assessments of *The Closing of the American Mind* are legion. For starters, see the contributions to Stone 1989, which contains a useful mix of reactions. See also Nussbaum 1987; Rieff 1987; Hayden 1988; Butterworth 1989; George Levine et al. 1989: 2–3; Christensen 1990: 453; Henry Louis Gates 1992c: 89, 111 and 1992: xvi; Giroux 1992: 117–19; Hardin 1990: 2; Sizemore 1990: 77, 79–80; Page Smith 1990: 148; Atlas 1992: 26–32, 111–13; Bérubé 1992: 129–30; Bromwich 1992: 214–20; Diamond 1992: 93–94; Graff 1992a: 72–74; Lanham 1992: 32, 45; Pratt 1992: 9–10; Sedgwick 1992; Baker 1993: 272, 276; London 1993; Jones 1994: 386–89; Dickstein 1994: 45; Jacoby 1994: 24–25, 35, 46, 111–12; Gitlin 1995: 40, 185–86; Lawrence W. Levine 1996: 6, 19; James Miller 1997; Yamane 2001: ix, 132–36; Piereson 2007. For Bloom's response to the reviews of his work, see Bloom 1990: 13–31.

62. In retrospect, this last charge seems peculiar, given that Bloom was himself gay. After Bloom's death, Saul Bellow (2000) composed a novel loosely based on Bloom's life that discusses Bloom's sexual proclivities. On Bellow's novel, see Hartman 2015: 235–36.

63. Rieff 1987: 960. For Bloom's response to this review, see Bloom 1990: 16.

a penchant for making cavalier generalizations. Though such pronouncements (about, for example, the depths of student relativism) lent the book a sense of boldness, they occasionally veer toward caricature. The same can be said about overstatements Bloom offered throughout the book: for example, the problems of the American university, however serious, surely did not rise to the level of the Nazi destruction of German higher education. One can also criticize the work's failure to ground its assessments in the history of American higher education.

The Closing of the American Mind's bursts of curmudgeonly elitism and ill-advised overgeneralizations are unfortunate, because they rendered the book easier for critics to dismiss. And this is a mistake because Bloom's opus, for all its flaws, amounts to a powerful indictment of American higher education and its impact on the young.[64]

In the fuss over *The Closing of the American Mind*, few if any critics appeared to notice the pragmatic elements lying behind Bloom's vision of a suitable approach to American higher education. By arguing in favor of the Great Books, Bloom promoted his subdiscipline to a privileged place in the academic firmament. Political theory arguably relies more on a canon of heralded authors than does any other field in contemporary academia. Teaching political theory is impossible without mention of Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Locke, Rousseau, and other canonical thinkers. Some peculiarities associated with Bloom's approach to the Great Books—its fundamental ahistoricism, for example—can be seen as related to the vicissitudes of Bloom's discipline. His monograph not only plumps for the Great Books, but also provides a vision of higher education that grants political philosophy pride of place.[65]

Radicals with Benefits

The wild success of Bloom's book launched a veritable cottage industry; numerous traditionalistic scholars and journalists tried their hands at jeremiads aimed at the American university. Among the most popular additions to the genre was Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals*, which Harper and Row published in 1990.

By this time, the academic culture wars had witnessed a variety of well-

64. As James Miller (1997) and Yamane (2001: 135–36), opponents of Bloom's views, noted.
65. See Bloom 1987: 377. Cf. Bloom 1990: 352, 377, 379.

publicized controversies. In the summer of 1987, for example, Ortwin de Graef, a graduate student, discovered that late Yale English professor Paul de Man (1919–83), an eminent proponent of deconstructionist approaches to literary criticism, had contributed a slew of dubious columns to two collaborationist newspapers in Nazi-occupied Belgium during World War II. Traditionalistic critics pounced on this discovery, attempting to use de Man's unsavory—and at times anti-Semitic—early writings to highlight the purported dangers of deconstructionist nihilism.[66] On February 9, 1988, the *Harvard Crimson*, Harvard University's daily newspaper, printed a student article charging history professor Stephan Thernstrom with racial prejudice, in part because Thernstrom had read from the journals of slave owners to his Peopling of America class. To critics of higher education, this episode amounted to a witch hunt that demonstrated the appalling intellectual conformity at American institutions of higher learning.[67] In spring 1988, Stanford's Faculty Senate, bowing to student pressure, voted to replace the university's Western Culture sequence with Cultures, Ideas, and Values (CIV), a program to some degree more amenable to antitraditionalists' educational designs.[68] By the fall of 1990, the national debate over "political correctness" (PC) on campus commenced with a *New York Times* article explaining—and ridiculing—the phenomenon.[69] The piece, which offered a report on the recently concluded annual conference of the Modern Language Association (MLA), bears a title that sums up its flippant attitude toward its subject: "Literary Critics Find Politics Everywhere."

Kimball, a former doctoral candidate in philosophy at Yale University then serving as the managing editor of the conservative culture journal the *New Criterion*, covered some of these controversies and numerous others in *Tenured Radicals*. A work of polemical journalism, *Tenured Radicals* asserts that "the academic study of the humanities is in a state of crisis."[70] Despite this broad indictment of the humanities, the book focuses the brunt of its author's scorn on departments of English, French, and comparative litera-

66. See esp. Lehman 1991. For other reactions to and discussions of the controversy, see Sykes 1988: 182; Christensen 1990: 438–55; Roger Kimball 1990: 12–13, 96–115; D'Souza 1991: 191–92; Atlas 1992: 35; Paul Berman 1992b: 16–17; Edmundson 1993a: 20; Jacoby 1994: 165–66; Ellis 1997: 130–31; Hartman 2015: 238–41.
67. See Short 1988: 46–47; Finn 1989: 19; Sykes 1990: 56; D'Souza 1991: 194–97, 1992: 13–14; Rosa Ehrenreich 1991: 57–58; John Taylor 1991: 32–34; Martin Anderson 1992: 147; Wiener 1992.
68. On this topic, see above.
69. Bernstein 1990. For other journalistic discussions of political correctness, see Adler et al. 1990; Mabry 1990; DePalma 1991; John Taylor 1991; Abramowitz 1992; Paul Berman 1992a. For discussions of the journalistic coverage of the topic, see Alter 1994: 8; Delbanco 1994: 35; Dickstein 1994: 42–43; Jones 1994; Kramer 1994: 74; Sidorsky 1994: 253. Cf. Hartman 2015: 242–48.
70. Roger Kimball 1990: xi.

ture. Although Kimball also expends some energy excoriating professors of women's studies, architectural studies, and art history, he includes no disparagement of classical studies.[71]

Like Bloom, Kimball highlighted what he took to be the wretched condition of the nation's most prestigious colleges and universities. He argued that erstwhile 1960s radicals were destroying humanistic education in the US by refusing to transmit Western cultural heritage to their students.[72] Instead, these "tenured radicals," Kimball believed, were engaged in tendentious political posturing and hermetic word games. Such professors routinely used their classrooms to proselytize for their political views, thereby assaulting the traditions of Western high culture.

