The story of Alfred Packer, who devoured his companions to fend off starvation in the Colorado mountains, inspired a musical by South Park's Trey Parker.

Killer: Packer called human flesh "the sweetest meat I have ever tasted."

Staggering out of the snowbound Colorado peaks, fortune hunter Alfred Packer claimed he had been abandoned by his five comrades and had survived for two months by eating nothing more than rosebuds.

But underneath all the grime Packer looked suspiciously well fed. He also had a butcher's knife tucked into his belt and his mates' cash stuffed in his pockets.
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Packer was arrested on suspicion of murder and eventually confessed to an even more harrowing deed - cannibalism.

He claimed the group became lost in a blizzard while trying to cross the mountains in February 1874 and ran out of food.

When two men died of exhaustion, their desperate comrades devoured them and abandoned their bodies before turning on each other.

Packer, then 31, insisted he only survived by killing his last companion, Shannon Bell, in "self-defence" after the bigger man attacked him with a rifle butt.
Grim find: The grave of Packer's victims

But his story quickly unravelled as more evidence emerged. Most damning was that Packer confessed to developing a taste for human flesh. Interrogators said he admitted it was "the sweetest meat I ever tasted" and he preferred it to civilised food.

Newspapers, convinced Packer killed all five men to eat them, branded him "the human hyena". But before his trial he bribed his jailer and escaped.

Read more: The world's most infamous cannibal killers pictured

Days later two artists stumbled on his victims' bodies in the western wilderness. They were dumped together, a rotting mess covered by blankets.

One corpse had no head, while the others were missing chunks of flesh that Packer allegedly hacked off to eat. As well as a folk song, the sickening tale more recently inspired a musical by TV's South Park creator Trey Parker.

Gruesome tale: Harold Schechter's book on Packer

He said: "This was one of the most gruesome and ghoulish crimes in US history. The fact he murdered these men to survive made him a monster in many people’s eyes, like something in a modern horror film.

"There was so little government in the Wild West that these frontiersmen developed an ethos of trusting each other. For them Packer embodied the nightmare that your comrade may betray you in a crisis."

Packer was not the first infamous US cannibal. Nearly 30 years earlier 87 travellers, the Donner Party, were trapped throughout winter by heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada mountains.

Just 48 survived and many of those had eaten the ones who died – even their relatives.

And before then, in 1820, eight out of 20 sailors adrift in three lifeboats survived by eating their friends who had died of thirst and starvation after a sperm whale sank US ship The Essex in the Pacific.

That story, which inspired the novel Moby-Dick, has been made into a film, In The Heart of the Sea, released on December 11 and starring Chris Hemsworth.

Yet Packer stands apart because he was accused of killing his victims before devouring them, rather than eating those who died of natural causes.

After escaping justice he avoided capture for nine years before he was spotted by a fellow prospector in a saloon in the neighbouring state of Wyoming.

He had changed his name to John Schwartz - but the two missing fingers on his left hand, the result of a mining accident in the 1860s, gave him away and he was arrested.

Read more: Chris Hemsworth goes through shocking weight loss for In The Heart of the Sea

Now his victims’ bodies had been found, he changed his story on why they were piled together instead of scattered across the mountains, as he had previously said.
Again his story began to sound increasingly shaky when he stood trial in Lake City, Colorado, and a group of Ute Indians revealed they saw him camped contentedly by the Gunnison River in early spring.

When Packer spotted them he quickly grabbed something from the ground and threw it into the water. Later the tribe found a human arm, minus much of its flesh, washed up on the river bank.

Packer was convicted of murder in April 1883 and sentenced to death by hanging, later commuted to 40 years in prison.

Prof Schechter said: "It's not hard to believe Packer committed these murders, as he kept changing his story."

"It also seems very suspicious that he happily settled in for two months and helped himself to the bodies. He displayed no remorse - and from what I've read, human flesh tastes pretty good."

But not all agreed Packer was guilty. The former soldier turned drifter was a rough character even by Wild West standards and he suffered from epileptic fits that terrified many fellow fortune hunters and made him unpopular with them.

So several men who travelled with him before his ill-fated trip were only too willing to think the worst and testify against him. Some, however, felt the evidence against him was unfair and the jury too hasty.
One journalist on the Breckenridge Daily Journal branded the trial a travesty and suggested Packer's story changed as he was afraid to tell the truth when he emerged frozen and starved from the mountains.

Reporter Polly Pry, of the Denver Post, went further. She portrayed Packer as a near romantic figure who embodied the resilience and resourcefulness needed to survive on the frontier.

He was paroled in 1901 due to her campaign and, although he had planned to open a saloon to capitalise on his infamy, he took a job at Pry's paper as a security guard. And by the time he died, aged 65, in 1907 he had even become a vegetarian.

