

OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST
R HOWARD BLOCH

What students can do for democracy

Back in the 1970s, when my student generation and I took to the streets to protest the Vietnam War, we sang a song written by the legendary Pete Seeger and popularized by that singing angel Joan Baez: “Where have all the Flowers Gone.” The lyrics cycled through a series of rhetorical questions and answers from the young girls who “have taken husbands every one,” to “young men all in uniform,” to soldiers “gone to graveyards every one,” to “graveyards covered with flowers every one,” to “young girls who have picked them every one” in a great circle of stubborn dedication to war capped by the subsuming repeated refrain, “Oh, When will you ever learn? When will you ever learn?”

These days, strolling around campus, I find myself humming this song silently to myself. But instead of flowers I hear the word “students.” Where have all the students gone?

I don’t mean there are no students in the halls and walls of Yale, but there seems to be so little evidence of student protest against what is happening in the world around them as to resemble a great empty silent space. Only two years ago U.S. campuses erupted over events occurring 3,000 miles away. Today, the threat is immediate, direct and existential, yet student reaction is seemingly non-existent.

I tend to ask students with whom I interact, “What are your ambitions for your future?” The answers range, of course, widely — from those interested in law, more particularly, constitutional law, to those headed to medical school or a career in science; from students interested in saving the environment, or in engineering, finance or “consulting,” to the myriad of other paths in the arts, teaching, cultural management, politics and government. All are menaced by the potential disappearance of the rule of law or looming constitutional crises, the degradation of the U.S. health system or the devaluation of scientific knowledge, the denial of climate change, the massive unemployment, even in technical fields, caused by artificial intelligence, or the loss of faith in essential private and public institutions.

All of our students’ ambitions depend upon the democratic process this country has nourished for 250 years and which we can no longer take for granted. For it will be tested by the upcoming midterm elections in ways that it has not been since the Civil War.

I read in the News that many students feel numbness in the face of current events, and others may feel there is nothing they can do.

On the contrary, this is a time when students, like those who participated in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s or the

anti-war movement of the 1970s, can and should take stock, speak out, step out of the safe space of campus and become actively involved in the future of the country which is the only guarantee of their own futures.

And here is one concrete way students might engage: Michael Roth, President of Wesleyan University and an effective organizer of university presidents in response to recent attacks upon higher education, has proposed a National Democracy Summer on the model of the courageous Freedom Summer of 1964 which played a key role in the Civil Rights movement by advancing voting rights in Mississippi. Roth proposes that “by the fall thousands of students will be working side by side with election administrators and civic organizations to support poll worker recruitment, election protection efforts, and lawful observation.” Students trained in what to watch for and what to do will make a difference in countering all the ways in which free and fair elections are threatened next fall.

Yale, which has a noble history of participation in the Civil Rights movement through William Sloane Coffin, might consider altering its academic calendar to make fall break coincide with election week. Alternately, students might be accorded an excused absence for the beginning of the week of Nov. 7. Such an effort articulates with creative ways of thinking about the future of participatory democracy already underway at Yale as part of the Citizen’s Assembly project.

So, if you are contemplating an internship this summer, why not consider making a meaningful contribution to your own future and that of your families, friends, neighbors, and, potentially, your children and grandchildren who one day may ask, “What did you do to preserve America’s great experiment in democracy?” It may mean some sacrifice, and even some risk, but you have been given great privilege in attending Yale, and, under current circumstances, you owe it to those both near and far who have made it possible. Besides, few things worth doing in this wondrous world are without sacrifice or risk.

I had the extraordinary blessing of being present at Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech on the Washington Mall in August 1963. That moment was proof positive that young people can make a difference in the course of a nation’s history. If ever there were a time for you to intervene both for what is right and what is in your own interest, that time is now. The danger is stunning; the path forward is clear.