Tenured Radicals shares some themes with *The Closing of the American Mind* but is a different sort of book. Whereas Bloom was given to airy philosophical musings, Kimball comes across as more grounded. *Tenured Radicals* features, inter alia, Kimball's appraisals of colloquies on the state of the humanities that took place on various campuses. The book also ridicules the voguish published work of postmodernist academic eminences. In some sense the blueprint for later assaults on the university, *Tenured Radicals*—as even some of its stalwart critics recognized—was, along with Bloom's work, the best of the traditionalistic broadsides.[73] Kimball seems particularly adept at exposing a species of groupthink on university campuses; this renders his reporting on various panel discussions on the humanities especially entertaining.[74] Further,

71. The closest Kimball comes to condemnation of classical studies is his negative appraisal of the opening remarks Sheila Murnaghan, an associate professor of classics at Yale University, offered at a May 1987 symposium on literary theory and the university curriculum at Yale's Whitney Humanities Center (1990: 10–11). As Kimball related them, however, Murnaghan's sentiments did not pertain to the study of classical antiquity.

72. The academic culture wars saw much discussion of the supposition, associated primarily though not exclusively with Roger Kimball 1990, that current radical professors in the United States were former 1960s student protesters. For examples and appraisals of this contention, see Ericson 1975; Balch and London 1986: 42–43; Short 1988: 49; Searle 1990: 38; Page Smith 1990: 282; Sykes 1990: 21; D'Souza 1991: 17–18; Lehman 1991: 73–74; John Taylor 1991: 36; Atlas 1992: 57; Bérubé 1992: 133; Bromwich 1992: 118–19; Brustein 1994: 26; Jacoby 1994: 162; Wolfe 1994: 283; Lawrence W. Levine 1996: 7–8; Ellis 1997: 207; Goodheart 1997: 166. For discussion of the prominence of Marxists and Marxist approaches to scholarship on American campuses since the 1970s, see Ollman and Vernoff 1982. According to Jacoby (1987: 266), academic life tamped down former radical enthusiasms among the professoriate. Menand (1991: 54) argues that the spirit of the 1960s does not live on in PC academic departments.

73. See esp. Bérubé 1992, a detractor of Kimball's who nevertheless asserts that he "is a witty and capable writer" (131) and concludes that he and Bloom were "the most intelligent" of the academic traditionalists (134). Cf. Gray 2012: 103 n. 22.

74. Roger Kimball (1990) criticizes various speakers at symposia such as "The Humanities and the Public Interest," hosted in spring 1986 by the Whitney Humanities Center at Yale (57–75) and a panel discussion held in September 1989 at Williams College, "Crisis in the Humanities?" (167–89).

Kimball, unlike other traditionalist critics, was well read in the work of leftist professors from different disciplines. Although his detractors asserted that he offered tendentious impressions of this scholarship, Kimball had at least experienced it firsthand.

Despite its strengths, *Tenured Radicals* also possesses shortcomings, some of which also mar the work of less compelling journalistic accounts. Throughout the book, Kimball's grasp of the history of American higher education appears weak. As John Searle, an insightful critic of the work, argues, "Kimball offers no coherent alternative vision of what higher education in the humanities should consist in. He simply takes it for granted that there is a single, unified, coherent tradition, just as his opponents do, and he differs from them in supposing that all we need to do is to return to the standards of that tradition."[75] But this, as Searle points out, is impossible. The canon was never set in stone, and higher learning in the US was not one long exercise in exposing students to the Great Books.

One also wonders about the prospect of overstatement on Kimball's part. *Tenured Radicals* offers readers the impression that virtually all humanities professors at prestigious American institutions were busy deconstructing the heteronormativity and phallologism of Bugs Bunny cartoons. What percentage of humanities scholars were "tenured radicals"? How typical were the sorts of intellectual approaches detailed in the book, and what effects did they have on the teaching of students? Kimball never explicitly answers these questions, and he has no trouble citing academics who agree with his traditionalistic take on the academy's woes.[76] This suggests that humanities departments at various American colleges and universities were not solely the preserve of leftists. The book's heavy focus on departments of English and comparative literature, furthermore, leaves us in the dark about the state of other fields in the humanities.[77]

75. Searle 1990: 37.

76. Roger Kimball (1990): e.g., Jacques Barzun (186), Walter Jackson Bate (159–60), Brigitte Berger (15), Allan Bloom, David Bromwich (74), Frederick Crews (xiii, 32–32, 80, 116, 148), Gertrude Himmelfarb (177–80, 181–84), Sidney Hook (69–70), Alan Charles Kors (69–70), Edward Shils (186), and Thomas Short (19, 42).

77. For criticisms of Roger Kimball 1990, see, e.g., Bérubé 1992: 131–34; Edmundson 1993a: 8; Fraiman 1993: 223, 227, 234–35; Kerrigan 1993: 169; Jones 1994: 388–89; Gitlin 1995: 173, 177; Lawrence W. Levine 1996: 23–24; Oakley 1997: 64–65; Hartman 2015: 249. Rosenblatt (1990) and Searle (1990: 37–40) prove largely sympathetic to the book. Roger Kimball 1991b attempts to answer some of the book's critics; he (1996b) also criticizes Gitlin 1995.

A Shed Full of Axes to Grind

Critics of the academic culture wars' traditionalist tracts had a tendency to paint them all with the same broad brush: one frequently reads their authors' names offered like a laundry list, as if their contentions were identical.[78] Mary Louise Pratt, then a professor of Spanish and Portuguese at Stanford University, for example, labeled Bennett, Bloom, and Bellow the "Killer B's."[79] In reality, the traditionalists' attacks, though similar in some respects, varied in both their emphases and quality.

