

## Nazis in the Ivory Tower

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How the Third Reich found a home on American college campuses in the 1930s.

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Over the past two decades we have witnessed the emergence of a mass movement of political extremism and support for totalitarianism on Western college campuses. Large numbers of university professors and administrators today advocate politically extremist positions that combine support for totalitarian Islamofascism and its terrorism with deep hatred of Israel and anti-Americanism. The dimensions of the phenomenon vary by campus and also by academic discipline. Middle East Studies is arguably the worst. The pro-totalitarian ideology and the hostility towards Israel and the United States have been documented for years by campus monitoring watchdogs like Campus-Watch in the United States and by Isracampus in Israel, as well as by web magazines, notably Frontpage.

Reading the exposes about campus political extremism today is numbingly shocking. No doubt many a reader responds bewilderingly by asking how such behavior and fanaticism could have been invented in the early twenty-first century. Actually, it was not. It was around many decades ago.

Campus radicalism, support for totalitarianism, and general political extremism are not new on Western campuses. Indeed some of the worst political extremism in academic history took the form of enthusiastic support on American campuses for Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. This is a disgraceful chapter in American academic history and one largely unknown. Its story is the topic of a new book, "The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower," by Stephen H. Norwood (Cambridge University Press, 2009). The author is a professor of history at the University of Oklahoma and holds a PhD from Columbia University (of all places; Columbia University is one of the schools whose ties with Nazism he documents carefully). Norwood is an accomplished writer and researcher, but I believe that this volume will turn him into an American household name. It is based on five years of his intensive research efforts. And it is already flaming controversies and debate.

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None of what follows is my own original research. All of it is taken from Norwood's seminal study and he deserves all the credit for uncovering these things. The simple lesson from examining the behavior on American universities in the 1930s is that that the appeasement, the support for totalitarian aggression and terror, the academic bigotry, and the anti-Semitism that today fill so many American universities were all predominant forces on many campuses in the 1930s, especially at America's elite schools, including on much of the Ivy League. The Chomskies, Coles, Beinins and Massads of today could easily be fit into the campus atmosphere of the 1930s.

Norwood sums up the situation at American universities in the 1930s thus:

“The leaders of American colleges and universities remained for the most part uninvolved as others in this country forcefully protested the Nazis’ barbaric treatment of Jews. The Nazis anti-Semitic terror in 1933 precipitated demonstrations and boycotts (of Germany) on an unprecedented scale... But although academicians were the Americans most conversant with European affairs, few engaged in public anti-Nazi protest.... American universities maintained amicable relations with the Third Reich, sending their students to study at Nazified universities while welcoming Nazi exchange students to their own campuses. America’s most distinguished university presidents willfully crossed the Atlantic in ships flying the swastika flag, openly defying the anti-Nazi boycott, to the benefit of the Third Reich’s economy. By warmly receiving Nazi diplomats and propagandists on campus, they helped Nazi Germany present itself to the American public as a civilized nation, unfairly maligned in the press.” (Norwood, page 34)

Norwood’s book is a must-read, but also a sad and uncomfortable read. He details the reactions of America’s professors and universities to the rise of Hitler. The responses on American campuses ranged from complete indifference and refusal to join in campaigns against Nazi Germany to widespread support for German Nazism, including for German atrocities committed against Jews. This was not mere Yankee provincial ignorance of what was happening outside the country.

Starting in 1933 anti-Hitler mass protests were being held throughout the United States. Americans of all creeds joined in. So did labor unions, political parties, and others. Perhaps the most memorable anti-Nazi sign from the marches was that of the Undertakers Union, “We want Hitler!” American streets were filled with anti-Nazi protests every week. At the same time, “College and university presidents and administrators did not convene protest meetings against Nazi anti-Semitism on the campuses, nor did they urge their students and faculty members to attend the nationwide mass rallies held on March 27, 1933.” (Norwood, page 15).

Some leading German Jewish scientists and professors managed to make it to the United States. The most famous was of course Albert Einstein. Some American schools went out of their way to hire these refugees. Harvard and Yale (which has a Hebrew slogan on its official coat of arms) were NOT among those! Yale’s President James Rowland Angell said he was “only superficially concerned with the plight of the German refugees” and reluctant to commit resources to finding them jobs. Harvard refused to hire refugees even when the Rockefeller Foundation offered to cover half their salaries, not even as curators at the campus Germanic Museum (pages 32-33). In contrast, the Nazi Professor Friedrich Schoenemann from the University of Berlin went on a speaking tour of American campuses in 1933 to great acclaim, where his talks were titled, “Why I Believe in the Hitler Government.” He had taught at Harvard during and after World War I.