Wilderness: The mountain scene where the victims were found

Prof Schechter said: "Even though Packer was probably guilty his trial was a travesty. He should have been acquitted on the basis of reasonable doubt, as no one could prove what happened in the wild. But such was the public animosity towards him he couldn't get a fair trial."

Several scientists have tried to determine whether Packer was guilty.

American Academy of Forensic Sciences chairman James Starrs exhume Packer's alleged victims in 1988 and found gashes on the arms suggesting they tried to defend themselves against a hatchet.

Starrs claimed this proved Packer did murder the five men but Professor David Bailey, from the Museum of Western Colorado, had a different theory.

He studied a rusted Colt revolver found at the grave and found the bullets in the chamber matched gunshot residue found on the wool fabric of Shannon Bell's clothing.

He concluded that Packer had told the truth, albeit belatedly, and that Bell murdered the other four men before being shot dead by Packer.

But Prof Bailey failed to convince other scientists, who argued that just because Packer shot Bell it did not necessarily mean he had not killed the rest with a hatchet.

Prof Schechter feels that Packer was guilty but that history should not judge the Colorado cannibal harshly. "The most civilised man can be reduced to barbarity when facing starvation," he said.
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Algebra Scores Prompt Second Look at Revamped Regents Exams

By KATE TAYLOR  NOV. 30, 2015

Here is the thorny math problem facing New York State education officials: If the percentage of students passing the Algebra I exam falls to 63 percent from 72 percent, and the passing grade is scheduled to increase by 14 points in coming years, should the test be made easier?

In 2013, concerned that high school graduates were not prepared for college, the State Board of Regents revamped the exams students must pass to graduate, starting with the English and Algebra I tests. The board decided that, where previously students needed a score of only 65 on a 100-point scale to pass, in coming years they would have to score at a “college- and career-ready” level, which this year was deemed to be a 79 in English, and a 74 in Algebra.

The result: On the 2015 Algebra I exam, which was supposed to align with the new Common Core curriculum, the percentage of students passing fell to 63 percent, down nine points from the old exam last year. And less than a quarter of students scored at the college-ready level. In New York City, which has a concentration of poor and minority students, only 52 percent of students passed the 2015 exam, down from 65 percent the previous year on the old exam. Just 16 percent reached the “college-ready” level.
Confronted with the consequences of higher standards, the Regents, like education officials across the country, are now rethinking them.

This fall, they established a committee to study the results on the new exams to determine, among other things, whether the bar for passing, which students would have to meet starting in 2022, had been set too high. (They had originally said the class of 2017 would need the higher scores to pass, but last year decided to push that back.)

MaryEllen Elia, the state education commissioner, said no decision had been made. “Does it look reasonable right now?” she said of the “college-ready” standard. “I would say, no, it doesn’t. And I would say, what we have to do is we have to keep our eye on that.”

Passing the old algebra Regents was already a struggle for many students. An analysis by the Center for New York City Affairs at the New School found that, among students who entered city high schools in 2010, three in 10 failed the exam on their first try. Students who failed the first time had to retake it an average of twice more to graduate. To help those students, schools had to devote more resources to teaching remedial algebra, rather than other, higher level math courses.

Before the new exam was given, the Regents had said they intended to set the grading so the same number of students passed as had before, but that did not happen.

Mark Dunetz, the vice president for school support at New Visions for Public Schools, an organization that supports a large network of high schools, said that while the algebra exam alone did not keep many students from graduating, many students ended up taking the exam five, six or seven times.

“It’s hard to quantify the impact of something like that,” he said.

To get students over the new, even higher threshold, New York City would need a “Marshall Plan” for teaching math, said Kim Nauer, the education project director at the Center for New York City Affairs. She noted that only 41 percent of this year’s sixth graders — the first who will be required to reach the new standard — scored at grade level on math tests in the spring.
"You don't have much time left to get them to a point where they can pass algebra and graduate," Ms. Nauer said.

The city's Education Department is "in a panic about this," said Uri Treisman, a professor of mathematics at the University of Texas who has advised the department on plans to improve math instruction in middle and high school.

Among the ideas the city is considering: having fifth graders take math with a specialized instructor instead of one teacher for all subjects; teaming up with local universities to get more sixth- and seventh-grade math teachers certified in math instruction; creating summer programs for middle- and high-school students who are struggling in math; and training middle-school and algebra teachers in how to address students' "math anxiety."

Mayor Bill de Blasio, a Democrat, also recently pledged that by 2022, all students would have access to algebra in eighth grade, and all students would complete algebra by the end of ninth grade.

The investment required is clear at Park East High School in Manhattan, where most students come in doing math below grade level, but where 91 percent of students who took the Algebra I Regents this year passed it.

Freshmen have two periods of algebra each day. Each class has two teachers: While one leads the main class, another pulls out small groups of students who need more individual attention.

The head of the math department, Lauren Brady, could not find a curriculum that she felt fully aligned with the Common Core standards, so she and the other two teachers wrote their own.