Take, for example, Dinesh D'Souza's 1991 offering, *Illiberal Education*, which, like Bloom's book, spent time on the *New York Times* nonfiction best-seller list.[80] In his broadside, D'Souza, a former editor at the *Dartmouth Review*, a right-wing student newspaper, who was then serving as a research fellow at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, focused almost exclusively on racial and ethnic matters. Although in places touching on such topics as academic feminism and poststructuralist literary criticism, the book demonstrates an overriding concern with the effects of affirmative action and multiculturalism on American higher education.[81]

The volume seems inferior to Bloom's and Kimball's efforts. *Illiberal Education* in places relies on quotations culled from undergraduate students the author met during his research. These students say some silly things. But why does D'Souza take these remarks so seriously, when he proves willing to overlook the sophomoric pugnacity of his own *Dartmouth Review*?[82] In addition, D'Souza proves capable of misleading his readers: the author's discussion of the demise of Stanford's Western Culture sequence, for example, appears especially deceitful.[83] As was not the case with Kimball and Bloom, moreover, D'Souza's

78. For examples of critics lumping together various traditionalist polemics, see Sizemore 1990: 77; Giroux 1992: 117; Pratt 1992: 9; Said 1992: 182 83; Baker 1993; Dickstein 1994: 45; Jacoby 1994: xiii; Jones 1994: 388–89; Gitlin 1995: 173; Lawrence W. Levine 1996: 3–4; Yamane 2001: 135–36.

79. Pratt 1992: 9.

80. See also D'Souza 1992; D'Souza and MacNeil 1992.

81. Discussions and criticisms of university affirmative action programs (for both student admissions and faculty hiring) abound in the literature on the academic culture wars: e.g., Bloom 1987: 92–97, 351; Himmelfarb 1988; Short 1988; Damon 1989; Finn 1989: 20–21; Hook 1989: 31; Thernstrom 1989; Kramer 1990: 8, 1994: 72–73; Page Smith 1990: 121; Sykes 1990: 46–51, 56; D'Souza 1991, 1992: 17–18; Carby 1992: 9, 16; Henry Louis Gates 1992b: 89–90; Perry 1992: 78; C. Vann Woodward 1992: 32–33; Jones 1994: 386; Searle 1994: 240; Ellis 1997: 216, 226–27.

82. D'Souza 1991: 19.

83. See ibid., 59–93. D'Souza's discussion of the CIV program focuses exclusively on one of its numerous tracks, which makes it appear as if CIV was more radical than was in fact the case. Of CIV's effects on students, D'Souza writes, "Their curricular diet now consists of little more than crude Western political slogans masquerading as the vanguard of Third World thought" (92). As even Barchas (1989–90), an opponent of the CIV change, noted, this is misleading. On this point, see also C. Vann Woodward 1992: 34–35; Jacoby 1994: 104; Gitlin 1995: 173–75.

discussions of the work of academic radicals leave one with the impression of a writer who is in over his head.[84]

One can point to many other sorts of traditionalist broadsides on higher education. Although conservative journalist Charles Sykes's two book-length contributions to the academic culture wars—*ProfScam* (1988) and *The Hollow Men* (1990)—seem like more frivolous and slapdash efforts, they are notable for their author's disesteem for the natural and social sciences, in addition to the humanities.[85] In fact, Sykes comes across as more disturbed by the advent of the German-influenced research institution than by the political inclinations of leftist faculty members.[86] Such books demonstrate—as do numerous other traditionalist jeremiads—that the attacks on higher education during the culture wars were hardly uniform.[87]

The "Cultural Left" Weighs In

Despite later grumblings about their belated retorts, some antitraditionalist academics soon responded to the attacks on the humanities.[88] In 1989, a group of humanists contributed *Speaking for the Humanities*, a report sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies. Its authors—George Levine, Peter Brooks, Jonathan Culler, Marjorie Garber, E. Ann Kaplan, and Catharine R. Stimpson—were established professors of English, French, or comparative literature, the disciplines that bore the brunt of traditionalists' criticisms. *Speaking for the Humanities* seldom discusses the classical world and offers no mention

84. For criticisms and assessments of D'Souza's work, see Cathy N. Davidson 1991: 10–11; Beers 1992: 111; Bérubé 1992: 139–43; Wiener 1992; Patricia J. Williams 1992: 194; C. Vann Woodward 1992; Edmundson 1993a: 8–9; Fraiman 1993: 234–35; Jacoby 1994: 33–42, 47–52; Jones 1994: 387–89; Gitlin 1995: 173–75; Lawrence W. Levine 1996: 7, 22. Short (1988) presents a very similar argument about race on campus.

85. See esp. Sykes 1988: 202–40.

86. For criticism of Sykes, see Lawrence W. Levine 1996: 22.

87. For other such traditionalistic critiques, see, e.g., Hirsh 1987; Cheney 1988; Kramer 1990, 1995; Lehman 1991; Martin Anderson 1992; Ellis 1997; Himmelfarb 1997. For a critique written by an author who did not share the conservative politics of some of his fellow traditionalists, see Page Smith 1990.

88. Jacoby (1994: xv) complained that leftist professors have presented "very little" in the way of a defense against the traditionalist objections. He further asserted, "Many critical reviews and essays have appeared, but for years nothing more. No leftist stepped forward with a book as sweeping and compelling as those by conservatives" (xvi).

of classical studies.[89] The pamphlet remains tied to an explanation of recent trends in the study of English literature, and, to a lesser degree, modern history.

Speaking for the Humanities presents a convincing rejoinder to traditionalists' assumptions about the decline in humanities enrollments. Although critics such as Bennett believed that ineffective teaching, radical politics, and recondite literary theory were largely to blame for recent decreases in the numbers of humanities majors, the authors of *Speaking for the Humanities* countered this thesis.[90] During the past few decades, they contended, economic conditions as well as demographic changes had pushed students toward business and other preprofessional majors. Were we to believe that teaching in these disciplines had improved by leaps and bounds since the 1970s?[91] Although student flight from the humanities likely had multiple causes, the traditionalists' failure to highlight economic matters rendered their conclusions dubious.

Other responses to the critics do not seem as potent, however. *Speaking for the Humanities* in places possesses a supercilious tone that some readers likely found off-putting. The pamphlet's defense of academic specialization offers a pertinent example. "It is precisely because teachers of the humanities take their subject seriously," its authors opined, "that they become specialists, allow themselves to be professionals rather than amateurs—belle lettrists who unselfconsciously sustain traditional hierarchies, traditional social and cultural exclusions, assuming that their audience is both universal and homogenous."[92] The report also declares that "professionalization makes thought possible by developing sets of questions, imposing norms which have then to be questioned and thereby promoting debate on key problems."[93] This seems like an ineffective way for the authors to win converts to their cause. Were nonacademics really incapable of *thought*?[94]

Speaking for the Humanities, however, was not the only early response to

89. For a brief mention of classical antiquity, see George Levine et al. 1989: 14.

90. William J. Bennett 1984: 2–3, 5–11, 13–24. Other traditionalist critics present similar theses about the decline in humanities enrollments: e.g., Lehman 1991: 29; Kramer 1995: 74; Tuttleton 1995: 82; Ellis 1997: 86. For figures on this decline, see Hunt 1997.

