Free Speech, Politics, and Academia

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> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.
>
> —William Butler Yeats

William Butler Yeats penned these words to describe his feelings in the aftermath of World War I (Harmon 1998). I believe his poem aptly captures the chaos, foolishness, and irrationality that are touted as "progress" in our modern progressive society. In this world, scientific or medical data—which documents how we and our children have been harmed not only by the abandonment of traditional forms of social behavior but also by some of the ideas that emerge from our universities—are sometimes met with a violent reaction by groups and individuals. Whereas some in academia argue that the family is a social construct and that a two-parent family with biologically related children has no special advantages over other family structures (Silverstein and Auerbach 1999), real-life evidence tells a different story. Children raised in traditional families have enormous advantages over those raised in other family structures (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Popenoe 1999; Rhoads 2004).

Rampant political correctness and progressiveness have resulted in dangerous decisions with serious repercussions in communities for which the actions purportedly were designed to protect. A salient example is the willingness of the US government to cover the cost of sex-reassignment surgery for prisoners and Medicare recipients who believe that their true gender is different from that indicated by their genitalia. Scientific evidence of harm to the group is ignored to advance the lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer (LBGTQ) community agenda. According to Dr. Paul McHugh, a former Johns Hopkins Hospital psychiatrist, "The transgendered suffer a disorder of 'assumption' like those in other disorders familiar to psychiatrists. With the transgendered, the disordered assumption is that the individual differs from what seems given in nature—namely one's maleness or femaleness" (McHugh 2014). Studies of sex-reassignment patients at Johns Hopkins University and the Karolinska Institute in Sweden show that transgendered people are far more likely to commit suicide after a sex-change operation. The evidence was so great that Hopkins Hospital, the institution that pioneered sex-change operations in the 1960s, ended the practice after finding that those who requested sex changes were more likely to commit suicide after the surgery and that they suffered from treatable mental illness.

Dr. McHugh concluded that government funding of sex-change operations can do more harm than good for the transgendered population that the government seeks to help (Witkin 2004). Meanwhile, our current society's political correctness prevents us from discussing and addressing mental-health issues that affect transgendered individuals and their need for appropriate care before the irreversible removal of a penis or a breast. Those who are working to ban the mental-health treatment of transsexuals and individuals struggling with same-sex attractions seek to provide transsexuals with government-funded operations, believing that this is the humane thing to do. As a consequence, criminals such as Private Bradley Manning, a US Army soldier convicted under the Espionage Act of releasing more than 700,000 classified documents to WikiLeaks and currently serving a 35-year sentence at Fort Leavenworth (Tate 2013), has been rewarded with government-funded sex change hormones and legal permission to change his name to Chelsea Elizabeth Manning (Londoño 2014; Pilkington 2015). Supporters of government-supported sex changes have argued that denying such requests would constitute cruel and unusual punishment.[1]

By their actions, those who advocate sex-change operations are stating that biological genitalia clearly visible at birth mean nothing: for them, all that matters is how people feel about themselves. On April 8, 2015, Obama adviser Valerie Jarrett strongly denounced conversion therapies for youth struggling with same-sex attractions.[2] In seeking to ban therapeutic choices for adolescents and adults who have requested reparative treatment, activists have engaged an aggressive ideological agenda that infringes on the rights of individuals seeking counseling for unwanted impulses. This has prompted a strong response from the NARTH Institute: The Clinical and Research Divisions for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity, which seek to protect patient/counselor confidentiality and the scientific community from ideological agendas that would ban options and legitimate research projects that raise questions running counter to the prevailing ideological agendas (NARTH nd).

The absurdity of the modern "progressive" university is such that it would jettison the gender-specific pronouns of "he" and "she" in favor of the newly invented social construct of "ze," which is gender neutral. A 2012 example of the inanity that surrounds political correctness concerning the LBGTQ agenda occurred when Mark Regnerus, a University of Texas at Austin sociologist, published social science research based on a study of more than 15,000 randomly selected individuals. He found that children raised in homes with at least one biological parent involved in a same-sex romantic relationship were more likely to suffer from emotional problems (Regnerus 2012). He was roundly condemned by the media, and his university took the unusual step of issuing a press release distancing itself from the peer-reviewed article written by their colleague. The press release reads, in part, as follows:

> Like all faculty, Dr. Regnerus has the right to pursue his areas of research and express his point of view. However, Dr. Regnerus's opinions are his own. They do not reflect the views of the Sociology Department of The University of Texas at Austin. Nor do they reflect the views of the American Sociological Association, which takes the position that the conclusions he draws from his study of gay parenting are fundamentally flawed on conceptual and

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methodological grounds and that findings from Dr. Regnerus's work have been cited inappropriately in efforts to diminish the civil rights and legitimacy of LBGTQ partners and their families. We encourage society as a whole to evaluate his claims.[3]

Professor Regnerus's study, although not perfect, remains one of the more rigorous studies of the topic because it uses a national random sample and includes numerous controls for alternative explanations for his findings. If his study is as methodologically flawed as his sociological colleagues claim, this is a huge indictment of the peer-review process that is designed to identify and select quality work that improves knowledge in a given area. A recent Australian study of relationships, in which at least one parent reported being attracted to someone of the same sex, garnered a lead *Washington Post* headline that reported erroneously, "Children of Same-Sex Couples Are Happier and Healthier Than Peers, Research Shows" (Crouch 2014). As the Family Research Council pointed out, the Australian study was not about same-sex couples; it was about situations in which at least one parent expressed a same-sex attraction. Moreover, it was a nonscientific "convenience sample" of parents' self-reports on how well they think their children are doing.[4] The politically correct and misleading headline implied that children in same-sex families were faring better than those in traditional families. It remains to be seen whether the methodological flaws of the Crouch study receive the same cool reception as Professor Regnerus's study.

Clearly, we live in a society in which many in government and academia believe that the advancement of society is best achieved by embracing radical change through silencing and, in some cases, destroying individuals and their careers. To accomplish its radical goals, the political Left has sought to curtail and suppress the Judeo-Christian values and principles that were major factors in our nation's success and the creation of many of our great universities. The desertion of traditional morals is most evident in the decisions frequently made by university administrators to silence the religious freedom of Christian students (discussed later in this article). Professor Mary Poplin, of Claremont Graduate University, notes that "[u]ntil the 1800s, most universities, even many of the early state universities, had mottoes, seals and buildings embellished with biblical texts" (Poplin 2014). Of the nation's first 108 colleges, 106 had Christian foundations (e.g., Harvard, Yale, and Princeton universities) and often were led by theologians or other members of the clergy.[5] These Ivy League institutions disproportionately produce leaders who shape and define our culture, albeit now from a secular perspective in which the Constitution and our biblical roots often are more disdained than embraced or at least acknowledged. Under the guise of progress, we in academia have allowed free speech to be stifled and the Constitution and the rule of law to be neutered. This has been done in a manner that no longer provides a meaningful compass for the young people whom we are charged with educating and directing. Among political scientists—who represent that branch of social sciences charged with educating young people about the inner workings of government—there is a reluctance to speak out about the dangerous trends taking place in our nation at the highest levels of power. I am referring to the tendency to "turn a blind eye" to the weakening of the rule of law and the undermining of the Bill of Rights. There is an unfortunate university cultural obsession with sexuality that seeks to stifle any dissenting voices that might warn of dire consequences that ensue from behaviors deviating from the norm. Although I understand the reluctance to become involved, I urge political scientists who care about America's future to step forward and fight for core values and principles.

In this polemical article, I share my misgivings about political science and the direction of our nation as evidenced in reckless governmental decisions about the use of taxpayers' dollars. I also discuss the factors behind my decision to venture into the world of political punditry and media. I write from the perspective of a nontraditional political scientist who has spent her life "marching to the beat of a different drummer." I was a high school dropout and teenage wife and mother, so I approach the world from a vantage point different from the one occupied by people of more privileged backgrounds whom I routinely encounter in academia. I also have the perspective of a person who evolved later in life from agnostic to Christian believer. My Christian-conversion experience and my love for America have had a profound impact on my relationship with political science and academia as a whole. At times, my shift from agnosticism to Christianity has placed a bull's-eye on my back; it has created an unease that I often sense within liberal political science circles and at Vanderbilt University in general. Over the years, I have suffered the indignity of having my faith mocked, and I endured a particularly painful experience in which a faculty dean told me at a social gathering that I needed to "tone down my faith" because it was hurting my career. I considered leaving the secular university and academia as a profession, but I eventually resolved to stay because I believe my voice is needed. I am a political scientist by training, and I believe that we have a responsibility to use our knowledge and training to fight for the nation from the perch on which we sit.

