

Chapter 7

CORNELL'S THIRD CRISIS:
FACULTY WAR

A willingness to doubt the identification of the good with one's own way.

— Allan Bloom, on the unique attribute of Greek and then Western civilization.

Disgraceful, cowardly acquiescence.

— Allan Bloom, on the Cornell faculty's refusal to identify his own way as the good one.

While the storm was abating for the campus at large, for the faculty it had not yet really begun to blow. Campus politics are said to be so bitter because the stakes are so low, but in the aftermath of nullification a faculty war broke out that was bitter precisely because the stakes were the faculty's deepest beliefs about their values and their institution. Principle, pragmatism, and the principle of pragmatism converged in a third and final crisis that was every bit as important to Cornell as the others. The hundreds of rural sheriff's deputies could take their riot gear and go home: it was intellectual, not physical violence that was about to burst out of the volcano "far above Cayuga's waters."

Speaking to the press after the faculty meeting, my father acknowledged how tenuous the case was for nullification: "(Our hope is that) peace and mutual respect will prevail....It was a moral gamble on the future of the university as an open place." Sensing that the debate was not over, he added that some members of his departments might see him as a "Judas." He had been one of the strongest voices against nullification just two days before, telling the *New York Times*, "If the ship goes down, I'll go down with it as long as it represents reason and order. But if it's converted to threats and fear, I'll leave it and take a job as a night watchman at a bakery." His colleagues who had not switched might well think that the ship was going down, but he wasn't on it. Walter Berns

had him in mind when he told the press that people who said that reason rather than fear had guided their decision were “simply not telling the truth.”

National reaction to the faculty’s switch was in accord with Berns’s position. The scathing opprobrium was nearly universal. People who had not been there to follow the march of necessity toward a resolution saw Cornell as an object of pity at best and scorn at worst. Commentators agreed that, by incompetence or cowardice, it had sealed its own tomb. As a prominent spokesman, my father found himself held in contempt by distant acquaintances and strangers alike, and angry calls and “umbrella” letters likening him to Neville Chamberlain at Munich poured into his office and home. Even sympathetic callers such as his former students or my grandmother could not grasp the madness that had been in the air and the urgency of the need to defuse it.

One measured voice amidst the obloquy was Robert Lucas, a commentator for the Gannett chain who wrote that there was no peace on campuses because of a national disillusionment among young people over their government’s preoccupation with the business of death. He didn’t take the students’ side, but did point out that universities could not be islands of reason in a sea of warmaking and racial oppression. He saw the unruly, unreasonable, and unwashed students as the conscience of the country, the unlikely saviors of the very society and universities they were attacking.

There was little attention paid to such thoughts in Albany, where Cornell’s substantial state funding was in jeopardy and the legislators were passing so many punishments (from jail terms to an end to student loans) for so many crimes (having guns on campus, burning draft cards and flags, using illegal force in a demonstration, interfering with classes) that it was difficult to keep them all straight. Liberal Republican alumni Rep. Howard Robison and Sen. Charles Goodell were also vocal in their disgust. Goodell said of the students: “They will get the big crunch if they keep pushing.” This anger on the part of congressional patrons, if nothing else, made it necessary for Perkins to resign, which he did a few weeks later.

The national spotlight soon turned away from Cornell, since its Crisis came in the middle of a swelling wave of campus protest. Only two days after the faculty reversed its position, the *Ithaca Journal*’s headline read: “Disorders Disrupt College Cam-

puses Coast-to-Coast." It did little good for the Journal to ask readers to focus on the "good student activism" of the Ithaca College students who had raised \$1,800 for migrant workers the day of the Straight takeover. Syracuse, Ithaca College and Oneonta — three campuses close to Cornell — gave in that same week to student demands without penalties after demonstrations that violated campus rules. George Washington, Harvard, Hampton (where the office of the president, my father's friend and classmate Brud Holland, was occupied), Tulane (!), the University of Washington, Dartmouth...the list went on and on, growing to a length only surpassed after the invasion of Cambodia a year later. At all-black Voorhees College, students holding the administration building armed themselves with knives, but wisely surrendered when the administration called in the all-white South Carolina highway patrol. At City College, New York, an "open racial battle" took place as police broke an occupation. For all of Cornell's troubles, it had avoided violence and injury.