91. George Levine et al. 1989: 4–5, 21–23. Many others blamed vocationalism for the decline: e.g., Crews 1982: 65; George Levine 1989: 122; Bromwich 1992: 85–86; Franklin 1992: 209–10; Jacoby 1994: 3–4; Yamane 2001: 137–38; Stimpson 2002: 40. See also Cheney (1988: 4), who blames both preprofessionalism and the changes in the humanities themselves. Roger Kimball (1990: 35–36) found *Speaking for the Humanities*'s defense of the humanities for the drop in student enrollments convoluted. Oakley (1997: 66) claims that no such drop occurred at elite institutions.

92. George Levine et al. 1989: 6.

93. Ibid., 8.

94. For further criticisms of George Levine et al. 1989, see Roger Kimball 1990: 34–45; Searle 1990: 39–40.

the attacks on the university. In 1990, the leftist academic journal *South Atlantic Quarterly* dedicated an issue to the "politics of liberal education."[95] This special number owed its origins to a 1988 conference at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that attracted various prominent humanities professors. Among the contributions to the resulting issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* were Henry A. Giroux's call for using the university to promote "the principles of social justice to all spheres of economic, political, and cultural life"[96] and Alexander Nehamas's argument in favor of adding television-watching to the humanities curriculum.[97]

Although some of its essays present substantive and illuminating critiques of positions staked out by Bennett and Bloom, overall the volume has a preaching-to-the-converted feel. Philosopher Richard Rorty, in a less enthusiastic contribution to the symposium, labeled the conference "a rally of [the] cultural left."[98] If nothing else, the issue's authors demonstrate that antitraditionalist academics were just as capable of composing rollicking polemics as were their traditionalist opponents.

A few contributions to the volume come across quite differently, however.[99] One essay in the special issue was written by George A. Kennedy, a distinguished professor of classics at the University of North Carolina. Although supportive of poststructuralist ideas on the arbitrary nature of language,[100] Kennedy's piece seems markedly unlike the volume's other articles. Its author recognizes the uncomfortable position of classical studies in the conflict, given the heavy representation of ancient Greek and Roman authors in the established literary canon.[101] Kennedy's tone differs sharply from that of the other contributions: his essay contains no harsh rejoinders to Bloom. In fact, Kennedy eschews rhetorical excesses, grounding his contribution in a discussion of classical studies. Despite its role in promoting a "scientific" and "objective" approach to literary interpretation, he argues, the discipline "in the twentieth century has been more 'conservationist' than 'conservative.'"[102]

95. Gless and Smith 1990.

96. Giroux 1992: 121.

97. Nehamas 1992.

98. Rorty 1992: 227.

99. See, e.g., Sedgwick 1992, a touching tribute to Bloom, her former teacher at Cornell. This demonstrates Searle's overly broad generalizations in his review of the issue (1990: 36–37).

100. Kennedy 1992: 225.

101. Ibid., 217.

102. Ibid., 218.

Savior or Spin Doctor?

Special issues of *South Atlantic Quarterly* may have allowed like-minded academics to criticize traditionalistic opinions on the culture wars but were unlikely to reach the public at large. The antitraditionalists required a writer who would take their case to the people.

One contributor to the conference papers in *South Atlantic Quarterly* made such attempts, becoming the most prominent defender of the academic Left in the fight over American higher education. In a number of articles and one oft-cited book, Gerald Graff, a distinguished professor of English literature and education at the University of Chicago, argued in favor of a novel thesis that would supposedly end the partisan bickering that plagued the humanities during the academic culture wars.[103] Rather than allow the intellectual disagreements to fester, Graff supported "teaching the conflicts"—turning the feuds over the curriculum into the substance of college students' educations. He counseled "that the best solution to today's conflicts over the culture is to teach the conflicts themselves, making them part of our object of study and using them as a new kind of organizing principle to give the curriculum the clarity and focus that almost all sides now agree it lacks."[104] To do so, Graff favored team-teaching—a combination of traditionalists and antitraditionalists in the classroom to demonstrate the saliency of their agonistic opinions.

Beyond the Culture Wars (1992), Graff's book-length explication of his thesis, also contains ripostes to traditionalist criticisms of the contemporary academic humanities. Its author points out, for example, that these tracts contain much "exaggeration," "falsehood," and "hysteria."[105] Although he admits the existence of regrettable lapses in judgment among a few zealous professors, Graff on the whole contends that conservative alarmism about "tenured radicals" is misplaced.

Graff's discussion of the academic culture wars demonstrates its author's grasp of the history of American higher education. This rare trait allowed Graff the opportunity to place the contemporary struggle over the university in context.[106] The idea of "teaching the conflicts," moreover, has the benefit of compelling disputants to engage in genuine dialogue. In a conflict that featured much partisan soapboxing, this seemed a refreshing change of pace.

Despite these assets, Graff's contentions largely met with disapproval—

103. See, e.g., Graff 1992a, b; Graff and Cain 1989.
104. Graff 1992a: 12.
105. Ibid., 3.
106. Cf. Graff 1987, a history of the academic study of English literature.

especially, though not exclusively, from traditionalists.[107] According to James Tuttleton, an English professor at New York University, Graff's book is nothing more than an exercise in left-wing damage control. Tuttleton further asserts that Graff's pedagogical innovation lacks substance: "One's primary task," according to Tuttleton, "is that of teaching the student a subject, not staging a counterculture debate with colleagues."[108]

There were reasons on occasion to question Graff's sincerity. In *Beyond the Culture Wars*, a book aimed at general readers, Graff portrays professorial proselytizing as a rare and disturbing misuse of the classroom: "Good teachers *want* their students to talk back. Good students for their part appreciate teachers who take strong positions on controversial questions—they do not appreciate brainwashing."[109] In his contribution to *South Atlantic Quarterly*, however, Graff expressed a discordant attitude toward the use of the classroom as a bully pulpit. "Speaking as a leftist," he asserted, "I too find it tempting to try to turn the curriculum into an instrument of social transformation. But I doubt whether the curriculum (as opposed to my particular courses) can or should become extensions of the politics of the left."[110] In his mass-market book, Graff advertised himself as a moderate;[111] in the small-circulation *South Atlantic Quarterly*, he professed to be a member of the cultural Left.[112]