Rampant political correctness and progressiveness have resulted in dangerous decisions with serious repercussions in communities for which the actions purportedly were designed to protect.

The Christian religion is important to our nation and its future. It helped define our nation and our institutions of higher learning. "From AD 1100 to the 1800s, Roman Catholics and, later, Protestants founded most western universities" (Poplin 2014, 35). Those leaders sought to instill in the next generation a particular worldview that was based on Judeo-Christian values and principles. However, we are witnessing the widespread rejection of Judeo-Christian values and principles by cultural elites who seek to remake our nation into their vision of "the good society." There is a new pugnacity against Christianity driven by activists who seek to silence those who hold a traditionalist worldview. Instead of seeking tolerance of alternative lifestyles, today's homosexual activists seek to flaunt their disdain of traditional

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values and norms by forcing observant Christians to actively participate in ceremonies that violate their most deeply held religious and moral beliefs. Bypassing those with no moral objections, homosexual activists have targeted religiously devout bakers, photographers, and florists, forcing some to leave their livelihood. This makes a mockery of First Amendment rights governing religious liberty and free speech.

Even while drunkenness and rape are rampant on many campuses, we see "progressive" leaders at institutions accommodating student-initiated drag shows and "Sex Weeks." The modern university has succeeded in replacing norms concerning right and wrong with cultural relativism and moral indifference—that is, unless an act of aggression targets one of its preferred groups. Whereas condoms are freely dispensed on most university campuses, pro-life students often are barred from posting information about pregnancy-crisis centers that would give women more choices by providing a full range of options, to include—as shocking as it is to progressives—carrying an unplanned pregnancy to term.

I am a nontraditional political scientist with an unconventional background that allows me the privilege of being openly different as a black female conservative. My journey has not been easy. I have been a faculty member at Vanderbilt University for almost 15 years; before that, I taught at Princeton University for 10 years. During my time at Princeton, I was an agnostic-seeker who explored New Age and Eastern religions as part of a journey that culminated with my Christian conversion in 1999. What I observe at Vanderbilt is an aggressive attempt to suppress Christian influence on campus if it emanates from a more conservative worldview. In 2011, Vanderbilt gave official holiday status to the Wiccan religion. This means that as a faculty member, I must recognize Halloween as a high holy day that excuses Wiccans and Satanists from an assigned exam. Vanderbilt garnered national headlines for its decision to give official holiday status to the group. The recognition of Wiccans occurred two months after the University adopted a policy that forced more than half of its student Christian groups to leave campus rather than compromise their core religious beliefs.

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At some academic institutions, including mine, those who abhor Christianity embrace other religions and worldviews. The way that Buddhism is treated at universities is one example of the hypocrisy that parades as progress. In some schools, Buddhist religious practices have been integrated into health-care programs as mindfulness meditation. Yet, these same institutions do not offer similar alternatives for Christians, such as a centering-prayer class as a relaxation technique. Christian students and employees who are uncomfortable with the focus on Eastern religions are powerless to do anything about it. Campus secularists have made room for everything but orthodox Christianity. At Vanderbilt University, for example, the website for the Center for Integrative Health greets visitors with a quote that captures the inconsistencies and confusions of the modern university. Under "Vanderbilt Mindfulness," a visitor encounters a Zen sand structure with a quote by Jon Kabat-Zinn: "Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally."[6] The purpose of mindfulness is to "provide a portal for mindfulness discovery that opens and enriches the mind and heart, through present moment embodied awareness, one person at a time."[7] Captured within this statement is the pantheist worldview with its emphasis on achieving a "spiritual reality that is one with observed nature and human reality." As Poplin observes, "these metaphysical presuppositions are not also not subject to scientific verification; they constitute the faith of pantheism" (Poplin 2014, 166). Vanderbilt University is taking sides in this matter. The lack of neutrality and alternatives as well as the off-putting Eastern images can be troubling to devout adherents of other religions. A more welcoming environment would include centering prayer and other alternatives for Christians, Jews, and Muslims, who might be more comfortable in a health-care facility that was either neutral in its metaphysical leanings or expressive of more sensitivity to other faith traditions.