But to devote so much time to algebra, ninth graders are no longer taking art, music and health. Now Ms. Brady and the other teachers are trying to pare the curriculum to give the students more time for other subjects.

And some people wonder if it is all worth it.

Algebra is a stumbling block not only for high school students, but also for
students in community colleges, many of whom founder in algebra-based remedial courses. Public colleges hoping to increase their graduation rates have been asking whether algebra should be the default math course. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, working with Dr. Treisman, has created courses in statistics and quantitative reasoning that are meant to be both more engaging and more practical for many students than college-level algebra. Close to 50 community colleges now offer the courses.

In “The Math Myth: And Other STEM Delusions,” to be published by the New Press in March, Andrew Hacker, an emeritus professor of political science at Queens College, argues that it is wrongheaded to force all students to study algebra.

But Dr. Treisman said that allowing students to graduate from high school without taking algebra “would dramatically reduce their options.” And he said there was value in making students pass an algebra exam to graduate, as well.

“There’s a very solid research base for at that level having external accountability for course quality,” he said. In states that have not had such accountability, he said, “ethnographic studies of algebra, particularly in low income schools, showed that almost no algebra was being taught.”

While Archie Rand was eating lunch at an Indian restaurant in Manhattan’s East Village in 2014, his agent told him and his wife that she’d landed a book deal to publish his series of 614 canvases—one per Old Testament commandment and an extra title painting. “I thought that some hippie in Saskatchewan had proposed mimeographing the text onto Xeroxed sheets of recycled Yoo-hoo labels,” said Rand, who serves as a professor of art at Brooklyn College.

Rand had reason to be skeptical. Back in 2006, when I viewed the works in Rand’s studio—two years before they hung very temporarily at a Brooklyn warehouse—I learned that it took Rand and two assistants three days just to prime the canvases.

“It took a while for the impact of this to dawn on me before the three of us did a happy dance in the back of the restaurant,” Rand said of his publishing deal.

Writing in these pages in 2006, I was skeptical of the series’s chances of finding any sort of even temporary asylum in a museum. After all, the series demands roughly 2,000 square feet of exhibition space. “And beyond these problems, who has the time and patience to see 613 canvases? And who would pay for 613 color plates for a catalog?” I wrote. Rand agreed at the time, and told me, “You are basically cutting yourself off from any source of
aesthetic applause or nutrition.”

Nearly a decade later, I’m about ready to eat my words, as I thumb through the book, which is roughly 650 pages and devotes a page to each of the paintings. And Rand tells me that the 614-canvas series is packed in boxes, but destined for exhibition in its entirety in 2017 at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, in San Francisco.

Rand chose to paint and number the series, which he sees as a single work, in the order in which the images and captions occurred to him rather than following any rabbinic numbering of the commandments. For example, a man, whose dress loosely evokes a musketeer, sits on a tree branch with a saw, severing the very platform that is supporting him. The commandment? “Not to have relations with your mother,” from Leviticus 18:7.

Although testing the laws of gravity by sawing off the tree branch upon which one sits proves an ingenious metaphor for incest, Rand insists the works aren’t illustrations of the Bible. “A majority of the paintings have no articulated literal connection, but rather a subjective relativism that would be counterproductive to even try to explain,” he said.

Asked if the elongated timeline of the series, from studio to book and then to exhibit, left him wishing he’d had the opportunity to include more timely accessories — say, iPhones instead of the rotary phone in No. 475, “Not To Withhold Wages or Fail To Repay a Debt” — Rand says he wasn’t interested in the works being relevant.

“I didn’t pay much attention to the declarations of each commandment and treated them equally,” he said. What seem to be difficult passages “are just accidentally current and held no more significance for me than did carrying out the procedure of the red heifer,” he added. “After what ISIS just did to Palmyra, ‘destroying the city that has turned to idol worship [No. 33]’ is, at least right now, one of the most dicey passages in the book.”

Several of the works in the series also quote from art history. When I asked Rand about a couple that seemed to draw from Manet paintings — “The Spanish Singer” and “The Fife Player” — he said that he was thinking about art historians’ “deification” of Manet.

“Painters think differently than scholars,” he said, turning to fellow Jewish painter Barnett Newman for the famous one-liner, “Aesthetics is for the artist as ornithology is for the birds.”

Menachem Wecker is a freelance reporter based in Washington, D.C. He is a co-author of “Consider No Evil: Two Faith Traditions and the Problem of Academic Freedom in Religious Higher Education” (Cascade Books, 2014),
With Legal Aid, Immigrant Advocates Turn Focus to Citizenship

By LIZ ROBBINS  NOV. 27, 2015

This election season, Sandra Ocampo is running her own campaign.

Last week, Ms. Ocampo, 21, who immigrated from Nicaragua to Yonkers five years ago, showed up at a citizenship drive sponsored by the Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights in Inwood.