Troubles on All Sides

This examination of major voices in the academic culture wars suggests a number of criticisms for all sides of the debate. Salvoes in the struggles often seem

107. E.g., Roger Kimball 1990: 21–22; Searle 1990: 35; Bromwich 1992: 127–28; Iannone 1993: 44–47; Jacoby 1994: xvi, 14, 184–88; Phillips 1994: 196; Radosh 1994: 204–5; Tuttleton 1995; Ellis 1997: 222–26; Goodheart 1997: 155; Menand 1997: 214–15; James Miller 1997: 66. Both George Levine et al. (1989: 17–18, 20) and Paul Berman (1992b: 26) support Graff's idea of "teaching the conflicts." Bloom (1987: 380) presents sentiments that sound a bit like Graff's avant la lettre.
108. Tuttleton 1995: 88.
109. Graff 1992a: 9; emphasis in the original.
110. Graff 1992b: 64. Searle (1990: 35) denounced this position as implicitly supporting the indoctrination of students. This sort of discrepancy in Graff's writings perhaps lends some credence to Jerry L. Martin's (1994: 168) charge that pedagogical "transformationists" cannot be frank about their pedagogical goals when addressing the public.
111. E.g., Graff 1992a: 147–48.
112. The academic culture wars were not merely a two-sided affair. For some examples of "moderate" stances on the academic culture wars, see Hayden 1988; Atlas 1992; Bromwich 1992, 1997; Fernández 1992; Gitlin 1992, 1995; Harvey 1992; Pollitt 1992; Rorty 1992, 1993; C. Vann Woodward 1992, 1994; Kerrigan 1993; Alter 1994; Dickstein 1994; Goodheart 1994, 1997; Jacoby 1994; Sabin 1997. But the traditionalist and antitraditionalist polemics generated the most publicity in the debate. According to Roger Kimball (1990: 185), Boyte (1992: 178–79), and Phillips (1994: 195–96), there are no moderates in the debate.

disconnected from an understanding of the history of Western higher education. Some traditionalists appear to have believed that the Great Books tradition was the foundational core of liberal education in the United States; some of their adversaries seem similarly unacquainted with Renaissance humanism and its centuries-long effects on the academy.[113] Virtually no disputants in the culture wars connected the fate of American colleges and universities to the erstwhile prominence of classical studies.[114] This may have resulted from the fact that many of the combatants focused more on censuring their opponents than on presenting expositions of Western higher education. Journalists who touched on the academic culture wars may have been particularly susceptible to creating ahistorical responses to the debates, since articles replete with anecdotal evidence of PC excesses would appeal to more readers than would careful lucubrations on the history of American colleges and universities.

The lack of historical knowledge occasionally created confusion. Much traditionalist criticism of higher education targeted the professionalization of academic disciplines and increased scholarly specialization. Though some polemicists imagined that the history of American colleges and universities prior to the 1960s was a sustained golden age, this professionalism predates the Great Books tradition in the United States.

Overall, antitraditionalists often demonstrated greater historical knowledge of previous curricular feuds than did their opponents.[115] Even so, the antitraditionalists occasionally appear to offer the impression that the existence of earlier academic disputes nullified contemporary criticism of the humanities. Some used the history of higher education—however tenuously understood—to collapse distinctions among crises.[116] If disapproval of the academy was age-old, then the current critics' points were deemed a priori illegitimate. But not all feuds are the same. For example, according to David Yamane, a proponent of multicultural education, the addition of Shakespeare to the curriculum in the nineteenth century amounted to a political act.[117] And indeed it did. But did such an inclusion have the same effect on students' political views as more

113. See chapter 2; Bruce A. Kimball 1995; Proctor 1998.

114. From the traditionalist side, Bloom (1987: 304) comes closest to highlighting the former role of classical studies in Western education. See also Douglas (1992: esp. 9–18), who, unlike his fellow critics of the university, made some effort to connect its current state to its history.

115. Sykes (1988: 14–18, 1990: 79–90) was an exception to this conclusion: he was a traditionalist more in tune with this history, explicitly blaming the German research model for many of academia's purported woes. Graff (1992a), who perhaps showed the greatest sense of history in the debate, focused solely on his subject, English literature. Cf. Graff 1987.

116. E.g., George Levine et al. 1989: 14–15; Graff 1992a; Edmundson 1993a: 15 ("Whatever critics of the academy may say, the humanities have always been politicized from their beginnings"); Jacoby 1994: 6–8; Lawrence W. Levine 1996.

117. Yamane 2001: 129–31.

recent curricular changes? Would reading Shakespeare influence students to favor a certain political outlook or to vote for particular political candidates? One may reasonably doubt the possibility. Just because everything possesses a political dimension, it does not follow that everything is equally political. After all, the Great Books curriculum allowed the cultivation of radical political sensibilities in students.[118] Thus, in one of his contributions to the academic culture wars, critic Irving Howe (1920–93), founder and editor of the democratic socialist quarterly *Dissent*, attempted to "show that in fact the socialist and Marxist traditions have been close to traditionalist views of culture" and therefore fit well with the Great Books.[119] Can the contemporary multicultural curriculum allow the cultivation of conservative political sensibilities—except unintentionally—among its dissenters?

The common perception among antitraditionalists that the Great Books tradition is thoroughly political hints at another peculiarity of the debate. As Reed Way Dasenbrock notes, combatants in the academic culture wars tended to promote a vision of Western culture as monolithic, the result of a grand narrative from Greek antiquity to the present.[120] Few authors stressed that the Western tradition is itself multicultural—hardly the product of generations of all-knowing WASPs. "Our current models of culture," Dasenbrock contends, "all seem to be either/or (Eurocentric vs. Afrocentric, Western vs. non-Western, monocultural vs. multicultural), but culture itself is both/and, not either/or. Multiculturalism is simply the standard human condition."[121] The failure to recognize this reality speaks to a simplified impression of Western intellectual history on the part of many polemicists.