In an effort to be more inclusive, the University removed language from its student handbook that had protected the religious liberty of students. Under the school's new policy, student groups are asked to sign statements that require them to abandon core-belief statements and religiously based qualifications for leadership positions in religious groups.[8] Vanderbilt administrators interpreted the new policy to mean that Christian groups could no longer require their leaders to affirm a belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior,[9] lead Bible studies or worship services, or adhere to a biblically based code of conduct. It did not matter that the policy ran counter to the intent and spirit of the Free Exercise clause of the First Amendment, that it was opposed by members of Congress, and that it contradicted any notion of what effective leadership requires. Vanderbilt's decision was featured in national headlines because it was so far reaching.

Vanderbilt-like policies are increasingly being adopted at other colleges and universities, including Tufts University, the State University of New York at Buffalo, and Rollins College in Florida (Paulsen 2014). However, some universities have chosen to respect students' rights of religious freedom and conscience. The University of Florida, the University of Houston, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Texas are among the institutions that exempt religious groups from the type of nondiscrimination policies used at Vanderbilt and elsewhere to force Christian groups off campus.

Religious intolerance on campuses has received much national attention. When students' rights to freedom of religion and freedom of conscience are being trampled, political scientists should boldly and strongly defend student rights and the constitutional values and principles integral to defining us as people of a free nation. At Vanderbilt, these concepts were squashed by institutional leaders who conveniently shielded themselves with

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the legalistic excuse that Vanderbilt is a private institution and therefore can choose and impose its own values. The ideal of the University being a marketplace of ideas that embraced pluralism and minority viewpoints disappeared. In this instance, a minority at the helm of the institution imposed its values on a much larger majority using the language of nondiscrimination. Across the nation, nondiscrimination has become increasingly a language of discrimination in which minorities use rhetoric and political correctness to impose their will on majorities. We fail to recognize and acknowledge the aggressiveness of secularism in promoting a worldview that its adherents see as superior to the Judeo-Christian worldview that shaped our nation.

Several years ago, journalist William Proctor wrote a provocative book titled *The Gospel According to the* New York Times*: How the World's Most Powerful News Organization Shapes Your Mind and Values* (Proctor 2000). Using a content analysis of news stories, editorials, and opinion pieces, he argued that the *Times* used its news coverage and the strategic placement of articles to advance a particular worldview that was more liberal than and contradicted the views held by most Americans. He believed that the "culture creep" and weakening of social and moral values were directly related to the proselytizing of the newspaper, which has significant influence on society's thought leaders. There are people in academia whose days are not complete without their daily dose of the *New York Times*. Exasperated by what he described as the ignorance of the female professor whom he was dating, a blue-collar friend exclaimed: "We can't communicate. She has no knowledge of the real world. If it wasn't covered in the *New York Times*, it simply didn't happen."

As part of the cultural elite, we should care about how nonelites think and feel. We should not mock them for seemingly clinging to their guns and religion, as candidate Barack Obama explained at a fundraiser in a small Pennsylvania town during the 2008 presidential election campaign.[10] While aggressive campaigns against religion and conservatism are occurring at many educational institutions across America—not only at Vanderbilt University—many in a position of influence sit idly by, paralyzed by apathy or perhaps fear of retribution (Paulson 2014). First Amendment rights are among those liberties that political scientists and lawyers within and outside of academia should defend strongly. In fact, we should stand strong for the rule of law and guarantees that the Constitutional Framers sought to protect when accommodations in the form of the Bill of Rights were added to shield citizens from the overreaching powers of the government. Today, governmental leaders disregard their oath of office and institutional leaders act like "might makes right." Unfortunately, many who have tenure are not doing enough to protect our nation or the integrity of the institutions of higher learning, where we are entrusted with parents' most precious possessions—their children and grandchildren. It is becoming more difficult for me to seriously teach American government classes when I compare the reality of the world with the straightforward language of the Constitution and the lack of knowledge that is displayed by some of our nation's leaders. Many laughed when US Representative Hank Johnson stated during a House Committee meeting that stationing 8,000 troops on Guam might cause the island to "become so overly populated that it will tip over and capsize."[11] Actually, his statement should have caused us to mourn for our nation because it is possible that he was serious when he made the stupid comment that he later claimed was a joke. This speaks volumes about the quality of some of our representatives.