After having her photo taken at a nearby travel agency, Ms. Ocampo did a celebratory dance.

“Sandra’s going to be an American citizen,” she said in Spanish. “Donald Trump, you are not going to win.”

With anti-immigrant sentiment soaring among Republican presidential candidates, and immigration reform stalled in Congress and the courts, New York advocacy groups, with the support of the Obama administration, are redoubling their efforts in one area they can control: citizenship. They are pushing to convert as many of the country’s 8.8 million green card holders as possible into naturalized Americans.

The influence of the Latino voting bloc has added impetus to the drive. According
to Latino Decisions, a polling and research firm, 80 percent of naturalized Latino citizens voted for President Obama in 2012. In New York State, there are approximately 915,000 legal permanent residents, more than 317,400 of whom are Latino, according to the Center for Migration Studies.

Nationally, nearly a third of legal permanent residents eligible to become citizens are Mexicans, a particular target of Mr. Trump, a Republican presidential candidate who has accused them of bringing drugs and crime into the United States and of being rapists.

This month, there were 14 citizenship events across the city compared with the usual eight, according to local advocacy groups. The events were held at college campuses, union headquarters, libraries, hospitals and the offices of community organizations in Hispanic and Asian neighborhoods. They were timed to the anniversary of President Obama’s executive actions allowing undocumented parents of American citizens to remain in the country legally, at least temporarily, and expanding the existing program for immigrants brought to the United States illegally as children. Those policies have been blocked by legal challenges.

“There’s something in the air saying that they’re coming for you, and that you better get as solid as you can,” said Allan Wernick, the director and co-founder of CUNY Citizenship Now, a legal assistance program operated across the City University of New York system.

Mr. Wernick said that the CUNY citizenship clinics were fully booked — at 130 spots — in November, with no room for walk-ins as there was just six months ago.

Around this time last year, groups like CUNY Citizenship Now and the Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights had prepared for a crush of applicants eligible for one of Mr. Obama’s programs. But when the executive actions were stopped by court injunction, the crowds never came.

A recent ruling by the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit on the programs, which the Supreme Court could take up next year, spurred immigrant advocacy groups to mobilize.

“There was a concerted effort around the anniversary anyway, and the fact that
the ruling came out the week before the anniversary only added to the interest,” said Roberto Frugone, the Northeast regional director for civic engagement at the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, or Naleo.

On a recent Saturday, Naleo sponsored an event with Unite Here Local 100, a union for hospitality and food-service workers in New York and New Jersey. The New York Immigration Coalition provided legal support. A total of 96 green card holders applied to start the citizenship process at a fair in the Manhattan offices of the union, which billed the event as a “response to the Fifth Circuit Court’s decision.”

Tahisha Bourdier, 25, is a paralegal who was volunteering at the event and also applying for citizenship. She moved to New York from the Dominican Republic when she was 2. As a legal permanent resident, she said, she cannot get government jobs or even be a notary.

“I feel like I have a lot of family members who have been deported through being immigrants and I think it will eventually get as hard for a legal resident,” she said.

The presidential campaign was another factor in her decision. “Now I feel like it’s a must,” she said. “Every vote is a voice.”

In the end, though, only 38 of the day’s applicants were able to move forward, Mr. Frugone said. Most of the others were not proficient enough in English to pass the citizenship exam, which requires an applicant to answer basic questions orally, write a sentence and pass a civics test.

Some older immigrants who have not learned English wait for the precise moment when they have lived in the United States for 20 years and are older than 50; at that point, they can take the test in their own language.

Jose Miguel Toledo Madera, 53, a resident of Washington Heights in Manhattan, said he had been too busy working as a custodian to learn English. After six hours at the Unite Here citizenship drive, he finally finished his application by taking photos.

In addition to supporting registration drives, the government appears to have sped up the processing time for applications in New York City, according to several
immigration lawyers. Those applications, the lawyers said, were being processed in
two to three months, less than the national average of five months and faster than the
six to 12 months it took just four years ago.

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services said it could not confirm
the accelerated application times in New York, but it did describe how, since
September, it had expanded programs to promote citizenship, including online test
preparation materials and the option to pay the $680 fee by credit card.

The Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights started its Citizenship
Thursdays program in April, in response to the legal challenges to Mr. Obama’s
executive orders. Since then, it has helped nearly 400 people seeking naturalization
assistance. In November alone, 90 applicants came in, twice the number from a year
earlier.

The drives have brought together a diverse group of immigrants from Africa, the
Middle East and Latin America, representing a wide range of ages. But they are
united in purpose.

“I want to vote so that we can have a better situation in the country for all the
immigrants, for all the people we actually need in this country,” Dinelsa Quezada
Martinez, 70, said in Spanish in the organization’s offices. “I want a president that’s
really going to worry and take care of our country and all the people in this country.”

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the New York Today newsletter.

