

Mobilizing Young Americans: Universities Are the Right Place to Demand Change

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Region: [USA](#)

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Finally, events have converged to mobilize our new leaders—young Americans. Who are students but the very women and men who will lead this country spiritually, economically, politically? We press them into college to imbibe progressive ideals, to hone their communication skills, to learn about justice (and injustice), to build enduring personal networks—i.e. to prepare for active participation in society. Hopefully while bettering themselves they enhance our culture, our government, and our values?

Yet look what this generation is faced with:—years of student debt, weary-part-time-underpaid adjunct lecturers, increasing dormitory fees, skyrocketing book prices, administrations that protect campus rapists, brutish fraternity practices, and racial bias overseen by presidents with million dollar salaries.

Some say the [current uprisings on campuses](#) beginning at [University of Missouri](#) were aroused in part by the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, and the Black Lives Matter movement in cities across the nation. Thankfully.

Who better to have led this revolt than Black football heroes who for too long have been compromised by glory and monetary rewards for athletic achievements? (“Our star basketball team is multi-racial; that should be sufficient.”) Whatever the inspiration, voices of students in the forefront of political demands for change are overdue. When can we remember the last campus-based revolt? (It was another generation when it probably focused on overseas wars that overshadow daily injustices at home.)

\$1.2 trillion is said to be the total accumulated student debt in the USA today. Without this staggering statistic, we live personal stories and conditions in our own family, our students and classmates, our co-workers and their children. On the one hand we learn about abuse on campus and wild student behavior on spring-break; on the other side, there’s the single mother holding down a job while she pursues her degree. This is American university culture! So is the common practice of underpaid college workers—adjunct teachers and other employees. Many professors who enjoy abundant privileges ignore staff inequalities around them just as they overlook racist practices that today’s [students are bringing to public attention](#) due to their raised intolerance of innuendo which, like as gender and religious insults, is simply unacceptable. Thus their multiple demands.

The case of [Steven Salaita](#) who was denied his appointment at U. Illinois ended in success with a substantial financial settlement. It’s a new victory in an American community of scholars who stood by as many more colleagues saw contracts cancelled because their political beliefs were seen as a threat to university vested interests and the status quo.

The current campus uprisings are significant because these youths are exercising nascent leadership, also because the university had perhaps lost its place in American society as the arena where ideals of equality and free speech are held most sacred. Where else do we expect vigorous debate if not here; where else do we expect parity if not here; where can we challenge the status quo if not here? Where else should social media be an effective political tool? Where can we expect hopes to be planted and nourished if not here?

Finally, although it's not been cited as factoring into these revolts, there's the current national election campaign underway. Surely that 'circus' disturbs many would-be first time voters anticipating next November. Either they are watching in disgust or cynicism and thinking: "None of these guys is going to stop police violence, cancel our debts or assure us jobs. Let's move it ourselves". The [November 12 nationwide march](#) is well timed.

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