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GUEST COLUMNIST
TIMOTHY RIEMANN

An open letter to Secretary Hegseth

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

I write to you as an active-duty Marine Corps officer currently serving as a visiting fellow at Yale University. I write not to challenge your commitment to our armed forces. Last week, CNN reported that the Department of War — formerly called the Department of Defense — would be suspending tuition aid for graduate education, fellowships and certificate programs for active-duty service members at Harvard. The department is reportedly contemplating similar action at Yale and dozens of other colleges and universities. I would like to offer for your consideration a “boots on the deck” perspective and recommendation, having spent the last seven months at Yale.

I understand your concerns about these institutions. You’re right that many top-tier universities lean heavily left in their faculty composition and campus culture. Yale is no exception. But I would submit that this political reality is precisely why military officers belong here, not why we should be removed.

During my time at Yale, I’ve had coffee with 25 or 30 students who sought me out specifically because I wear the uniform. They’re curious, and they want to understand what we do and how we think. They ask hard questions about current events and the logic behind decisions that shape public policy and global security. In seminars, I’ve been asked to explain our strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities and the military operation to capture Nicolas Maduro. I was given a chance to speak about your meeting in Quantico with flag and general officers. I’ve provided context on why repositioning forces or moving aircraft carriers matters and what these actions signal to adversaries and allies alike.

These aren’t just academic thought experiments. These types of conversations can and often are formative. The students I engage with today will very likely become tomorrow’s journalists, policymakers and business leaders. They are future members of

Congress who will vote on defense budgets and authorizations for military force. If we remove military practitioners from campuses like Yale, these future leaders will graduate, enter positions of influence and make decisions affecting our national security without ever conversing with someone who has spent their career in uniform.

The danger isn’t just ignorance; it’s the persistence of the echo-chamber. Without us, the military remains an abstract idea or a distant institution that will be viewed through whatever lens the media or their liberal professor provides. Students will lose the opportunity to understand the perspective of the servicemembers who may execute the very policies many of them will help create and implement. They lose access to voices that, according to Gallup polling, still enjoy some of the highest trust ratings among American citizens.

What members of the military say matters, and it matters most while these students are still forming their worldviews. What we bring to the classroom at Yale cannot be replicated through reading assignments or guest lectures. When discussions turn to international relations, military strategy or the use of force, we don’t offer just ideas or theory: we are the only voice of actual experience. We challenge widely held assumptions and complicate easy narratives. We represent a perspective that’s often missing in rooms dominated by one political viewpoint.

While the Yale faculty does lean hard and nearly exclusively to the political left, the student body is more diverse than someone might imagine. One of the largest student-run organizations at Yale is the Buckley Institute, which actively promotes conservative thought and advocates for free speech. There is intellectual curiosity across campus, and I have found a genuine openness to different perspectives.

However, students can only be open to new perspectives if those

perspectives are present on campus to engage with. I can’t speak to what happened at Harvard or what conditions exist at the other universities under review. What I can tell you is what I’ve seen and experienced at Yale. Here I’ve seen and experienced military officers adding tremendous value to the classroom conversations and to the student’s outlook. On a near daily basis, I see the bridging of a civil-military divide that grows more dangerous the wider it becomes. I do not believe the solution to a politically homogenous campus like Yale is to remove the voices that offer alternative viewpoints. I think it is far more beneficial to ensure those voices remain present, engaged and able to share their expertise with these future leaders.

These programs represent a vital investment in civil-military relations at a time when such relations are increasingly strained. They make it possible for future leaders to potentially have at least one meaningful interaction with a soldier, a sailor, an airman or a U.S. Marine during their college years. The programs allow Department of War personnel to plant seeds of understanding that may bear fruit decades later when Yale graduates face decisions involving war, peace and the proper use of military personnel.

I respectfully recommend that you consider not cutting ties between the Department of War and Yale University. The officers you send here serve a mission that extends far beyond their own education; they serve an irreplaceable link between the military and the next generation of civilian leaders who will one day direct it.

Thank you for your time and consideration, Mr. Secretary.

Respectfully,
Lt. Col. Tim Riemann

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GUEST COLUMNIST
MILES ZAUD

Let me leave you with this useless fact

I don’t like basketball, so when I clicked on a News article about a Yale-UConn basketball game, I was not expecting to be entertained. But as I began to read, the unthinkable happened. Verily, yea, I was transported to the stadium itself by such evocative prose as the Bulldogs “stunning” UConn in a “buzzer-beating game winner.” It wasn’t just the UConn Huskies that were stunned.

