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Woke Students Will Outgrow It

'Intersectionality' has thrived on campus, but it won't survive now that it's being exposed to sunlight.

By Michael Segal

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Students participate in an anti-Israel rally at the University of California, Los Angeles, Nov. 18. PHOTO: CAROLINE BREHMAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

You might have been shocked to see American college students demonstrate in support of Hamas. But we should be careful not to overreact and expect the U.S. to degenerate into such hatred.

The support for Hamas's goal of destroying Israel didn't surprise anyone who has followed the comments sections of student newspapers, where readers have advocated such horrific plans for years. What is new is that these ideas have emerged into public attention.

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Even support for Hamas's Islamic supremacist ideology didn't surprise anyone reading student newspapers. The most significant change in students' moral philosophy in recent years has been the popularity of an identity-based ideology known as "intersectionality" that demands special privileges for all groups deemed oppressed. Intersectionality creates a pecking order with blacks, Muslims, and LGBTs on top and whites, East Asians and Jews on the bottom. The result is a zany coalition

in which gay-hating Islamic supremacists and gay intersectionality devotees go to the same demonstrations, and groups emerge that sound like parodies, such as Queers for Palestine.

Nutty ideas persist longer than they used to because ideas can dwell in the safe space of like-minded groups on the internet. But to have an effect on real life, ideas need to emerge from the shadows, and they may not survive. As Louis Brandeis observed, "sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants."

White supremacists found that out in 2017, when they emerged into the sunlight in Charlottesville, Va. If they expected support from leaders on the right, they

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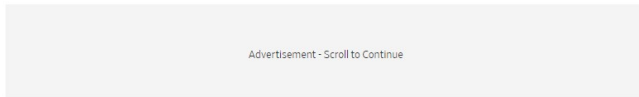
were disappointed. Although [Donald Trump](#)'s critics accused him of not denouncing the supremacists forcefully enough, in fact Mr. Trump declared from the beginning that "they should be condemned totally." The same is happening to the identity-based demonstrators who emerged into the sunlight after the Oct. 7 massacre. If they expected support from leaders on the left, they were disappointed. President Biden backed defeating Hamas, and so did Democratic Sen. John Fetterman. In a letter last week denouncing Israel for the way it is conducting its Gaza campaign, even Sen. Bernie Sanders acknowledged that the Jewish state "has a right to go to war against Hamas."

The speed of change on these issues is dizzying. University presidents were unable to defend applying different standards to Jews and other minorities. The sudden change is reminiscent of evolutionary biology, in which stasis prevails until a stress triggers rapid change, a pattern called a "punctuated equilibrium." In the ecosystem of ideas, Brandeis's sunlight is such a stress.

Don't expect that the identity-based views now emerging into the sunlight will flourish. Such approaches haven't fared well in the U.S. We defeated white supremacy and enshrined identity-blind principles of equality in the 14th Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Many people assume that the ideology of the young is a predictor of the future. But students grow up. They start out as pacifists until they realize that other people want to kill them. They start out as socialists until they realize that socialism brings economic ruin. In the real world, they learn through experience and exposure to other viewpoints that many policies that sound nice lead to terrible consequences.

Dr. Segal is a neurologist and neuroscientist.



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Wonder Land: College Presidents' spineless response to antisemitic protests are the culmination of academia's plummet the past 50 years which has included grade inflation, speech codes, trigger warnings and ultimately cancel culture. Images: AP/AP-Photo/Getty Images/Zuma Press Composite: Mark Kelly

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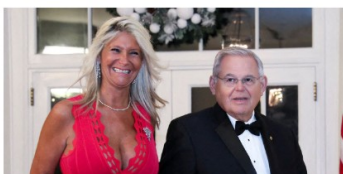
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