Some academics condemned those calling for a boycott of Germany in response to

the atrocities committed against on Kristallnacht. They insisted it would be “hypocritical” on the part of those protesting the boycott of German Jews by Nazis to call for a boycott of Nazi Germany. This is worth noting because one hears the exact same claim today. Those today calling for boycotts of the anti-Israel academics that lead the “divestment” movement demonizing Israel are similarly denounced; they are accused of supposedly exhibiting “hypocrisy.” In other words, one must not oppose the evil use of boycotts to achieve evil totalitarian aims, especially not through a campaign against them of boycotts to achieve just and democratic aims, lest one be guilty of “inconsistency.”

Harvard University stood out above the rest in its moral failure and in its collaboration with Nazism. Many of the faculty members at Harvard were openly anti-Semitic, including Harvard’s president James Bryant Conant. Later, after the war, Conant served as US Ambassador to Germany and worked feverishly to get Nazi war criminals paroled and hired (pages 243-256). He lobbied for appointments of Nazis to various public posts in Europe and at the United Nations. Harvard’s law school Dean, Roscoe Pound, was openly sympathetic to Hitler, vacationed in Germany and attended anti-Semitic events there (pages 56-7). Harvard history professor William L. Langer strongly defended Hitler’s reoccupation and remilitarization of the Rhineland, which was the first step in launching World War II. More generally he served as a sort of academic apologist for the Nazis (pages 41-2).

Harvard went out of its way to host and celebrate Nazi leaders. The high Nazi official Ernst (Putzi) Hanfstaungl was invited as the Harvard commencement speaker in 1934. The wealthy Hanfstaungel had been one of Hitler’s earliest and most important backers. He was on record insisting “the Jews must be crushed,” and describing Jews as “the vampire sucking German blood.” Hanfstaungel was invited by a Harvard medical professor to serve as the honored speaker in the Harvard commencement ceremony and class reunion of 1934 and used the occasion for anti-Semitic incitement (page 49). (He also showed up in Harvard at the 50th class reunion after the war in 1959.) He openly advocated the mass arrest or worse of German Jews. The student paper, the Harvard Crimson, defended Hanfstaungel (pages 49-50). Harvard called in the Boston police to arrest Jews and others protesting the visit, and they were charged with “illegally displaying signs” (page 52). When Hanfstaungel returned to Germany from Harvard, he was personally greeted by Hitler (page 55).

Harvard maintained warm intimate relations with many Nazi institutions, in particular the University of Heidelberg, even after it proclaimed proudly that it had expelled all its Jews and began promoting what it called “Aryan Physics” (page 62). Harvard’s warm relations with German universities were used by Nazi propagandists, including Joseph Goebbels, to lull the world into accepting and legitimizing the Nazi regime. In 1937 Harvard’s president was still saluting Nazi universities as playing a legitimate part of the “learned world” (page 70). Harvard President Conant pursued collaborative relations with Nazi universities throughout the 1930s and right up to the outbreak of war.

In 1935 the German consul in Boston was invited by Harvard to lay a wreath with a swastika on it in the campus chapel. Nazi officials were invited to Harvard's tercentenary celebrations in 1936, held intentionally on the Jewish High Holidays as a slap in the face of Jewish faculty and students (page 39). A mock student debate held in 1936 was presided over by Harvard professors as judges. They acquitted Hitler of most of the mock charges (condemning him only for having a German general killed) and declared that German persecution of Jews was simply irrelevant (pages 40-41). The Harvard Crimson, the student paper, ran numerous pro-Hitler articles. Its editors were among those coming out to celebrate the visit of a German ship with Nazi officials on board. MIT also helped host the ship. The Nazi "Horst Wessel" marching song was played by student bands. Meanwhile, the campaign to boycott German goods was condemned by rally speakers.