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Every day in Congress, and in lower bodies that do not simply buck disputes up to higher ones, legislators handle train wrecks like Cornell's, impossible impasses of sincere convictions and powerful interests that must be resolved. My father was partial to the enduring myth that such politics consists of hammering out methods in the warm glow of consensus on goals, describing the delegates to the Constitutional Convention as "whole men on stern principles and half-way men on negotiable details." This differentiation would be comforting if it were true, but it wasn't at the Convention and hasn't been since. By agreeing to individual representation in the House and state representation in the Senate, those delegates were willing to be "half-way men" on the sternest principle of democracy, not because it was a detail but because it was the price of union. As a congressional staffer I learned that "compromise" is too sweet and harmless a word for what it takes to keep the ship of state sailing in America when sharply opposing views collide. It usually feels like capitulation.

And it hurts. It hurts like unto death to give up something you believe in and cut your losses, or to refuse to give up but get rolled anyway as your allies abandon you, leaving you straining futilely against the engine as the inevitable repairs clear the tracks and the special pulls away again. If you are the one who decided it was necessary to cut the losses, you feel rotten for

abandoning your beliefs; if you are the one who refused to buckle but still got rolled, you feel rage, and that mostly at your erstwhile friends who cut and ran. For the faculty at Cornell, this would be the first big hurt, the first time they really had to stick their hands in the mud as governors and not float above it as scholars, the first time practicing the politics they studied. Unlike politicians, they didn't know enough to expect and absorb the abuse that comes from an unsatisfying settlement. It was also psychologically harder to capitulate for the faculty in 1969 than for today's congress and its forebear in Philadelphia, because the AAS refused to engage in reasoned debate or help govern even after victory. Rather than just politely take "yes" for an answer, the AAS was bent on humiliating the faculty, which had to shoulder the entire burden and take all the abuse themselves. It is not surprising that some of them were unwilling to do so.

To threaten to resign if you don't get your way is a dangerous thing. Government professor Allan Sindler followed through on his threat, announcing his resignation within hours of the reversal. This statement of principle was tarnished a bit by his noting for the benefit of the administration that the resignation would not take effect until after the paid year's leave he had earned. Sindler's was the most likely resignation, if only because he had developed and defended the judicial system that the faculty had just voted to suspend. Next to go was Walter Berns, his close friend and ally. Berns and Sindler explained their decision as a protest against the death of academic freedom. What would happen, they asked in a letter to the Sun, when SDS or the Black Liberation Front demanded certain readings in courses, the way they had demanded a speaker to counter the controversial economics professor? Their answer was that the university would give in, and that because of an awareness of this reality, "most faculty members...will play it safe and teach students what they want to hear."

Walter LaFeber resigned his history chairmanship, and announced that he would resign as a professor, too, if he could find another job. His colleague Donald Kagan, who had already taken a new job, said: "I regret I announced my departure earlier than this. I'd be delighted to do so now....George Orwell could have written" the administration's script. He refused to teach for the remainder of the semester, telling his students to read about Nazism and Communism on their own. A majority of govern-

ment and history professors opposed nullification, and 24 refused to teach until Perkins could assure them that all firearms were off the campus. Another pledged to resign if the administration didn't pledge to punish intellectual intimidation by students.

Always worthy of quotation, government professor Allan Bloom at first said, "Happily, I shall be on sabbatical leave next year and will be spared the further acts of this desperate comedy which has left academic freedom at Cornell in a shambles and degraded the faculty." A few days later, he formally resigned, also taking his sabbatical with him. The *Ithaca Journal* backed the predictions of the departing faculty, saying that while "some feel that the faculty pulled the university back from the abyss of chaos...in the long run, there will likely be chaos of a different degree," since "history teaches that force expands as reason shrinks and capitulates." However, in concluding that "(a)cademic freedom has been sorely hurt. It will take a superhuman effort to revivify this freedom," the Journal seemed to speak for all sides in the faculty debate — except perhaps for the 70 radicals who issued a statement arguing that black students should be able to have guns for self-defense.