A version of this article appears in print on November 28, 2015, on page A19 of the New York edition with
the headline: Promoting Citizenship in Face of Court Case.
A Special Boy Inspires His Mom to Open a Store on Staten Island

New shop sells therapeutic toys, clothing and tools for special-needs children

By ZOLAN KANNO-YOUNGS
Nov. 26, 2015 5:03 p.m. ET

Not long ago, when Melissa Palermo wanted to purchase a therapeutic product such as a chewy tube or a weighted vest for her special-needs son, her only option was to shop online.

The result was disappointment. Some products took days to arrive, and when they did, Mrs. Palermo often found they didn’t meet Alex’s needs in the ways she hoped.

The 30-year-old Staten Island resident wished there was a local store where she could get therapeutic toys, clothing and tools. So, with the help of a $40,000 business loan taken out with her husband, a sanitation worker, she opened one herself in October.

In the weeks since it opened in Staten Island’s Eltingville neighborhood, the Island Sensory Shoppe has served teachers, tutors, therapists and parents of special-needs children. “I wish this was around when my son was little,” Mrs. Palermo said of Alex, who is now 6 years old. “It’s why I did it.”

On first look, the shop appears like any other toy store, with jovial background music and shelves of multicolored trinkets. But parents are finding that the elastic animals, squishy putties, body socks and blankets are beneficial to children who suffer from high-functioning autism, Asperger’s and other sensory issues.

Lisa Allen, 42, of Staten Island, went to the store to look for something to ease
the stress of her son, who has Asperger’s syndrome. She said he would get flustered when working on homework assignments and feared he would accidentally hurt himself.

“He gets very dramatically over the top and frustrated when he’s working,” Ms. Allen said. “And it’s very painful to see your child’s just day-to-day activities having such a hard time.”

Ms. Allen smiled when she saw one of the squeezable “crawly” toys. “I figure it will help him get the fidgets out if he can have something that he just manipulate—and not break a pencil out of frustration,” she said.

The elastic toys are also the favorite of Mrs. Palermo’s son, who she said was diagnosed four years ago with PDD-NOS, or pervasive development disorder—not otherwise specified. Most of her shop’s products focus on ways to help special-needs children who have episodes of frustration.

Children who have trouble sitting still can sit on the shop’s vibrating pillows. And the body socks and blankets provide a sense of security.

“Some children with sensory issues, they feel like their skin, they might want to crawl out of it,” Mrs. Palermo said. “Something like this can give them that calm, relaxing feeling.”

Discovery Putty has been especially popular with special-education teachers and occupational therapists; both groups receive a 10% discount on all products. Teachers can hide tiny toys inside the putty and ask their students to find them.
as a way to help special-needs children strengthen their fine motor skills.

In addition to products for special-needs children, the shop carries organization tools, some for visual learners.

Angela Klein, a 54-year-old tutor from Staten Island, bought one of the organizing charts last week for her 13-year-old son, who has dyslexia. "It will make it a little more fun than mommy’s homemade list," Ms. Klein said.

Business has started out slow, but is building as word gets around among parents of special-needs children. Mrs. Palermo said on a good day she has as many as 10 customers. On other days she might only see two. But she said that’s fine for the early days of a specialty store like hers.

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Mrs. Palermo, who has a business degree from Baruch College, said she spent months researching products that would fit the needs of a variety of children. It is how she found the ID bracelets, which helps lost children get home.

If someone finds a lost child, they can text or scan the code on the bracelet and they will receive a text informing them they have found a lost special-needs
child. The parent of the child will also be alerted their child has been found.

As Mrs. Palermo explained the bracelet, Ms. Klein interrupted her. “I wish I had it when my son was younger,” she said. “He couldn’t remember his address, his phone number, his daddy’s last name.”

Mrs. Palermo smiled.

“Every time I hear a parent say something about, ‘Oh, this store is great,’ it makes it worth it,” she said later. “As many children as I get to help, it makes it worth it.”
Free Tuition Is Not the Answer

By CATHARINE HILL  NOV. 30, 2015

THOSE days, politicians on both the left and the right are very critical of higher education, especially the cost of attending college and the related debt that students and their families incur. But there is more to college affordability than lower prices.

While calls to reduce tuition sound terrific, neither of two recent proposals for reform would sufficiently target the students most affected by rising college costs and debt burdens: those from middle- and low-income backgrounds. To get those students to and through college, we must focus on what they are asked to pay, not on making it free for everyone.

Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont has called for free tuition at public institutions, which would cost taxpayers $70 billion a year, while Representative Tom Reed, Republican of New York, wants to require private institutions with endowments of more than a billion dollars to use them to lower tuition, to zero if possible. Those proposals ignore the fact that it is declining state support for public institutions that has shifted a much larger burden of college costs to students and their families, increasing both tuition and debt.

