

Missive to a Millennial

by G. Murphy Donovan (May 2016)

“You speak like a green girl, unsifted in such perilous
circumstances.” – Shakespeare



[Sophomore year at college continues to live up to its reputation. A student we know often sends me her draft “research” papers before she turns them in. I usually confine my critique to form and leave content to her instructors. However, her recent paper was such a rant that I waded into the swamp of campus blather that passes for conventional wisdom today. My response to her essay follows bellow. Names have been changed to protect the innocents.]

Dear Daisy,

Well, that was an eyeful. You are a credit to [Millennials](#), long on invective, short on facts and common sense. Nonetheless, there’s good news and bad news in your speculations. Your form and mechanics are much improved. On substance and argument, you need to think about thinking for yourself instead of repackaging the tropes so common at the schoolhouse today. Political correctness is a kind of rhetorical cancer, both regressive and toxic at the same time.

Some specific quibbles follow.

Your alleged thesis is “The Rise of the Radical Right,” but your argument is about Donald Trump. Trump is neither right nor left. He’s a third party running under a Republican banner. Ted Cruz would be the first to tell you that. Trump is unique too; more threat to conservative interests than he is to liberals. In either camp, he is neither radical nor right. Certainly not correct, if behavior is the metric. Obnoxious outsider might be the characterization you seek.

Name calling isn’t an argument in any case. When you use hyperbole like “radical right” and “right wing extremists,” you poison the well, a logical fallacy, not an argument. Are we to believe there is no “radical left” that might be culpable today? And alleging that the American left is “progressive” is a little like

claiming that Beyoncé is black. Does the chap in the White House get a pass on all those societal ills that you seem to attribute to the “radical right?”

Maybe Putin, Bush, Sarah Palin, global warming, and public television can share some of the blame too.

Your patronization of folks without college degrees is offensive, inaccurate, and prejudicial; in short, a borrowed media trope. A phrase like “less educated working class whites” is egregiously biased on at least three counts. For the most part, North America and the Internet Age were built by pale faces without college or formal credentials. More than a few of these entrepreneurs were melanin deprived and European too. Many were Jewish.

And the contemporary melanin enriched immigrant blitz is largely the result of the need for somebody to do the jobs that entitled, redundantly schooled, native born, pampered twits will not. A white Baccalaureate doesn’t pick tomatoes or mow lawns. A brown Master’s Degree doesn’t lay bricks or fix a toilet. And a PhD mutt will not change the oil in your over-priced Italian scooter. You have confused melanin with merit as you do school with education.

Let’s not confuse four or more years of college, or credentials, with character, achievement, skill, or merit either. The schoolhouse and social networks are, for many of your peers, excuses for not growing up.

Unemployed Millennials are self-inflicted wounds too; wounds like zero skill, bad credit, and chronic dependency. Nevertheless, all is not lost for the unemployed baccalaureate. If you never acquire a skill, you can always teach, go into politics, or work for the government.

I’m gobsmacked to see arrogant and entitled Millennials burden themselves with debt and then patronize the very working, taxpaying HS graduates who are expected to bail out smug [musterbaters](#). A mind might be a terrible thing to waste, but that train has already left the station. The K through 12 rot in the American public school system is now generational. The very same folks who received credentials instead of an education now run the public schoolhouse. Functional illiteracy is now a self-fulfilling prophesy.

America has the most expensive dystopic and despotic school system on the planet. If schools could be sued for malpractice, faculty and student

performance would improve overnight. Tweets, Instagrams, a Facebook page, “likes,” and a rap remix will never make you market worthy.

This is not to argue that school should prepare you for a trade. Trades have skill standards; a likely reason they are no longer taught at American high schools. And still, trades are more important today than ever, but even that baby has been thrown out with the bathwater.

We have school administrators today with the rhetorical skills of house cats. And neither the “system,” as you say, nor academic peers are willing to recognize the deadwood. Education is indeed an opportunity, but in its absence, incompetence always fills the vacuum. Unfortunately, modern standards for tenure have little to do with competence. Having labored at the schoolhouse and in government, I can assure you that decaying deadwood cannot be fired, literally or figuratively. Like pedophile clergy, poor teachers and inert government employees are simply shifted to another venue where the rot spreads.

The key to employment is marketable skills – or maybe an ounce of effort for every pound of whining. It is more than a little ironic to hear kept or dependent Millennials complain about the very system and patrons that make indulgence, subsidized superfluous school, and silly ideology possible.

In this vein, you might lose that conceit about college credentials and compensation. Trust me, there are more unemployed college graduates today than there are unemployed mechanics. Do you know what demographic has the best employment record? The answer is uneducated immigrants, humble folks who will take any job that pays. This is not to argue that we should turn colleges into trade schools, but skill helps; skills like balancing a checkbook or writing code.

It is one of the great ironies of the 21st Century that the country that created the digital age can’t produce enough skilled graduates to man the oars of domestic cyber commerce. A subordinate irony is that the virtual world was created for the most part by clever chaps without benefit of college degrees. A final irony is the specter of naive students pursuing degrees in subjects that no one values.

Understand if you will, universities and governments are institutions capable of making spare parts for themselves. You will not have that superpower as an

entrepreneur or market employee.