As soon as Sindler resigned my father went to ask him to reconsider, but found him, as he recorded in his diary, "cold and obdurate." Berns, too, was unreachable, "mad — I mean out of his mind," leading my father to "begin to understand" how irrational the rational faculty must have looked to the AAS. The rantings of Berns and Bloom at faculty meetings, where Berns refused to shake my father's hand, showed him the animus they were planning to apply to Cornell. He realized that his two departments were in a state of "dissolution" that could spread to others unless the prevailing notion that the only honorable course was resignation was challenged. My father and Mike Abrams reconvened a group that had been meeting on and off since the day of the guns, a group of leading lights they dubbed the "41 Ronin" (after a Samurai band called the 47 Ronin in a recent film) because it produced a statement by 41 professors, which was released the Sunday after the reversal. The group was a rump body of some of Cornell's most respected faculty, including philosopher Max Black, historian Henry Guerlac, political scientist Doug Ashford, engineering dean Ed Cranch, venerable physicist (and Cornell's most famous professor) Hans Bethe, and redoubtable English professor Cushing Strout.

The 41 declared that they would stay at Cornell and protect academic freedom, but would consider resigning as a group if it was debased: "We intend to stand together and stay at Cornell, (but) we must have freedom to inquire, to teach, to learn without intimidation. If these conditions are not met, we will act together." Strout made the purpose of their action clear: "We have not given up hope....We will not secede from the battle for the university." The statement signaled in two directions, telling faculty who were considering resigning that there was honor in staying as well, and telling students and administrators that more turmoil could result in more, and more prominent, resignations.

Delivered up to a campus swirling with rumors and starved for good news, the statement was tremendously calming. Faculty began to see the logic of rallying to the university, warts and all, and there were no more resignations. Within a few days, nine members of the philosophy department, who one might have guessed would tend toward absolutism rather than compromise, praised the university for "adjudicating conflicting demands" and "averting violence, dampening aroused passions." Asianist George Kahin, who had gained national prominence for a book opposing the Vietnam War, announced that he would "stay to fight for academic freedom. It is in the balance."

Most students rejected the resigning faculty, just as most outside commentators applauded them. "Let them go find a place of comforting serenity...and leave us with faith in ourselves and each other..." said one letter to the Cornell Daily Sun. They acted, said a student, "only along procedural lines. They would put some high sounding principle before the expediency of avoiding violence. They represented as much of a threat to the stability of this university as the militants do." But the resigners also helped stabilize the campus by underscoring in a way that words could not the seriousness of their concerns about the train of unpunished disruptions starting with the protest against the economics professor and ending with the guns. While the resigners certainly sold their colleagues short by predicting that they would "play it safe" rather than face intimidation, perhaps this insult was intended to goad the faculty to prove them wrong. As one insightful student wrote, by resigning they made credible the threat of the 41 Ronin.

"Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it," says Malcolm of the Thane of Cawdor in Macbeth; the opposite held

for those whose honorable act of leaving for reasons of conscience was stained by the way they impugned their colleagues and students as they left. For years they continued to castigate the faculty who switched as knaves and those who had always supported nullification as fools. Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, although plagued with inaccuracies, is an invaluable guide to the Crisis simply because the palpable contempt with which it drips at a remove of twenty years reveals how bitter the invective of the resigners must have been at the time. It shows more damningly than any opponent of Bloom's could just how closed his own mind was: his deepest beliefs about the Crisis persisted despite the evidence of the years that followed, rendering his continued calumny almost absurd.

Bloom, who died in 1992, cavalierly downplayed the danger of using police to clear occupied buildings in the Crisis, although the killings on the campuses of Kent and Jackson States in 1970 and Southern University in 1972 have shown how real the danger was. He likened the students of 1969 to Nazis, and the faculty and administrators to the German and Polish academicians who accommodated to Nazi rule, although it is now clear that the great majority of student protesters were not totalitarian in their intentions, and that the universities' feeble response to protest did not lead to a seizure of power by left-wing thought police, let alone to the Nazis' mind-boggling abuses of human rights. The book never discusses the root causes of student unrest, the Vietnam War and racial tensions, preferring to blame it on the adoption by some faculty of the literary theories of radical French thinkers! The cross-burning that touched off the Crisis is never even mentioned.