Many who have worked hard and played by the unwritten rules for success now find that we are complicit and silent. We passively watch the destruction of our nation and its evolution toward the lawlessness and chaos associated with Third World nations and totalitarian regimes. We think and act like the student who wrote in an essay that "There are two main views on political issues—the religious view and the fact-based view." The student missed the competing and contending worldviews of material naturalism, secular humanism, pantheism, and the Judeo-Christian view that Poplin so eloquently distinguished in her book, *Is Reality Secular: Testing the Assumptions of Four Global Worldviews* (Poplin 2014). Everyone holds one or more of these perspectives of the world, which affect everything we do and the questions we choose to research. We should not pretend that we are operating devoid of a worldview and that our research is objective and neutral.

In recent years, the deafening silence of fellow political scientists regarding many of the social and political issues affecting our nation has been disturbing. This includes the racial double standard that has allowed the Obama administration to engage in what many perceive as an abuse of executive power in several forms. Given the various scandals surrounding the Obama administration, it is doubtful that former US Attorney General Eric Holder would have survived to a second term had not there not been double standards and political-correctness norms placed above good government. Regardless of political party, everyone has a stake in the health and welfare of our nation. Every year, our nation moves increasingly further from respecting and upholding the fundamental rights and privileges guaranteed by the Constitution. We have allowed political correctness to silence us on issues when instead we should be offering leadership. We should not be content to merely observe and record the decline of our nation; we should roll up our sleeves and fight.

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Even if we reject the Judeo-Christian worldview, there is a basis for common ground emanating from our shared Western culture. The Secular Humanist Declaration of 1980 affirms this point and reveals shared values between Christians and secular humanism that should provide a basis for unity, as well as justification for secularists to fight for the values and principles embodied in the Constitution, including free speech and freedom of religion:

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> Free inquiry entails recognition of civil liberties as integral to its pursuit, that is, a free press, freedom of communication, the right to organize opposition parties and to join voluntary associations, and freedom to cultivate and publish the fruits of scientific, philosophical, artistic, literary, moral and religious freedom. Free inquiry requires that we tolerate diversity of opinion and that we respect the right of individuals to express their beliefs, however unpopular they may be, without social or legal prohibition or fear of sanctions (Poplin 2014, 116).

Notwithstanding the basis for common ground, we do not find many voices joining in unison when controversies arise in the media and on campuses involving viewpoint discrimination and the suppression of free speech.

If we are true to our profession, more people in academia should be concerned about the loss of basic freedoms in America and the reach of the federal government. This is especially true for those who read the dystopian novels of George Orwell and would easily identify "Big Brother" and the "thought police." If we are honest, we must admit that the censorship and rising levels of surveillance do not bode well for the "land of the brave and the home of the free." We should be able to recognize when Marxism and totalitarianism reach our shores and begin to mutate. Remembering the words of the philosopher Santayana, we should not want to be counted among the foolish who have failed to remember the past and therefore are doomed to repeat it. We should know better: we have read books, watched documentaries, and listened to oral histories of people who fled totalitarian regimes. We do not want to experience the same senseless violence, absence of rule of law, and disrespect for humanity in America. Nevertheless, many who are trained students of government fail to sound an alarm when we see high-level leaders repeatedly violate their oath of office while the media and other institutional leaders either "turn a blind eye" or justify the violations as no worse than those of the past. This is unfortunate for our nation, and it is not a good sign for our profession. We should use our knowledge and influence to enlighten and educate the public, expose wrongdoing in high places, and challenge others to rise to a higher standard. We cannot allow the need for governmental funding of research to obstruct us from criticizing governmental officials and holding institutions accountable—even if the challenge involves a measure of risk.

The media exert a major influence on public attitudes and what people are willing to tolerate. In a 1948 book that has proven prescient, former University of Chicago professor Richard Weaver warned of the disintegration of Western civilization. He sounded an alarm about the rise of nominalism, a worldview that rejects absolute truth and now is recognized on university campuses as cultural relativism, a first cousin of multiculturalism. Weaver introduced the "Great Stereopticon," a three-pronged gadget that included the press, the radio industry, and the film industry. The Stereopticon he described projected "selected pictures of life in the hope that what is seen will be imitated." According to Weaver, "All of us who are within the long reach of technology are sitting in the audience. We are told the time to laugh, the time to cry, and signs are not . . . [lacking] that the audience grows ever more responsive to its cues" (Weaver 1948, 93). Too easily, we join the bandwagon and follow the group; however, it does not have to be this way: we can take up defensive positions and use our skills and talents to educate and motivate the public to make its voices heard by its elected officials and to set the bar higher. Our foe today is an overreaching government that now threatens the freedoms that once distinguished America as a nation that worked because it had a constitution that made sense as well as a populace that feared God and believed it had responsibilities to others, at home and abroad.