We can detect other problems with arguments advanced in the fight over the university. Although some critics contended that American colleges had been denuded of traditionalists and conservatives, many scholars advanced the traditionalist line from within the purlieus of academe. To be sure, numerous traditionalist critics, unlike their opponents, had careers as journalists or political appointees.[122] Yet several academics remained among the traditionalist ranks.[123] This does not presume ideological balance in the academy. But if the

118. As Hook (1989: 31), a former Marxist and supporter of traditionalist pedagogical positions, noted.

119. Irving Howe 1991: 41.

120. Dasenbrock 1992.

121. Ibid., 206. For a dissenting take on this approach to multiculturalism, see Hanson and Heath 1998b: 55–57.

122. Political figures: e.g., William J. Bennett 1984; Cheney 1988. Even President George H. W. Bush (1991) contributed an attack on political correctness. Journalists: e.g., Sykes 1988 and 1990; Roger Kimball 1990; Will 1992a, b.

123. E.g., Bate 1982; Bloom 1987; Himmelfarb 1988, 1997; Short 1988; Hook 1989; Ricks 1989,

humanities were supposedly as monolithically leftist as critics charged, what accounts for so much apostasy?

Regardless of our response to this question, the apparent dominance of antitraditionalists in the humanities suggests that the traditionalist critiques of American academia did not chiefly seek to reform higher education in the US, since doing so would prove a daunting prospect.[124] Rather, the traditionalists may have been interested in informing the general public about "tenured radicals" and their biases, thereby warning American parents and allowing their college-aged progeny to remain skeptical of the professoriate's ideas. If so, in this sense the traditionalist jeremiads have proven effective: contemporary Americans seem aware of academia's leftward tilt, and students often appear cynical about their professors' motives.[125]

Free-Market Radicals and Dirigiste Conservatives

A tour through the literature on the academic culture wars presents some apparent ironies. Many conservative voices opposed (explicitly or tacitly) aspects of American higher education influenced by the free market: for example, the free elective system, the spread of popular culture studies, and vocational education.[126] Their critics seemed correct to point out the reticence of some conservatives to acknowledge this fact. D'Souza, for example, hailed American universities as "tributes to the largesse of democratic capitalism,"[127] but disdained the application of free-market principles to the curriculum. In regard to Bloom's work, however, this critique misses the mark. Bloom—a thinker who demonstrates occasional opposition to capitalism and other conservative sacred cows—hoped that the American university would serve as a bulwark against the excesses of democratic capitalism and thus aimed for the university to be neither democratic nor capitalistic.[128]

1997; Clausen 1993; Alter 1994; Tuttleton 1995; Ellis 1997.

124. Bloom (1987: 342, 380) and Roger Kimball (2008: 7–8) demonstrated little faith in the prospects for reform.

125. See Menand 1991: 48–49; Hartman 2015: 222.

126. E.g., Roger Kimball (1990: xii–xiii, 39–45), Sykes (1990: 3), and Kramer (1995: 76, 78) opposed the study of popular culture, at least in humanities courses.

127. D'Souza 1991: 1.

128. See Bruce L. R. Smith, Mayer, and Fritschler 2008: 10. According to Werner Dannhauser (1995: 7), Bloom's good friend, "Allan had many right-wing views but was not really a conservative and refused to call himself one." Bloom himself wrote (1990: 17), "I am not a conservative—neo- or paleo-."

The cultural Left could be equally implicated in dissembling. Its proponents tended toward captiousness about the free market, but supported an elective-based curriculum defined by it. Even so, this criticism of leftist critics may occasionally miss its mark. Many such thinkers favored compulsory classes on multicultural topics; they were not, then, stalwart opponents of all curricular requirements.[129] Still, supporters of mandatory multicultural courses tended to favor a system of distribution requirements, rather than a fixed core curriculum.[130]

We can suggest more criticisms of the debate. Numerous contributions to the academic culture wars from all sides demonstrate a tendency to ignore substantive points made by opponents in favor of harping on weaker ones.[131] Thus, for example, many disparaged Bloom for his grouchy denunciations of modern university students,[132] but failed to take seriously (or even, in some cases, to address) the challenge he presented to multicultural visions of education. Detractors fumed about art critic Hilton Kramer's polemical denunciations of academic faddishness, but did not discuss his more substantial charges regarding the humanities' capitulation to categories of analysis supposedly more appropriate to the social sciences.[133] Similarly, some traditionalists regurgitated colorful anecdotes but kept silent about perceptive attacks on their positions. Kimball, for example, did not offer a sufficient defense of his conception of a proper university education, even after Searle criticized Kimball's failure to do so.[134] Such features gave the debate a parochial quality.

Academics who contributed to the conflicts were overwhelmingly distinguished, tenured professors, whose job security, previous scholarship, and current status allowed them to enter the fray as "public intellectuals." The public nature of the debate—its adjudication in books from popular presses and in major magazines and newspapers—led to the adoption of less rigorous standards of evidence than one often finds in peer-reviewed academic publications. Hence, culture warriors of various stripes often seemed content to score points, humiliate opponents, and paint their side as moderate and reasonable.

129. E.g., Damon 1989; Ted Gordon and Lubiano 1992: esp. 257.

130. Yamane (2001: 142–43), a proponent of multicultural education, however, favors a core curriculum.

131. There were however, some exceptions to this rule: e.g., Epstein 1992; Harvey 1992.

132. E.g., Hayden 1988: 20; Jacoby 1994: 46; Lawrence W. Levine 1996: 6, 13–14, 23. Cf. Butterworth 1989: 56, 58–59; James Miller 1997: 59.

133. Kramer 1995: 75. Cf. Will 1992b: 23. Sabin (1997: 90–91) notes the influence of social science methodologies on the courses taught in the English department at Amherst College.

134. See Roger Kimball 1991b: 11 for his response to Searle's criticisms (1990: 37).

Common Complaints

Although the combatants in the academic culture wars often disagreed profoundly on seminal matters, a few substantive points of agreement existed. Both traditionalists and their opponents, for example, tended to view preprofessionalism in higher education as a threat. To both sides, the liberal arts were integral to American education, and short-changing them in favor of undergraduate instruction in, say, business administration would prove disastrous. Conservative pundits may have been shy to link the increasing demand for vocational approaches in higher education to free-market capitalism, and radicals may have failed to link it to demographic changes in American colleges and universities, but they still agreed on the nature of the problem.