Bloom can be forgiven for thinking during the Crisis that he was Cassandra predicting the end of western civilization, and he ought to be praised for playing that role, because nullification might have been a first step to a betrayal of all principle. After all, some of the protesters did claim that they grasped emotional truths that were superior to the professors' rational proofs, and so did provide an echo of Nazis of the early 1930s, who advocated that people "think with their blood" and respond to their feelings without question. What Bloom can not be forgiven was his obtuse refusal to recognize after the fact that he too was thinking with his blood, as we all do, try as we might and ought to control its power. Robert Pirsig's novel about the study of philosophy at Bloom's

haven at the University of Chicago, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, grants a tawdry fate to academics like Bloom who see perfect knowledge as something to be achieved rather than continually sought: they suffer either a pathetic hubris or insanity. By appointing himself into a select few who had reached a special state of enlightenment, Bloom kept himself from seeing that the horde of students was not an enemy force bent on destruction of his people, but in fact was his people, trying to reconcile some severe differences.

Reading Bloom's attack on those who disagreed with him as either unaware of the university's purpose or not dedicated to it, one can understand why his counsel might have been rejected. He says that the professors who switched "rushed over to congratulate" the students in Barton Hall and "win their approval," never thinking that perhaps they went there to educate and to heal. He lauds the resigning professors for being "willing to make a sacrifice for their love of truth," never thinking that perhaps the faculty who stayed may have had similar motivations. Bloom lambastes students for using arguments like, "You wouldn't obey Hitler, would you?", but makes the same incendiary analogy himself by likening them to Nazis. He gleefully describes an incident in which students were tricked into applauding a quotation on the need for illegal protest whose author is revealed to be Hitler, a trick with as little proof that the audience consists of fascists as a similar one by a Harvard law student a year later who in the wake of protests over the invasion of Cambodia goaded a crowd of parents and faculty into thunderous applause and then embarrassed silence with a quote by Hitler on the need for law and order. All in all, Bloom's analysis calls his title of Co-director of the Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy into question, since it's clear that at least its practice unhinged him.

For those who stayed on at Cornell to fight for their definition of academic freedom, which could also be called faculty power, there was lots of work to do. My father saw his primary challenge as reviving his two departments, government and history. Sindler had decided to continue as government chairman for the final two months of the academic year. There was some irony in his position: like the AAS during the crisis, he castigated Cornell as an illegitimate institution, yet he wanted to remain part of it and enjoy the related prerogatives. How, my father asked in his diary, could Sindler lead a department he had abandoned? He

soon came to believe that Sindler was sabotaging the department's search for faculty and graduate students, and he took it upon himself to rein Sindler in. He failed to get his colleagues to agree to remove Sindler from the chairmanship, but he provided a counterbalance simply by raising that possibility and generally acting the part of the "bad boy." The presence of the three resigners at faculty meetings angered my father, and when feelers arose in a few months about letting them rescind their resignations, this conciliator who had made the motion asking Bob Miller to un-resign adamantly opposed their return.

The government department needed to pick a chair for the next year, and students demanded a say in who it would be. My father and the other faculty convinced the students that this was a line they could never cross. The department selected Arch Dotson, who hit the road in successful pursuit of new faculty, who were understandably wary of walking into this mine-field. My father's diary records calls from Dotson at all sorts of strange hours from many parts of the globe as he did his business. Soon after the Crisis, SDS threatened disruptions unless the university agreed to end ROTC and draw half of the student body from the "working class." The second demand cut to the core of the mission of the elite universities, who used scholarship funds to support qualified students but insisted on deciding who was qualified. In attempting to rectify their racial and social imbalance, they had started remedial courses and undertaken special searches to find students who might otherwise not have applied. For example, nearly all of my mates on the wrestling team at the University of Chicago were low-income whites from the top of their class in small towns in Montana; hardly any of them lasted more than a year in the unfriendly city.

There was nearly universal condemnation of the SDS plan, with the Cornell Daily Sun noting that the reform could only be paid for by doubling the tuition of the non-working class students, and mocking SDS as precisely the wrong group to trust with such a complex and potentially disastrous venture. There was certainly some self-interest in students' rejection of the SDS plan, since they were largely from the middle and upper classes themselves, but also a lot of sound resistance to the idea of letting the professed anti-intellectuals of SDS tamper with the essence of the university. The 41 Ronin were adamantly opposed to letting SDS get its foot in the door on the issue, and dispatched a delegation to meet

with Perkins to make it clear that any discussion of it with SDS would be unacceptable to them.