If the revenue is not replaced, free tuition means fewer resources to teach students. Unintended consequences could include reductions in need-based financial aid, which would harm the low- and middle-income students free tuition is meant to
help.

Last year, the average cost of tuition and fees was $9,139 at four-year state schools and $31,231 at private nonprofits. Any policy reducing tuition to zero would primarily benefit students whose families earn the most, who currently pay all or nearly all of a school’s full tuition price because they can afford to. Lowering tuition would have less impact on moderate- and low-income students if they already receive some need-based financial aid grants that reduce what they are asked to pay—known as the “net price.”

Between 60 and 75 percent of students at four-year public and private nonprofit institutions receive grant aid that meets need and reduces their net price. Many private, nonprofit colleges and universities with large endowments allocate significant amounts to need-based aid. At Vassar, where I am the president, families with incomes below $30,000 are asked to pay $4,456 a year (on average) for tuition, fees, room and board (which costs $63,280). For families earning $48,001 to $75,000, the average net price is $11,817.

The Department of Education’s new online College Scorecard, which reports these data for many schools, makes it clear that too many institutions, both in the private and public sectors, are not affordable for low- and moderate-income families. Rather than free tuition, we need targeted policies that result in more money for need-based aid, from both public and private institutions, and from both state and federal governments.

While lower net prices would reduce the need for students and their families to borrow for college, federal student loan programs will remain an important tool to improve college access. Even zero tuition wouldn’t eliminate the need for loans, since room, board and travel expenses would still be a constraint for some students.

These loan programs merit closer scrutiny because the government extended about $96 billion in student loans last year, and $1.2 trillion in loans are currently outstanding. The trillion-plus figure is certainly eye-catching, but part of the increase in total debt is a result of more students going on to higher education, which is a good thing.
At first it seems like the increased borrowing per student and the number of student loan defaults prove that these programs are overextended and misguided. But for those students who graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 2013-14 from public and private nonprofit four-year institutions, the average amount of debt was $26,900. This is more than justified by the increased average earnings resulting from a bachelor’s degree.

A significant portion of the recent increase in defaults comes from students who borrow money to attend for-profit institutions. While those students account for about 9 percent of higher education enrollments, they account for 20 percent of federal loan borrowing and 44 percent of all federal student loan defaults (as of the end of September 2013). Fortunately, increased regulation of those companies is underway.

Some students who attended public colleges and private nonprofits are also having trouble paying back their loans. Defaults are more likely when borrowers don’t graduate with a degree or certificate, so improving completion rates is important. Providing better counseling and better options — including longer repayment periods and repayment plans based on earnings — will also help ensure that more students can pay back their loans.

Being able to borrow for education increases students’ options. Sometimes they choose a higher-cost school as a better investment, because of stronger academic programs and a higher graduation rate, even though it might involve more debt. Without federal loan programs, many students could attend only schools that their families could afford from their current incomes and savings.

For wealthy students this wouldn’t be a constraint. Students with less money would be forced to choose options at lower cost and lesser quality, or not to pursue higher education at all, which hurts not just them but society as a whole.

If free tuition weren’t an indiscriminate solution, it might be a worthwhile plan. But if our real goal is to improve college access and affordability for students from low- and moderate-income families, as it should be, stronger need-based financial aid policies and well-structured borrowing are a far better strategy.
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We Must Aggressively Fight Antisemitism on All College Campuses

NOVEMBER 27, 2015 6:18 AM 4 COMMENTS

"There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest." — Elie Wiesel

On November 12, 2015, sentiments similar to those expressed pre-WWII in Germany played out in the City University of New York's Hunter College, with threats of physical attacks and harassment towards Jewish students abounding.

A pervasive propaganda about the Zionist agenda and attempts to link Zionism to global economic difficulties. Seemingly unrelated events are woven together to expose the current face of something very old, antisemitism.

Last Thursday, students of CUNY schools organized the "Million Student March," a movement primarily dedicated to lowering the cost of higher education for students. In the midst of peaceful protest and social activism, a group known as The Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) gathered under the auspices of the "Million Student March" at CUNY Hunter College. Under the guise of joining in the social action, SJP seemed innocuous enough. As its Facebook page states, "We believe that our mission as students living in a free Democracy is to promote the cause of justice and speak out against oppression."

Instead, what took place was a pro-Palestinian convention targeting Jewish students on Hunter's campus and concomitantly on all college campuses across the nation.

Soon enough, shortly after the rally began the real agenda of the night's events was unveiled.

With flags of Palestine waving in the background, the crowd began shouting "F--- Zionism," demanding "Zionists out of CUNY," with further claims that they "are fighting Zionism in our administration." The hate and rage came to a climax as the megaphone rang out: "Long Live the Intifada." The speaker shouted, "There is only one solution," with the crowd vigorously responding, "Intifada Revolution."