I believe we must acknowledge the influence of our worldviews and ask ourselves what kind of world we want our children and grandchildren to inherit. I chose "the road less traveled" for a political scientist, and I believe that things will fall apart and the center will not hold. Political science for me is about using my knowledge and insight to empower the "We the People" mentioned in the preamble of the US Constitution. A few years ago, I thought I had no alternative but to leave political science. I increasingly found myself in the media as a public intellectual speaking to issues that I believed should be of importance to the American people. Understanding the norms of the profession, I was keenly aware of the contempt that some in academia hold for those who share our opinions with the media.

I was reminded of this firsthand in January 2015 when I wrote an editorial for the Nashville *Tennessean* in which I criticized Islam for posing a worldwide jihad danger. I authored the piece in the wake of the horrific attacks carried out a week earlier by Al-Qaeda jihadists that left 12 dead at the Paris offices of *Charlie Hebdo* magazine. Through this commentary, I might just as well have lit the fuse on a thousand pounds of dynamite, considering the maelstrom that sent a ton of proverbial bricks cascading down onto me within hours after the piece was published.

As I write this, I continue to come to grips with the fallout from devastating, unfair attacks on my character made by those who dissented with my commentary, not with reason but with insults and callousness. A small band of Vanderbilt students organized a campus rally to rail against what they termed "hate speech" on my part. They called for Vanderbilt officials to condemn my comments and "to declare that the campus is free of intolerance and hatred against its students." Note that my column never mentioned Vanderbilt or its students, yet students there took it upon themselves to be offended. Also, I was unapologetically shunned by faculty peers, some of whom castigated me through campus media for my non-PC viewpoints, throwing around phrases such as "simplistic nostrums," "unthinking emotiveness," "shallow political opportunism," and "Muslim-baiting" to describe my column. Anyone who still believes that colleges and universities remain bastions of free speech, where diversity of opinion is openly encouraged, should spend a few days in my shoes.

Fortunately, there is hope on the horizon. I am encouraged by the actions taken by faculty at Princeton University (2015) and the University of Chicago (2015) reaffirming their long-standing commitment to the freedom of speech and academic freedom traditionally associated with universities. Rather than coddling the politically correct, the Princeton statement reads, in part:

> Of course, the ideas of different members of the University community will often and quite naturally conflict. But it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. Although the University greatly values civility, and although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.

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It takes thick skin to engage the culture and often walk alone. No matter, I still want to see more political scientists avail themselves of opportunities to share their expertise and unpopular opinions with the general public. Obviously, it takes courage to cut against the grain. However, I offer a caveat: being willing to share one's views requires transparency and a willingness to take risks. Making oneself available to the media is not for the faint-hearted. Whenever one takes a stance on an issue, he or she can expect heavy criticism (i.e., my *Tennessean* piece on Islam) along with the accolades and other forms of support. Venturing beyond the walls of academia requires a thicker skin, a certain amount of humility, and a firm conviction that one's actions matter in the world.

Appearing on television as a pundit might look easy but it is not. It is difficult because the call for an appearance might come on short notice, and there can be a last-minute switch of topics without forewarning. Consequently, a pundit is expected to offer an opinion on a breaking issue long before the full facts are known. There is no substitute for media training and experience if one chooses radio and television. It is essential for authors of university and trade books to set up websites and be available for numerous radio, television, and print interviews. This is an opportunity to decide if a book or an article is important enough to invest the time and energy needed to sell one's ideas to a waiting public.

Venturing beyond the walls of academia requires a thicker skin, a certain amount of humility, and a firm conviction that one's actions matter in the world.