SDS then turned to ROTC, an issue where it had greater support among students, if not the faculty. A few weeks after the Crisis, an SDS-sponsored rally of about 100 students disrupted an ROTC drill in Barton Hall. They entered a fenced-off section to sit on and paint anti-war slogans on an artillery piece, which ironically had already been scheduled for scrapping. To their surprise, the leaders of the rally were indicted and arrested a few days later by the city at the request of the Cornell administration. This show of toughness in the first confrontation since the Crisis was seen as a good sign by most of the faculty; my father's diary noted, "About time." Remarkably, Sindler again railed against the administration in the Sun, because while it had finally held protesters accountable, it had bypassed the judicial system he had set up to handle all but the most serious crimes committed on campus.

The Ithaca Journal had predicted that by capitulating to avoid the abyss in April, Cornell had merely delayed its meeting with another sort of abyss, a crescendo of demands and disruptions by people mimicking the Crisis and hoping to replicate its results. In fact, the relative calm of the remainder of the spring and the next fall revealed that the Crisis was a high-water mark of madness on the campus, and that both the faculty and the students who lived through it had absorbed its implications and realized that both unresponsive regulation by the former and unfettered anomie by the latter were dangerous. The faculty did not demand inflexible sanctions, the white students did not rally to SDS in its constant search for an issue to trigger mass protest, and the black students were absorbed with setting up the new Africana Center. Tussles continued for the faculty, with my father's diary noting his efforts on two of them, an apparent limitation on the number of white students permitted in the Africana classes and the demand by a number of students for the ouster of a professor. The first contest ended in a draw of sorts, but on the second issue, Arts College dean Fred Kahn stood firm. What may have mattered more than victory in any particular case was the effort, the act of placing the rest of the campus on notice that the faculty would fight every perceived challenge.

One of the demands of the Barton Community had been for a Constituent Assembly through which students and faculty would help govern the campus. It was "the year of Bailey, Bailey"

for my father as the body took shape in interminable meetings in the concert hall. His diary showed that he resisted and finally succumbed to the pleadings of his colleagues to participate as a hedge against student encroachment in academic matters. He succeeded: the Assembly designed a University Senate that plowed on for years with little effect. For the scholar of the Constitutional Convention, the Assembly's deliberations were interesting but often irritating. He attended many of its meetings, but his diary records that he had to skip them once in a while when they became "too silly."

In retrospect, it's easy to see that the Assembly was a sham, a way to dissipate rather than strengthen the ability of students to change the campus. As a vociferous, unruly mob, they had forced the faculty to switch a deeply-held position in the space of two days; as a polite debating society, they fought for a year for the right to decide whether or not to buy non-union lettuce for the dining halls. This Machiavellian agenda should have been evident from Perkins' announcement that McGeorge Bundy had provided \$25,000 for the Assembly from a special fund at the Ford Foundation, where he had gone to be president after directing the Vietnam War as President Johnson's national security advisor. As SDS was surely aware when it opted out of the process, McGeorge Bundy was interested in controlling dissent, not empowering it.

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The Crisis was one of the most important educational experiences Cornell students would ever have. In Barton Hall, they took responsibility for the future of the campus, and so were forced to think about big issues like the social contract in ways that a course in that topic never could. For the rest of the semester, there were "students galore" in my father's office, discussing the Crisis and its implications. They, no less than the faculty, had to ponder George Kahin's meaning when he reminded the campus that Plato had said that even if every Athenian in the mob were a Socrates, it would still be a mob. They learned first-hand what Fred Kahn meant when he noted "how fragile is the preservation of reasonableness"; they learned that picking the lesser of two bad choices could be an act of principle just as surely as refusing to pick was; they learned that a little disruption is a good thing for thinking and for society, but that too much becomes counter-productive; and they learned how hard it is to draw the line between the two.

“My feeling is that a man can’t teach at a place that is in a condition of turmoil,” my father said in an interview during the Crisis, but he added, “I don’t mean I want a state of constant serenity. I feel once in a while a crisis is good for us — it reminds the people on the outside that we are part of the real world.” It reminds the people on the inside, too.