In recent years, some conservative thinkers have presented positions more favorable to pragmatic higher education.[135] Yet such was not the case at the peak of the academic culture wars, when all sides expressed faith in the importance of the humanities. One can see this in Bloom's dismissive gibes about preprofessional education and Kimball's censure of the University of Chicago for endeavoring to water down its curriculum to court more business majors and, therefore, alumni dollars.[136]

Contributions to the academic culture wars also occasionally express unease with the German research university tradition as a whole.[137] In this respect, conservative journalist Charles Sykes saw eye to eye with Tom Hayden, a founder of the prominent New Left organization Students for a Democratic Society. This speaks to unexpected overlap between traditionalist criticisms and radical student complaints during the protests of the late 1960s about the impersonality of the contemporary American "multiversity" and its disregard for student needs.[138] Even Bloom, who chronicled his abiding disdain for the student revolts in *The Closing of the American Mind*, related that "the first university disruptions at Berkeley were explicitly directed against the university smorgasbord and, I must confess, momentarily and partially engaged my sympathies."[139] Some traditionalists' criticisms of the research culture of American academia echoed the sentiments of 1960s student radicals.

135. E.g., Murray 2008.

136. Bloom 1982: 1544, 1987: 81, 369–71; Roger Kimball 1999. For this reason, Donoghue (2008: xv) was correct to separate Arnoldian critics such as Kimball from the threats to the academy posed by the business-model approach to higher education. Cf. Newfield 2008.

137. E.g., Cheney 1988: 8; Sykes 1988: 14–18, 1990: 61, 79–90; Hayden 1990; Page Smith 1990. Cf. Rieff 1985: 124.

138. For the notion of the American university as a "multiversity," see Kerr 1963.

139. Bloom 1987: 338.

Widespread agreement also existed about the impossibility of implementing a fixed canon. Even enthusiastic supporters of the Great Books recognized that the curriculum should not be set in stone. Furthermore, traditionalists such as Bennett, Sykes, and Page Smith criticized the university's overreliance on graduate student and adjunct labor, a point that has become common among a more recent wave of leftist assessments of contemporary American academia.[140] Despite the fact that many observers and participants were loath to admit it, some important common ground existed in the debate.

Necessity, the Mother of Invention

Although critics often focused on the ideological nature of the disputes over Great Books courses, profound professional reasons contributed to their demise. Teaching such classes remains time-consuming, especially in an academic environment that requires scholarly productivity and trains future professors as specialists. In such circumstances, distribution requirements were likely to replace a Great Books curriculum, since the former require less work from the faculty. Antitraditionalists could offer critiques of the Great Books on political grounds, but the movement away from such broad courses may also have been partly—if not primarily—pragmatic in motivation.[141]

In a perceptive addition to the culture wars debate, sociologist Alan Wolfe offered similarly hardheaded explanations for other antitraditionalist academic victories.[142] As Wolfe explains, antitraditionalists wooed college presidents and other senior administrators to their causes because they aimed to add new programs to the existing university. It remains easier to fundraise for such initiatives and easier for presidents to use them to make their mark as an institution's leader. Traditionalists, conversely, sought to restore the Great Books programs, to limit grade inflation, and to reestablish core curricula. Such goals were both difficult to implement and unlikely to appeal to the vanity of senior administrators. Even before the first shots in the academic culture wars were fired, there were pragmatic reasons to suppose that the traditionalist cause was doomed.[143]

140. William J. Bennett 1988: 15–16; Sykes 1988: 41–47; Page Smith 1990: 119. George Levine et al. (1989: 26) defend the use of adjunct labor. For more recent criticisms of the "neoliberal" university, see Kirp 2003; Bousquet 2008; Donoghue 2008; Newfield 2008.

141. For criticisms of the Great Books, see, e.g., Nussbaum 1987: 26; Lanham 1992: 46; Pratt 1992: 12–14; Frank 1993: 147; Jacoby 1994: 114–19. Bloom (1987: 344) offers his own criticisms of the Great Books but still suggests that it is superior to other approaches. Ogbu (1992) concludes that neither a Great Books program nor a multicultural curriculum will help minority students.

142. Wolfe 1994.

143. Hence the possibility that traditionalists sought to score political points rather than to

Accentuating the Positive

For all the potential clouds of the academic culture wars, there were numerous rays of sunshine. As critics noticed at the time, the feuds engaged a broad swath of the American reading public in a topic—higher education—typically deemed too dull to generate much interest. Despite the drawbacks associated with partisan polemics, many authors composed compelling, highly readable tracts that engrossed large numbers of Americans. In retrospect, the major incidents that spurred on the conflicts—the Paul de Man affair, Stanford's curricular changes, the brouhaha surrounding controversial Afrocentrist Leonard Jeffries, and the Sokal hoax, inter alia—seem interchangeable.[144] Different events could have taken their place, with no substantial effects on the issues at stake. In short, the fights over the university were propelled by ideas.

Although it was fashionable to lament the rabble-rousing character of culture wars jeremiads,[145] the conflicts made clear why the battle over the university was such a crucial struggle for American culture. These clashes presented an opportunity for professors—along with journalists, political figures, and other intellectuals—to address the public on matters of deep importance to the nation's future. In the midst of their pugnacious rhetoric, some culture warriors offered thoughtful considerations of the state of American higher education and presented interesting ideas.[146] Despite the rancor and oversimplifications, the tracts from the academic culture wars give the sense that ideas really matter.

Where Have All the Classicists Gone?

If nothing else, the academic quarrels of the 1980s and 1990s demonstrate the centrality of the English department to the humanities. Professors of English literature played an extraordinarily prominent role in the conflict, a phenomenon that had much to do with the fact that the English department was now the home of many of the Great Books and that the subject of English literature had witnessed profound disciplinary shifts. Although critics demonstrated concerns about other fields of study (e.g., women's studies, black studies, and film studies),[147] English was at the heart of the struggles.

In comparison with the heavy focus on departments of English literature, the discipline of classics hardly made a mark on the academic culture wars. Even traditionalistic critics of higher education yearned for college students to read the non-English Great Books in translation, rather than in their original languages. Conservatives such as Bennett and Sykes shuddered at the thought of a return to the classical curriculum of the antebellum American colleges.[148] Polemicists in search of material headed to MLA meetings for culture wars fodder;[149] they did not take in the colloquies of the American Philological Association (APA), the chief professional organization for classical scholars in the US and Canada.[150] Critics piled on the MLA's attempt to demonstrate that its ranks were not infested with radicals;[151] the APA felt no need to offer such a report.

One might have supposed that classical scholars and classical studies would play a substantive role in the academic culture wars. Many of the disputes pertained to classical antiquity. The relativism adopted by some poststructuralist literary theorists, for example, owed its origins to the sophists of fifth-century BC Greece; criticism of such perspectives blossomed in the works of ancient Greek philosophers. Hellenistic Greeks working at the library in Alexandria produced the West's first literary canon.[152] The term ***humanities*** has a Roman pedigree.[153] One can also detect the ways in which the cultural conflagrations of the late 1960s had affected classical scholarship: pessimism about the Vietnam War, for example, had helped usher in both the so-called Harvard School of

reform the academy.