Once upon a time, a liberal arts education began with two years of mandatory courses, followed by a couple of years of specialized concentration. The early emphasis was rhetoric: critical reading, logic, speech or debate, and writing. Science was called natural philosophy in those days. If you could not master critical rhetorical skills, you would get the gate before a third year. Rhetorical skills have been the mark of an educated man or woman since Plato was a pup. Nothing has changed today except the frivolous schoolhouse where inmates now run the asylum.

Today, students are abandoned to indulgence, left to recognize the basic skills necessary for success. Many do not.

Master those traditional rhetorical skills anyway and you are well equipped to conquer any specialty. Most kids don't have any specific career goals in college. And maybe they shouldn't. Still, without basic skill sets, specialization and career ambition might be another waste of time.

If a student squanders four expensive years on academic or ideological cotton candy (you know who you are) you shouldn't expect potential employers to share your folly. Unfortunately, most youngsters who major in soft soap end up back at the schoolhouse where workplace and social adolescence is an asset. You can't spend a lifetime on Twitter or Facebook, masturbation is not a career track.

American schooling at the elementary and HS levels is a disaster today because those at the bottom of the baccalaureate barrel find refuge there as teachers.

Surely there are a host of millennial victims, but the culprit is likely indulgent parents and schoolhouses run by fakirs and place holders. A sheepskin has no value for the unemployed. And the notion that somehow we should worry more about the unemployed college graduate than we do about the tradesman is elitist twaddle; very unMarxist too.

Individual and institutional failure is usually a function of will, sloth, or character, not tooth fairies. If individuals take credit for success, they must also accept the debits of failure. The most useful tool for measuring personal achievement, or lack of it, is a mirror. Alas, reflection seems not to be a campus value these days.

Speaking of coattails, Mrs. Clinton's slide left has little to do with Trump either and everything to do with Bernie Sanders who is running as a socialist. The left is moved left by the left. If we can put Trump aside for the moment, there's little difference between the establishment, right and left, on domestic or foreign policy anyway. Both parties are willing to throw good money after bad in failed social programs at home. Public Education is just one example. Both political parties are willing to throw lives and treasure at failed regime change schemes abroad too.

Trump is not the cause of anything, except maybe media and establishment heartburn. He is a symptom not a cause, not to be confused if you're considering a career as a diplomat or political diagnostician. Blaming the "system" is a cop out too. Institutions are individual collectives of real people – for good or ill.

You are correct, however, about the "progressive" putsch. The nanny state is endorsed and funded liberally by both political parties today. And for the American establishment: debt, deficit, human rights, a few lost heads, women, Jews, or Christians are small prices to pay for appeasing a "great religion" and the now global jihad. Using neologisms like "Islamophobia" give you away as someone willing to rationalize or excuse the worst among us.

You have plenty of media support too in your use of race as a brickbat. Trump may have a lot to answer for, but methinks the charge "racist" is not supported by facts or actions. Inappropriate rhetoric maybe, but not anything concrete. Trump comes to the hospitality/developer industry via Queens, Fordham, and Wharton. No KKK at those stops. And as a hospitality and housing industry mogul, he probably employs more immigrants, minorities, and women than anybody in politics besides Teresa Heinz.

If you judge folks on what they say, Islam might be illegal tomorrow. You need to judge on facts or a record, actions not words. Clinton, Sanders, and Cruz have political records. Trump is still a cypher. Trump and Sanders are in fact having a political bromance. Both are running against business as usual – or Obama 3, if the truth be told. The target in 2016 is establishment dystopia, right and left. Alas, as outsiders, neither of these guys is likely to have much impact on clueless Beltway apparatchiks or tenured incompetence.

I'm not sure Trump actually wants to be President in any case. He seems to be as surprised as anybody by his appeal. Win or lose, Trump enjoys rocking the boat. Both sides fear Trump because they don't have a clue as to what he might say – or do. The establishment abhors the *parvenu*.

All of which brings me to a final observation. Politics has little to do with logic and less to do with "science." People vote with their hearts, not their heads. If your heart is leaning left, you might want to condition that emotion with a little evidence, given your father's family history.

Nazis, totalitarian socialists, and fascists are a phenomenon of the left. National Socialism was once the polite moniker for a small group of anti-Semites who consigned your European ancestors to the ovens. Communists did much the same only with larger numbers. Slavery, racial bigotry, and a hundred years of neo-fascist segregation is a legacy of the American left here at home too. When you are calling names, you must remember to call Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, and Ronald Reagan what they were: Republicans not Dixiecrats.

The political correctness and anti-Jewish, anti-Israeli sentiment that poisons campus culture today is a phenomenon of the contemporary left; cowardly academics that defend bigotry like Islamism in the name of tolerance. The BDS movement is a glaring example. If you watched the last Clinton/Sanders debate, you can't help but know that neither candidate on the left is good news for Israel.

If you are hell bent on swimming with those sharks, don't be surprised if and when you find yourself on the menu. You can do something about your personal politics and your skill sets; there's little you can do about being Jewish.

I have never belonged to any political party; such things were incompatible with my former profession. Nonetheless, I treasure tradition and history, and the wisdom of any policy that represents prudence and common sense. The American left may have hijacked the true meaning of "progressive." Hope isn't a destination and change isn't a virtue of itself.

We get change daily, like it or not. The passage of time is not necessarily progress. History moves in two directions, forward and backwards. You are the future. You get to pick. Choose well.

We are as always,



G. Murphy Donovan usually writes about the politics of national security.

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