The most important lesson of the Crisis was that the claim that we are a government of laws and not of men is an ideal to which we aspire but dare not attain, that people must have the courage to use their judgment. From a county judge suspending a teenager’s sentence to two nations compromising over a border dispute, judgment is the necessary leaven in the bread of justice, and it distinguishes democratic society from tyranny even as it threatens to lead it into anarchy. “Hard cases make bad law” is a quote not from an irresponsible anarchist, but from one of our greatest jurists, and our legal system makes the inexpert jury rather than expert judges its final arbiter. Recourse to judgment implies not an absence of standards, but rather a constant search for the proper standards. Cornell, like universities across the country, granted amnesties for protesters to calm the waters, enraging absolutists who saw a surrender to Whitman’s absolute relativism — “Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself. (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” — rather than an acknowledgment that blind justice can easily degenerate into a war on your fellow citizens.

Would it have made sense to expel all the students who occupied Barton Hall? Would it have made sense to fire all the faculty who stopped teaching in protest? Of course not: turmoil, not principle, would have been the primary result of such actions. Similarly, it was proper for the Inter-Fraternity Council to rule after the Crisis that while fraternity members might have violated the student code of conduct when they attempted to roust the AAS from the Straight, the matter should be dropped due to “mitigating circumstances.” Absolutists, of course, don’t believe in mitigating circumstances, and they are wise to force us to explain why we do, and to make us acknowledge that they imply a slippery slope we need to stay on the very top of if at all possible. We rely on the absolutists to call societies to absolute standards, but not to govern societies with them — John Calvin’s Geneva and Ayatollah Khomeini’s Iran are enough proof of that. The perfect is the enemy of the good, the old saying goes, and so it would have

been at Cornell had the absolutists prevailed. It takes judgment to make a democracy work, not just adherence to words on paper, no matter how wise.

Over the next 20 years, there were many other challenges to order and academic freedom at Cornell, but none that posed a threat like the Crisis. All sides felt the specter of the Straight and the guns hanging over them for the next year, at least. When the new Africana Center suffered a suspicious fire in April 1970, 100 black students roamed the campus, smashing windows and overturning cars and causing \$35,000 in damage, but the administration immediately announced its support for restoring the center. In May, Cornell was the scene of a student strike after the invasion of Cambodia, but it was directed outwards, against the war, rather than inwards, toward Cornell's links with it. In April 1972, 200 students occupied the engineering library to protest B-52 raids against Hanoi and Haiphong, renaming the building Giap-Cabral Hall, after military leaders in Vietnam and in Portugal's African colonies. They demanded that the university end ROTC and vote against Gulf Oil on stockholder motions to stop its operations in Portuguese colonies. The students got considerably less than half a loaf: there were some abstentions on stockholder motions, and President Dale Corson had the delicious pleasure of reminding the protesters that their own University Senate had retained ROTC. A number of students were charged with violating a court order.

After President Nixon announced the mining of North Vietnam's harbors in May 1972, a march through colleegetown ended with some students trying to burn a bank, and a block party in the same area a few days later turned into a police riot when the mayor, fearful of another attempt at arson, ordered the streets cleared. In 1978, the trustees were barricaded inside their annual meeting by protesters, primarily because a trustee had mused that maybe the time had come to disperse the functions of the Africana Center throughout the university, but also because of Cornell's refusal to divest from companies operating in South Africa, white students' theft of a black nationalist flag from a black dormitory, and another unsolved cross-burning. After some heated discussion and cursory chest-bumping between Africana Director Jim Turner and President Frank Rhodes, the group dispersed with the understanding that the Africana Center would remain a separate entity.

Throughout these years there were disruptions of speeches and campus appearances of such disparate people as black nationalist (and anti-Jewish) activist Stokely Carmichael; Jewish (and anti-Arab) activist Meher Kahane, who presented an interesting challenge to the university on the issue of free speech by refusing to take questions from Arab students — that, said Dean David Drinkwater, who was doing the dirty work of keeping a tumultuous session under control, ends this discussion; William Colby, former CIA director and architect of Operation Phoenix, the assassination campaign against alleged Viet Cong; former South Vietnamese vice president Ky; a *Playboy* photographer; recruiters for the CIA and alleged union-busting law firms and companies; and top executives of Citicorp and Exxon.