Yale was only marginally less friendly to the Nazis than Harvard. "President James Rowland Angell of Yale University refused the request by Rabbi Edgar E. Siskin to speak on March 27, 1933 at a community-wide mass meeting in New Haven called to voice 'dismay and indignation at the anti-Semitic excesses now being carried out in Germany'" (page 15). Yale and Harvard presidents welcomed a delegation of Italian fascists to both campuses in October of 1934 (page 57). The student newspapers at both schools warmly approved. Fascist Italy's diplomats were often welcomed by Harvard.

Other parts of the New England academic elite expressed similar sentiments. A protest rally against German anti-Semitism was planned for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for March 30, 1933. It drew only a small number of protesters after MIT President Karl Compton intervened to oppose it. Compton also opposed the sending of petitions to the German government signed by MIT faculty and students. Some MIT professors came out vocally in support of Hitler and Nazi Germany, including mechanical engineering professor Wilhelm Spannhake (page 16). His son Ernst was a student at the time at MIT; the son insisted that the Nazis had committed no atrocities at all and he defended the Nazi boycott of German Jews and Jewish businesses.

Professor Thomas Chalmers of the history department at Boston University publicly demanded a "hands off" policy regarding Hitler and opposed American denunciations of Nazi Germany (page 17). Public efforts were made to recruit leading university presidents to refuse to travel on German ships flying the swastika flag, and to refuse to attend German "academic" conferences, but most refused. Among those who demonstrably insisted on traveling on Nazi ships was Nicholas Murray Butler, president of the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace, and Harvard's President Conant. President Robert Maynard Hutchins of the University of Chicago insisted on traveling on the same ships until the summer of 1937 (Pages 17-18). After the war the University of Chicago hired one of the leaders of the Romanian genocidal fascist organization "Iron Guard" as a faculty member.

Norwood's own alma mater of Columbia University is a major target in his book (pages 75-102). Columbia was an active collaborator with Nazi Germany in many ways. Months after Germany started book burning, Columbia's President Nicholas Murray Butler went out of his way to welcome Nazi Germany's ambassador to the US for a lecture circuit at the school, and praised the Nazi emotionally as a gentleman and a representative of "a friendly people" (page 76). Shortly afterwards, when a man who had escaped from a Nazi concentration camp lectured on campus, Butler refused to attend (pages 77-8). Butler frequently praised Germany and Fascist Italy. He would have approved of Joseph Massad getting tenure this year at Columbia.

Columbia University itself had been officially discriminating against Jewish students since the beginning of the century. A Columbia Dean named Thomas Alexander praised Hitler's Nazism sycophantically and visited Germany himself (page 83). He especially approved of the Nazi policy of forced sterilizations. More than one Columbia faculty member was fired for taking an anti-Nazi stand. These included a Jewish professor of fine arts, Jerome Klein, who dared to protest the campus visit of the Nazi ambassador. Columbia built and maintained extensive connections with Fascist Italy.

Many other universities were little better. The "Seven Sisters," meaning the seven elite women's colleges in America, were decidedly unwilling to take any anti-Nazi stands (pages 103-132). Professors and students served as apologists for Nazism. So did some of the college presidents. Collaboration with the Nazis continued at some campuses even after Germany invaded Czechoslovakia and Poland. The oppression of women in Nazi Germany made no more impression upon them than the oppression of women in Islamic societies does on today's campus extremists and feminists.

Freedom of speech was selectively defended on campuses in the 1930s, as it is again today in the 21st century. The President of Queens College prohibited an anti-Nazi speaker from giving a lecture on campus as late as spring 1938 (pages 223-46). Harvard suppressed student efforts to aid Jewish refugees from Germany. For many years Catholic universities in the United States were strongly pro-fascist (pages 196-219).

Phony symmetry, the condemnation of fascism together with condemning Western democracies, is not the innovation of the past decade's campus campaign to defend Islamic terror. In the 1930s academics and university presidents signed statements that protested German behavior but at the same time gave it legitimacy. For example, in one attempt at "even-handedness," a petition claimed that Nazi actions were "in large part the result of the lack of fair play to Germany" on the part of Western countries and their "slighting of German rights and needs." It added that "minorities are suppressed and discriminated against to some degree in every land." They knew so well - at the time most Ivy League universities and many other colleges officially and openly discriminated against Jewish applicants. (They still do

under affirmative action quotas.)

Does all of the above sound familiar? It does to Norwood, who says he sees frightening similarities between what has been happening in American campuses since the early 1990s and what transpired in the 1930s.

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