

Safe Spaces and
Campus Protest

Annie Dillard
Reads Her Mail

Rebecca Solnit
Visits Death Row

HARPER'S

HARPER'S MAGAZINE/MARCH 2016

AMERICA'S BEST IDEA

In defense of our public universities

BY MARILYNNE ROBINSON



THE FEDERAL AGENCY THAT KILLS BALD EAGLES

BY CHRISTOPHER KETCHAM

DRONE WAR! VEGANS VS. HUNTERS

BY JAY KIRK



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COURTESY THE ARTIST AND HOLLIS TAGGART GALLERIES, NEW YORK CITY

Apple Tree, a painting by Alex Kanevsky, whose work was on view in December at Hollis Taggart Galleries, in New York City.

have been worse than negligent in dealing with the students who entrusted themselves to the schools' internal processes.

Students' vulnerability makes them emotional—and of course justified emotion is the basis of any social critique. And maybe the students' impulse to cast their professors as part of an older generation that is complicit with enduring patterns of injustice is likewise understandable. Other cohorts of student protesters have gotten away with it, after all: many of the professors involved in these same disputes, including Gitlin, identify with an earlier generation whose critique of "the system" has gone down in history, and not for its subtlety.

Students then and now have often failed to distinguish their professors from the institutions at which they work. But in casting so much recent student activism as a danger to the intellectual freedom they value, professors are also conflating their students, particularly (tuition-

paying) undergrads, with university administrations and the forces to which they are responsive.

Like students' own, professors' sense of vulnerability is not merely psychological. In the case of adjunct instructors and researchers—who, as everyone has grown tired of reading, do an increasing proportion of academic grunt work—the grounds for that feeling are obvious, urgent, and of the kind Gitlin suggests: debt, precarious jobs, zero ability to plan for the long term. They (we) need unions.

Tenured faculty also have legitimate reasons to feel vulnerable. The response of universities such as my own to the guidelines issued by the federal Office of Civil Rights as it began investigating student Title IX complaints makes for a case in point. The OCR guidelines say that "responsible employees," to be designated by a university, are required to report cases of sexual misconduct. Columbia and other universities