Other incidents included another rampage through the campus by black students when a black administrator was fired for insubordination, which ended in the occupation and damaging of a building; a dispute over the amount of financial aid available for black students, in which a number of them piled up books in the libraries at the check-out counters, each repeating, “These books don’t serve my people”; and the construction by students and then the destruction by the university of “shanty towns” to protest Cornell’s failure to divest. In all these cases, Cornell or the local authorities made a reasonable stab at protecting free speech on all sides and a purposely feeble stab at punishing transgressors. There were some charges brought, some convictions achieved, some penalties levied. The students usually won reaffirmation of a general principle but lost on specific issues: divestment came, but late and in piece-meal fashion; the Africana Center remained, but the black administrator stayed fired. The speakers were almost always able to speak, and the buildings were prettied up for normal use and the next protest.

So controversy and protest never left Cornell, but they failed to destroy its ability to foster diverse opinions, even some of these most extreme opinions whose primary purpose, it seems, was to test how far freedom of speech can go. A good example both of Cornell’s commitment to academic freedom and of the limits of that commitment was the potential appointment in 1971 of Nixon aide Daniel Patrick Moynihan to the John L. Senior chair in American Institutions, which had been left vacant by my father’s death. Moynihan’s name was mud with the black intelligentsia because his research had highlighted the damage poverty had done

to the black family, and because as an official in the Nixon administration he had advocated a period of "benign neglect" toward black Americans in a personal memorandum to the president that was leaked to the press. Had Moynihan been hired, there would have been a storm of protest, both by black students and by white students who wanted them to feel welcome on the campus. My brothers and I had considered staging our own personal picketing even of his visit as a candidate.

In retrospect, I think we were right from a political perspective to oppose the appointment of anyone who was linked with Nixon. The link implied acceptance of the Vietnam War, and we were conducting a cultural war at home against that acceptance. We were dead wrong, though, on the substance of Moynihan's career and infamous remarks, and on the importance of appointments being determined by scholarship. Unlike many former Washington officials who are sought for academic appointments because universities have a financial interest in the publicity they can generate or the contacts they have with federal grant-makers, Moynihan was a significant scholar in his own right. The passage of time has shown his work on the black family to be both balanced and perceptive, and as for the memorandum, it was pretty benign itself. It called for "benign neglect" of the issue of race, to reduce the polarization that Moynihan believed was impeding progress, but it also advocated concerted actions, against the reality of racial discrimination and unequal opportunity. The infamous phrase itself was in quotes, borrowed from a 19th century British debate over the future of Canada. Through Moynihan's prodding, the Nixon administration, odious as was its racist "Southern strategy" that assuaged white voters, had taken significant steps in affirmative action that increased the hiring of minorities.

For us callow students to have been wrong about Moynihan's views and our right as uninformed critics to block his appointment was understandable; what would have been appalling would have been if the administration had forgotten its primary duty to educate us about these matters, and had turned Moynihan down because of fear of another Crisis. In an exchange of letters with me twenty years after the incident, President (then Emeritus) Corson argued emphatically that this was not the case. Corson noted that despite the controversial nature of the candidate, the faculty committee did chose him, and that he, Corson,

won approval from the Board of Trustees. Moynihan then declined the offer, and it was only "after some time" that he changed his mind and told Cornell that he did want the job. However, Corson decided not to re-offer the position to Moynihan, but rather to let the selection committee continue searching for another candidate, who turned out to be Ted Lowi.

Corson was aware that black students would oppose the appointment of Moynihan, but he denies that this had any bearing on his decision. The original offer had generated "strong opposition from some of the most senior faculty (Moynihan) would have to work with," and it was "primarily because of that faculty opposition" that Corson "declined to go through the whole process again." He recalled saying at the time, "You can make a soufflé rise only once." Certainly, there were faculty who disagreed with Corson's decision and saw it as an example of seeking calm over principle. However, the fact that Moynihan was offered the job once and turned it down significantly undercuts their criticism. It is calls like this that the president of a university is paid to make, and the tremendous success of Ted Lowi in the job, both as a teacher and as a prominent symbol of the university, tends to vindicate Corson's judgment.