As some people already know, I started my career as a painfully shy woman with a heavy Southern rural dialect that immediately set me apart from most people I encountered at elite institutions. What I experienced was a struggle for my voice. My first foray into the media came shortly after the 2002 publication of my book, *The New White Nationalism: Its Challenge to Integration* (Swain 2002). I decided to take media training because I believed so strongly in the critical message of my book; I wanted to be able to sound what I thought was a necessary alarm about the dangerous trajectory that lay ahead for America. Based on my research—which included interviews with leaders of white-nationalist organizations—I believed that conditions were emerging in America that would create a devil's brew for racial unrest. These conditions included (1) the growing presence of nonwhite immigrants, legal and illegal, and the gradual transformation of the nation from majority white to majority minority; (2) the structural changes in the global economy, which were creating a loss in high-wage production jobs; (3) the continued white resentment about race-based affirmative-action policies; (4) the high black-on-white violent-crime rates; (5) the language of multiculturalism and identity politics, which divided rather than united Americans; (6) the rising expectations of racial and ethnic minorities; and (7) the exponential growth in the number of households connected to the Internet, which allowed like-minded people to organize more easily.

The book, published before immigration reform became a hot topic, received a fair amount of press coverage. Included was a review in the *New York Times*'s style section by a sympathetic columnist who agreed that the alarm I sounded in the book was worth hearing. Between April 2002 and December 2003, I logged more than 1,000 print, radio, and television interviews. In 2007, I became a paid contributor for CNN's "Lou Dobbs Tonight," a stint that lasted two years before I moved on to become an unpaid regular for Fox News's "Hannity Show," where I was the X-factor on the Great American Panel for several years. The X-factor was present to bring unpredictability to the mostly partisan panels.

Impatience and frustration with the process led me first to envision and finally to create my own show. I chose this route because I wanted to be able to select the guests and the topics. Moreover, I felt strongly that there was a need for a different type of show and that my training as a political scientist and my life experiences would complement one another.

In the summer of 2012, I created Eagle Wings Media, LLC, which owned and produced the *Be the People* television show. In addition, I incorporated a 501(c)3 nonprofit entity to educate people about conservative values and principles. With a small budget and three minor investors, I stepped out, firmly convinced that there was a need for a new television show hosted by a conservative black woman who would bring Judeo-Christian values to the issues of the day.

The first *Be the People* episode aired on October 12, 2012. *Be the People* was a half-hour talk show that addressed political, social, and cultural issues from a Judeo-Christian perspective. It sought to educate, inspire, and motivate people to take action that would change the quality of their lives, their communities, and—ultimately—our nation. The show promoted free-market ideas and the Judeo-Christian principles that undergird America. It was dedicated to the presentation of "fair and true" information about social, political, cultural, and economic issues impacting the quality of everyday lives. It offered a call to action because it is too easy for people to stay home and complain. My goal was to go beyond mere "sound bites" to educate audiences about a particular policy or individual and to motivate viewers to take action.

The results of *Be the People* were mixed, and ultimately I had to pull the plug on Eagle Wings Media in the spring of 2015 because of a variety of factors, mainly financing. Producing a television show, even a modestly successful and popular one, often involves a steady drain on the bank account. The quality of the product is never a guarantee that it will produce the stream of advertising dollars needed to thrive, let alone survive. But we did have measurable success, and it was an experience I would embrace again, given outside investors with deeper pockets.

Initially, *Be the People* aired at midnight for 18 months on a local NBC affiliate before it was moved to an early-morning time slot on a Fox affiliate. On the NBC affiliate, the show, when it launched, followed *Sunday Night Football* and reached audiences as large as 46,000 households, according to the Nielsen ratings. To air the show, it was necessary to find a television station that would work with a novice: me. I was fortunate enough to launch on a station with a female general manager who took an interest in the show and was willing and able to make concessions on the

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cost of airtime and promotion. Nevertheless, it was necessary to find an experienced producer, as well as sponsors who would buy 30-second spots to defray the costs of a new show. The show had to evolve.

Our topics included affirmative action on university campuses, the conflict between Israel and Hamas, attacks on religious freedom on university campuses, the Republican Party's difficulties in attracting racial and ethnic minorities, immigration reform, and abortion. Our guests included James Taranto of the *Wall Street Journal*, Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies, documentarian Curtis Bowers, US Representative Steve King (R-Iowa), economist Arthur Laffer, and singer/songwriters John Rich and Lee Greenwood.

In the fall of 2014, the show shifted to a YouTube format, and I use the Be the People TV website to offer conservative commentary on pressing issues. I stay actively engaged with the culture mostly through radio and occasional television interviews and blogs.