Perhaps Hunter should have anticipated the escalation of the event, as the below Facebook statement was signed by every CUNY chapter of SJP prior to the rally: "On November 12th, students all across CUNY will rally to demand a freeze on tuition and new contracts! We must fight for funding for our university, and for CUNY to be accessible to working class communities in NYC as the public university system. The Zionist administration invests in Israeli companies, companies that support the Israeli occupation, hosts birthright programs and study abroad programs in occupied Palestine, and reproduces settler-colonial ideology throughout CUNY through Zionist content of education.

While CUNY aims to produce the next generation of professional Zionists, SJP aims to change the university to fight for all people's liberation."

You are not alone if you are trying to wrap your mind around the connection between Zionism and the cost of college tuition. What is the connection? The hate synthesized in this language toward Jews is so vitriolic that there really need not be any connection between reality and the proclamations of the SJP.
The cost of higher education is a legitimate issue of financial importance to young adults, their parents and individuals who generally care for the welfare of our society. However, the SJF are cunningly using student concerns and frustrations over the rising cost of tuition as a way to implicate the “evil Zionist” as the cause of their plight. A quick look back at history, from Iranian manifestoes to German propaganda, shows that there has been a long trend of blaming Jews for controlling the world’s money, media and having exorbitant amounts of power, which they use to plot their insidious endeavors.

Next, and most importantly, the SJF make calls to “intifada” as being the only solution. Ironically, as noted above, the SJF claim to be dedicated to a “free Democracy.”

However, democratic ideals allow for differing points of ideology without the threat of physical harm. Perhaps they overlooked that point. For those who do not know, an intifada is typically a word used in Israel as a call to pro-Palestine Islamic extremists to attack and kill “Zionists” (i.e. innocent civilians). In Israel, an intifada, there is no discrimination between a soldier, civilian and child; all are open to being run over by cars, killed by stones or stabbed in the face.

In light of their calls for an intifada, what action will these SJF students take? Will attacks on Jewish students begin to take place on college campuses? How would one go about identifying Zionists on campus? According to what criteria do we differentiate a Jew from a Zionist? How shall Hunter answer their demand for “Zionists out of Hunter”? Shall they simply round up the Jews and expel them? There is no veil over this antisemitic slur. The protest was an expression of the poison and passion to hate Jews.

In an open letter to Hunter College donors, some of whom are Jewish, Inna Vernikov, Esq., writes:

> The First Amendment gives us the right to speak freely, redress the government, and peacefully assemble. The First Amendment does not however, allows government-funded institutions to create a forum for the incitement to imminent, unlawful actions.... Furthermore, City University of New York has a comprehensive non-discrimination policy available to the public. That policy lists discrimination and harassment as prohibited conduct on campus... Harassment is defined as “a form of discrimination that consists of unwelcome conduct based on a protected characteristic...or creating an intimidating, hostile or abusive work or academic environment.”

How are we going to respond to the violent face of antisemitism? Like in any conflict, there are two options: we can remain silent (right) or we can protest (right).

When I reached out to Hillel, the center of Jewish life on the Hunter campus, its response was to say, “We have no comment at this time. Thank you.” I received a polite, noncommittal email, instead of the unfettered support of the anchor for Jewish life on this college campus.

Hillel, this is my question to you: For how long will you remain silent? Just ask Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu how deafening silence can be.

On the other hand, here is a statement from UJA-Federation of New York on the antisemitic incident at Hunter College on November 12, 2015:

We strongly condemn the repugnant hate speech and antisemitic rhetoric that punctuated a rally at Hunter College on Thursday night.

Students of all backgrounds deserve a campus experience that is free from intolerance and prejudice. We appreciate the swift condemnation issued by the CUNY and Hunter College administration, the Hunter College undergraduate student government, and the Hunter College senate. We urge all parties involved to disavow hateful language against other students and take appropriate measures to ensure this does not happen again.

We must stand by the students of Hunter College and let them know that they are not alone. We will not look away. We will not be silent. Antisemitism against any Jew is an act of antisemitism against all Jews. We must stand with Jewish students at Hunter College and across all college campuses.

We cannot make excuses that antisemitism is simply an unpleasant fact of life. If I do not step up to antisemitism, who will? Moreover, if I choose not to get involved, resting assured that someone else will, what does that say about me? We must take responsibility and show that we are strong and unafraid.

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THE DEATH KNELL FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES

Ignoring Muslim violence against women while boycotting Israel for non-existent crimes.

November 30, 2015  Phyllis Chesler


The National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) has just voted to support a boycott of...ISIS.

No, just joking. The boycott is against Israel - only.

The recommendation was developed in 2014 by Feminists for Justice in Palestine and draws on a "transnational, intersectional feminist framework" which emphasizes an "indivisible sense of justice."

Please don't ask me to explain such self-important and obscure language.