A controversy at Cornell during the writing of this book shows that the challenge of finding a proper balance between competing values on a campus is one that must be faced over and over again, rather than lost or won all at one time. During the Gulf War in 1991, a student with a brother in the armed forces hung out of his dorm window the American flag, that oft-appropriated symbol of everything from tribal loyalty to equal opportunity, from military might making right to justice ruling all. A dorm adviser told him to remove it, citing a clause in housing contracts that kept Cornell's buildings free of all banners, and that admonition was parlayed by the campus newspaper into a threat to expel him. That report was inaccurate, since non-renewal of a lease was the toughest penalty for a housing violation, but the fact that Cornell would bar a student from displaying the American flag became news across the country. Just like 1969, there Cornell was on every television news report and in every newspaper. Again the switchboard was swamped with angry calls supporting a gallant David standing up to the politically correct Goliath of the university.

The fact that the university was represented by an African-American, vice president Larry Palmer, was particularly galling for part of the public, and some calls were racially offensive. (In the modern university, the president does the fund-raising and speech-making, and the vice president runs the campus. President Frank Rhodes went off on a scheduled trip, telling Palmer, "You've got a loser here.") Palmer immediately decided that the controversy was capable of doing such damage to the university that "politically, we could be shut down." Despite supporting the housing clause and believing that educational discourse flows from words and not symbols, Palmer found himself in the same position as the faculty in 1969: in order to act responsibly and preserve the university, he not only had to compromise his beliefs, but also had to be the agent who implemented that compromise. He announced that nothing was going to happen to the student, and that he was suspending the ban on banners while the student assembly reviewed it with him. As quickly as it had flowered, the story, and the national interest it had generated, had been killed.

Students in the campus coalition against the war were outraged, and festooned their dorms with banners castigating Palmer for giving in to political pressure. Palmer did not duck the accusation, countering that it "is permissible" to respond to public opinion, and that "if we are pure, we can lose our principles too" by failing to preserve the university and its educational mission. The student assembly, which had voted to support the war, was initially inclined to stand with the student, but became leery of his argument that there should be no restriction on his symbolic expression. It referred the matter to a committee, which recalled that confederate and Nazi flags had been flown against each other in recent years until the banner clause was invoked, and asked Palmer to reinstate the ban for the next semester. Now at Cornell you can do anything you want with a flag or banner — like carry it with you all day, or stick it up on your door at night — but you can't leave it hanging out of your window. National war fever had made this a special case, and it was treated as such.

What Palmer did was no different from what Cornell's faculty did in 1969. They both weighed the rules against the politics, and decided that blind adherence was dangerous. In 1991 capitulation came from the overwhelming public fury against Cornell's

rule, and in 1969 from the possibility first of violence and then of having to coerce the majority of students. Unlike the administration in 1969, Palmer took the decision upon himself rather than kick it over to the faculty. He believed that “faculty politics are very privatized and personalized,” and that to ask each professor to define the good in the face of a national uproar would make for a decision that was no wiser but was far more contentious. Perhaps Palmer was wrong and Muller right, since the higher the stakes the more important it is that the faculty make the decision. And perhaps both Palmer and the faculty in 1969 were too quick to end a controversy rather than hold on and let the confrontation educate the students. But even those who disagree with their decisions should be able to see that their motives in bending the rules were honorable.

Tom Jones and the resigning faculty agreed on only one thing in their assessments of the Crisis, which was that Cornell — which for Jones was the embodiment of hierarchical authority and for the resigners was the sanctuary of discourse and knowledge — died the day the faculty capitulated. Time has proven them wrong. The thin line between flexibility and anarchy seems to have been smudged a few times at Cornell but not erased. Academic freedom was by and large preserved in the years after the Crisis: for better or worse, faculty have continued to teach largely as they wish. As on most campuses, the biggest educational problem is academic boredom. Diversity of opinion is constrained not by radical students, but by the elitist system of certifying and hiring faculty, and by the corporate nature of universities that studiously avoid the controversy that is at the core of true education’s testing of limits and principles.

Bloom’s claim that it was “almost impossible to question the radical orthodoxy” without being vilified and having your class disrupted has become more absurd with each passing year. Few professors who deserve their title and their tenure shrink from speaking their minds for fear of simple opprobrium from the thought police of the left or the right. Those who resigned from Cornell in protest can take some credit for helping draw the line in the sand, but those who stayed behind to guard it deserve the lion’s share. Far from being Judases, my father and the others who switched their votes were Peters, denying their Jesus of academic freedom during the “awful trial at night” so they could survive to build the church. Jesus, you’ll recall, specifically forgave this tactical retreat by the first Pope.

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