I pursued a place in the media with my own show from a conviction that sound bites never actually educate the general public. As a guest on another show, one cannot control the selection of other guests or topics to be discussed. In addition, many of the news programs' "talking heads" are entertainers; their commitment to the positive good often is limited to whatever they believe will drive the ratings. Moreover, I observed that people who watch conservative talk shows were becoming increasingly despondent after listening to talking heads rant on their favorite shows.

Before creating the television show, I published a book by the same name: *Be the People: A Call to Reclaim America's Faith and Promise* (Swain 2011). It was my first effort at writing a book geared primarily to a general audience. It addresses political, social, and cultural issues from a conservative perspective, and each chapter ends with concrete action points, which I included because of my conviction that people not only need but also desire direction in determining how best to address a problem. Each chapter includes social science research and current information, as well as biblical perspectives and scriptures. I wrote *Be the People* for the "millions of hardworking, honest Americans who are frustrated with elected officials who act as if the opinions of their constituents no longer matter once elections are over" (Swain 2011). I wanted them to know that "We the People" have the power to hold politicians accountable. Also, "We the People" are ultimately responsible for the policies and programs enacted on our behalf. I hoped that the book would empower readers to "become skilled at gathering, filtering, and evaluating the information that comes to us shaped by the media, cultural elites, educational institutions, and other gatekeepers who have set themselves up as change agents" (Swain 2011).

I chose the path less traveled by academicians. I realize that the decision to enter the public arena with a missionary zeal risks reputational damage and potential financial ruin. I financed the launch of *Be the People* with personal savings and several minor investors. It was a "labor of love" born of a vision to impact society for what I see as a greater good best accomplished by galvanizing a slumbering public. Initially, I pondered leaving Vanderbilt University and relinquishing my tenure, taking early retirement, and retooling for a different career. Political office was never an option that I seriously considered, despite being contacted several times about running for the US House of Representatives or the US Senate. Circumstances and the wisdom of the elders intervened. Their sage advice was that, as a tenured professor, I was free to follow my dream even if it might be frowned upon by the conformists among us.

What I hoped to do with my life and talents was to empower everyday people to be more effective in their pursuit of the values and principles connected with our Judeo-Christian heritage and the constitutional form of government that once greatly distinguished America from other nations. It seemed natural to use my skills and training to inspire, motivate, and educate others. The jury is out on whether I ultimately will be successful in achieving my goals to use my life and training to impact the nation. In the meantime, I put one foot in front of the other and I keep walking. ■

NOTES

1. Kosilek V. O'Brien, Commissioner of The Massachusetts Department of Corrections, December 16, 2014. Available at http://media.ca1.uscourts.gov/pdf.opinions/12-2194P2-01A.pdf. For current updates, see GLAD.Org, http://www.glad.org/work/cases/kosilek-v.-spencer
2. "Petition Response: on Conversion Therapy." April 8, 2015. Available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/04/08/petition-response-conversion-therapy
3. "UT Austin Denounces Mark Regnerus's Anti-Gay Study," March 4, 2014. Available at www.hrc.org/blog/entry/ut-austin-denounces-mark-regnerus-anti-gay-study
4. "Parent-Reported Measures of Child Health and Wellbeing in Same-Sex Parent Families: A Cross-Sectional Survey," available at www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/14/635/abstract
5. April Shenandoah, available at www.tysknews.com/Depts/Educate/history_part3.htm
6. Vanderbilt Center for Integrative Health. Available at www.vanderbilthealth.com/integrativehealth/37864
7. Ibid.
8. Variations of what happened at Vanderbilt University are occurring on other campuses. Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, is the only institution that has adopted the Vanderbilt model. Ironically, it was founded as a Congregationalist institution and Vanderbilt as a Methodist.
9. Kim Colby, "Vanderbilt to Christian Student Organization: Drop Commitment to Jesus Christ for Leadership," April 12, 2012. Available at www.clsnet.org/page.aspx?pid=791 (accessed May 28, 2014).
10. Ben Smith, "Obama on Small-Town Pa.: Clinging to Religion, Guns, Xenophobia." Available at www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0408/Obama_on_smalltown_PA_Clinging_religion_guns_xenophobia.html
11. Representative Hank Johnson (D-Georgia), House Armed Services Committee meeting March 25, 2010. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7m6aewquco&feature=kp

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