The good news: Although NWSA claims that, in 2014, 2500 of their members "stood in unison in support of freedom and justice in Palestine," in late November of 2015, only 35% of the voting membership (or 653 members) bothered to vote.
The resolution reads, in part:

"As feminists scholars, activists, teachers, and public intellectuals we recognize the interconnectedness of systemic forms of oppression....we cannot overlook injustice and violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, perpetrated against Palestinians and other Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, within Israel and in the Golan Heights, as well as the colonial displacement of hundreds of thousands Palestinians during the 1948 Nakba. The discriminatory treatment, exclusion, military siege and apartheid imposed by Israel on its own Palestinian citizens as well as those residing in the occupied territories constitute flagrant breaches of international law, UN resolutions, and fundamental human rights...let it be resolved that the NWSA endorses the 2005 call by Palestinian civil society for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) of economic, military, and cultural entities and projects sponsored by the state of Israel."

The resolution also blames "the U.S. tax dollar and tacit support of Western powers" for enabling the aforementioned violations.

In my 2003 book, The New Anti-Semitism, I wrote about the Stalinization and Palestinianism of Women's Studies. I bemoaned the fact that American feminists were less concerned with the "occupation" of women's bodies world-wide than they were with the alleged occupation of a country that has never existed: "Palestine."

I also noted that the way in which Women's Studies faculty has increasingly conformed to a post-colonial, Lacanian, incomprehensible Mandarin writing style meant that both intellectual clarity and feminist activism was dead.

In 2005, in The Death of Feminism, I explained how such an obsessive focus on one country only—Israel—also amounted to the "death" of the vibrant, universally oriented feminism that I and others once pioneered. That, and the determined adoption of multicultural relativism, sounded the death knell for this academic discipline, one which was increasingly concerned with accusing the "colonial" West and Israel for all the indigenous human rights violations that characterize tribal and barbaric cultures.

Passing this resolution is a betrayal of all the girls and women who are being honor killed on the 'West Bank', in Gaza, and in Arab Israel—not by Israelis, but by their own families; a betrayal of all those girls and women who are being forcibly face-veiled, forcibly married as children to their first cousins, forcibly genitaly mutilated—not by Israelis, but by their own families.

More important, passing this resolution is a betrayal of all those girls and women—as well as public intellectuals—who are being tortured and murdered by Muslim regimes and by the imposition of Shari'a law in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Indonesia, Nigeria, and in the Gaza Strip under Hamas, and in the West
Bank under the Palestinian Authority and Fatah.

Above all, passing this resolution displays absolutely no objective knowledge of how cultures, other than the West, have "colonized" and "oppressed" people, including Islamic culture, which has a long history of colonialism, imperialism, gender and religious apartheid, conversion via the sword, anti-black racism, and slavery.

This resolution displays no knowledge about the forced flight of Jews from Arab and Muslim lands which means that Israeli Jews exist in all colors of the rainbow; and absolutely no knowledge of the historical and contemporary Muslim persecution of the "wrong" kind of Muslim, and of all infidels, especially Christians, Yazidi, and Kurds.

Here is what sheds some light on one possible force behind this resolution.

NWSA just passed as second resolution as well. This second resolution was concerned with the "disproportionate impact of precarious employment in higher education on women and people of color." The NWSA will issue a "public statement of support and a series of demands on behalf of adjunct or "contingent faculty." This resolution comprises a series of requests addressed to NWSA concerning "per-course compensation" and other working conditions which effect "women and people of color."

I am reminded of the recent demands made at Hunter College by rioters. They called for a pay raise for adjunct faculty and, to my knowledge, for the first time, tied this legitimate request to chants against Zionism, chants for the destruction of Israel.

In Ferguson, pro-Palestine activists climbed aboard the flotillas of marching rioters and exploited an American-specific grievance about young black men being shot by American cops to issues related to "Palestine."

May I suggest, that whoever and whatever is behind the propaganda about Palestine; whoever and whatever is behind the systematic use of academic associations, academic campuses, the internet, the United Nations, the media, and human rights groups is also behind the NWSA adoption of this resolution against Israel.

Heavily brainwashed academics, both faculty and students, are roaming these corridors and turning everything into accusations against "colonial" America and Israel, and doing so on behalf of American-specific racial grievances. Some exceptionally vocal African-Americans and other peoples of color now believe that their struggle in America has been caused by Israel or that their struggle is somehow akin to that of the Palestinian people.

Indeed, the NWSA relies upon the fact that they are now joining forces with other academic associations that have similarly voted to boycott Israel. This includes: the
African Literature Association; American Studies Association; Association for Asian American Studies, Association for Humanist Sociology, Critical Ethnic Studies Association, National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies, Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, Peace and Justice Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa-Ethnic Studies Department and "over 1000 members of the American Anthropological Association."

All these disciplines, other than anthropology, are minor, ghettoized entities looking to gain power through Identity Politics, and not through intellectual achievement. How sad that Women’s Studies has cast their lot in with them.

Tags: Boycott, Feminism, Israel, Women