# Teaching Inclusion in a Divided World

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One of the most difficult intellectual and emotional challenges I faced earlier this year at Yale was finding an answer to a Native American student's poignant question: Why should she put any faith in institutions in our society — including our judicial system and universities – when those institutions had clearly betrayed her people in generations past?

"The same Constitution with its protection of the rights to free expression and assembly that you revere," she said, "was previously of no use to people like me."

She was right, of course. So why should she and other young people place trust in systems that can perennially fail us?

I wish I had told her that the way out of this conundrum is to make these institutions her own. I wish I had told her that these institutions are worth respecting and preserving for their (albeit imperfect) embodiment of Enlightenment values; that she surely should want to embrace those values; and that her generation could make those values more true, not less. These institutions could be hers, and I believe she should *want* them to be hers.

Students are demanding greater inclusion, and they are absolutely right. But inclusion in what? At our universities, students of all kinds are joining traditions that revere free expression, wide engagement, open assembly, rational debate and civil discourse. These things are worth defending. In fact, they are the predicates for the very demands the students have been making across the United States.

Conversely, it is entirely illiberal (even if permissible) to use these traditions to demand the censorship of others, to besmirch fellow students rather than refute the ideas that they express and to treat ideological claims as if they were perforce facts. When students (and faculty) do this, they are burning the furniture to heat the house.

Open, extended conversations among students themselves are essential not only to the pursuit of truth but also to deep moral learning and to righteous social progress. The faculty must step up and show students a way forward: to learn to be harder on the problems we face in our society, but easier on each other. We must demonstrate that we cannot be a community of searchers and learners if we do not share the same principles at the core of our universities.

And so the faculty must cut at the root of a set of ideas that are wholly illiberal. Disagreement is not oppression. Argument is not assault. Words —even provocative or repugnant ones — are not violence. The answer to speech we do not like is more speech.

If we fail to see this, we risk confirming for our students the old joke that we wouldn’t want to join a club that would have us.

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