But just as the most riveting NCAA championship double-overtime has to come to an end, so too did the piece. However, the last few seconds of a game are often the best part. The time was ripe for a borderline-legal buzzer beater of a paragraph that would generate angry opinion-editorials, libel accusations, and defamation lawsuits, as all good journalism does.

Instead, there was a single sentence: “At home, the University of New Haven basketball teams play in the Jeffery P. Hazell Athletic Center.”

This was no buzzer-beater. It was a pathetic, flaccid air ball.

Slapping asinine hooley on the ends of articles appears to be official News protocol. News reporters may be very good at following the policy of the “neutral fact” — a whopping 100 percent of reported news articles on the News’ home page end with neutral facts — but they are often less clear on why exactly they are following it. When I asked News staff about the point of the policy, I was met with vague blatherings about “tradition.”

Unfortunately for them, this was not “Fiddler On The Roof.” Such bunk would not cut it with an investigative journalist. Did anyone remember the original point of this vapid dogma? After conducting further investigation on News staff at an alcohol-fueled function, I got the truth: the policy was supposed to make articles “unbiased.”

Sometimes someone can be so wrong about something that it is

hard to address the issue without insulting them. So why even try not to? Slapping an “unbiased” fact on the end of a biased article is like spraying Febreze on something produced from a squatting position.

Just to make sure you understand the sheer level of stupid at play here, let me remind you of the headline of the article in question: “UConn won’t play Yale. Now it faces Elis’ neighbor.” If this “neighbor,” the University of New Haven, wasn’t even important enough to be mentioned by name in the headline, why did I need to know that their team plays in an athletic center named after some guy named “Jeffery”? If they were dead-set on ending the piece with the address of an athletic center, at least this mouth-breathing oxygen-waster of a sentence could have been about Yale’s athletic center. Even then, to be clear, this embarrassingly loud word-hiccup would have been about as interesting as watching an elementary-school Nativity play just good enough not to be funny.

These dingleberries clinging onto the ends of articles have managed to soil nearly everything in the News. They generally fall into the following five categories: addresses, e.g. “The Rosette Neighborhood Village is located at 203 Rosette St;” antediluvian founding dates, e.g. “The Stanford Daily was founded as The Daily Palo Alto in 1892;” amount of people in a building, e.g. “Yale New Haven Hospital has over 12,000 employees and 4,500 university and community physicians;” yogurt facts, e.g. “During the 2024–2025 school year, approximately 19 pounds of yogurt were wasted each day;” and finally, pure twaddle, e.g. “Junus’ YouTube channel has 711,000 subscribers.”

Sometimes neutral facts create unintentional ironies within articles, which can only mean that whoever

was supposed to edit the article was instead scrolling through 2x-speed split-screen Family Guy / Subway Surfers clips at maximum volume. The most barbarous instance of this sort of neutral fact I’ve ever seen came at the end of an article about how a history professor’s book misrepresented its sources: “The Qing dynasty fell in the early 13th century.” The rest of the article criticized the book for containing “out-of-context” information. Even Stevie Wonder could have seen this irony.

Hear me well, YDN: any effort to conclude a piece on an unbiased yet thought-provoking note is dead on arrival if it uses the phrases “is located at,” “was founded in,” or “YouTube channel.” As I am nothing if not practical, allow me to suggest two simple amendments to the News constitution. First: Do NOT end an article with: a) the location of a building, b) the amount of people in a building, or c) a statistic about dairy. Second: Above all, NEVER end an article with anything related to the Qing Dynasty — unless the article is about the extremely niche field of Qingology, in which case the News has bigger problems than neutral facts.

But if you’re going to continue this imbecilic policy anyway, as I suspect you will, at least consider this: what’s so bad about bias, in the first place? Bias can make an article much more convincing. A rank instance of bias can even make an article more relatable, because if there’s one thing we all have in common, it’s that we’re really, really biased.

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