144. On Paul de Man and the Stanford CIV change, see above. On Jeffries, see chapter 4; e.g., Berger 1990; D'Souza 1991: 7; Steinberg 1991; John Taylor 1991: 39–40; Henry Louis Gates 1992b: xvi; Graff 1992a: 34; West 1992: 327–28; Mirsky 1994: 189–92; Radosh 1994: 202; Sidorsky 1994: 253–54; Gitlin 1995: 175–76. On the Sokal hoax, see esp. Editors of *Lingua Franca* 2000. Cf. Hartman 2015: 250–51.

145. E.g., Brodie and Banner 1990: 3; Bromwich 1992; Baker 1993; Said 1993b: 119; Sedgwick 1993: 260–61; Jacoby 1994: xii–xvi; Searle 1994: 227; Goodheart 1997: 155; Kermode 1997: 170; Stimpson 2002: 39. Henry Louis Gates (1992b: xiii), however, appreciated the attention paid to literary studies as a consequence of the debate.

146. E.g., Epstein (1992: 153), who discussed the ways in which political correctness harmed the causes of the Left; Carby (1992: esp. 16–17), who contended that the multicultural curriculum assuaged white guilt without helping minorities; Ellis (1997: 138–39), who pointed out that if literary critics truly believed that politics was so important, they would be appropriating models from political science. For some lesser-known but compelling pieces from the period, see Hook 1989; Dasenbrock 1992; Jerry L. Martin 1994; Wolfe 1994.

147. For a well-known attack on women's studies from this period, see Sommers 1994. On the supposedly outsized role of academic feminism on the university in general, see Yllö 1989.

148. William J. Bennett 1984: 29; Sykes 1990: 82–83.

149. Critical appraisals of MLA meetings during the culture wars include Bernstein 1990; Roger Kimball 1991a; Jay 1992.

150. In 2013, members of the APA voted to change the name of the organization to the Society for Classical Studies. Because this book deals primarily with the history of American classics in the 1980s and 1990s, it refers to the APA except in chapter 6, which includes recommendations for the future.

151. For the MLA study itself, see anonymous 1991b. For appraisals of it, see, e.g., Shaw 1991; Morrisey, Fruman, and Short 1993; Oakley 1997: 72–75.

152. See Kennedy 1992: 219.

153. See, e.g., Proctor 1998: xxvi, 14–21.

Vergilian criticism and more faultfinding appraisals of Roman imperialism.[154] Many of the Great Books fell under the purview of classics departments. Classical studies had played an outsized role in Western higher education for centuries, and one might have thought that culture wars combatants would have emphasized this erstwhile prominence.

But this was not the case. In fact, many participants in the academic culture wars used the word *classics* to define any time-tested works of high culture, rather than to denote the study of Greco-Roman antiquity.[155] The Great Books—all of them—were "classics." By now the discipline of classical studies was thoroughly marginalized within the academy. Culture warriors proclaimed or denied a "crisis in the humanities," but seldom mentioned the field of classics—the wellspring of the humanities.

Antitraditionalists used the classics as the quintessential example of American higher education's prior exclusivity. Both traditionalists and antitraditionalists who mentioned the discipline tended to portray the field and its subject matter as stodgy and elitist.[156] By likening postmodern literary theorists to Socrates, for example, Graff attempted to convince readers that these thinkers were as old-fashioned in their proclivities as the most traditionalistic field in the academy.[157]

Yet such mentions amounted to quick detours from arguments that chiefly pertained to departments of English and comparative literature. According to critics, proponents of multicultural education demonstrate little concern for language instruction;[158] such a perspective appears inhospitable to a discipline that centers on the translation of Latin and ancient Greek. In short, the field of classics found itself in a peculiar position: part of the division of the university so "radical" that it was in crisis, but a discipline so outmoded that it failed to win even the traditionalists' assent.

Given the marginalization of Greco-Roman studies in the academic culture wars, it is not shocking to discover that classical scholars played a peripheral

154. On the Harvard School, see, e.g., Martindale 1997: 8; Richard F. Thomas 2001: 224. For examples of this scholarly approach to Vergil, see, e.g., Commager 1966. For an important critical estimation of Roman imperialism from a post-Vietnam intellectual milieu, see Harris 1979.

155. E.g., Sizemore 1990: 77; Sykes 1990: 64; Irving Howe 1991: 47; Martin Anderson 1992: 150; Atlas 1992: 134; Bromwich 1992: 192; D'Souza 1992: 19; Graff 1992b: 54; Jay 1992: B2.

156. E.g., William J. Bennett 1984: 29; Minnich 1992: 183, who disparages the ancient Greeks; Pratt 1992: 10, who suggests that it is especially notable when a classicist supports a nonhierarchical approach to the study of culture; Wolfe 1994: 287. D'Souza (1991: 62) quotes Stanford history professor Clayborne Carson scoffing at the notion of people reading the works of Vergil and Cicero.

157. Graff 1992a: 15, 55.

158. E.g., Bloom 1987: 320, 352, 376; Fox-Genovese 1991: 48; Bromwich 1992: 173–74; Lilla 1994: 130. Oakley (1997: 68) sees language training as unfriendly to ideological posturing and cites classics as an example.

role in the conflicts. In comparison with professors of English or modern history, very few classicists offered wide-ranging assessments of the curricular battles writ large.[159] The few classical scholars who contributed to the general debates tended to shy away from polemics in favor of more detached perspectives, as if to say that they had no dog in this fight.[160] Only in regard to the *Black Athena* controversy, furthermore, did a classics-based disagreement register a substantive impact on the culture wars.

Why was this the case? What explains the negligible role of classical studies in the academic culture wars? The next chapter presents a brief history of the role of classics in American higher education and suggests some answers.

159. One exception to this rule: Thornton 1999. Yet this book was published by a small conservative press and did not receive much attention. Even in a contribution to a symposium on political correctness, Lefkowitz (1994a) chose to focus the brunt of her attention on classical antiquity. Many classical scholars during the culture wars contributed to debates on the study of Greco-Roman antiquity.

160. E.g., Kennedy 1992; D'Arms 1997, who discusses funding trends in the humanities as a whole.

Classics, the Culture Wars, and Beyond

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