



ENQUIRY

Free Thought and Discourse

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A New Threat?

By Elizabeth Barry // Editor-in-Chief

With coverage of ISIS and global terrorism dominating the nightly news, ordinary Americans have been inadequately exposed to the rise of another military threat to the United States: China.

While China has challenged the economic dominance of the United States for years, no thanks to Beijing's effort to devalue the Yuan, it was not until 2015 that the most populous country on earth demonstrated the potential to either lessen American influence in East Asia or attack us directly.

While continued American presence in the region has certainly aggravated China and its neighbors, the military threat China poses stems more directly from a long-time territorial dispute in the South China Sea. Since the turn of the twentieth century, China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei have taken turns laying claims to the sea's mineral rich deposits, as well as ownership over key trade passages, which together generate more than five trillion dollars in annual revenue.

Last year, China's shift toward a more aggressive approach to the dispute raised a series of red flags for the United States. In an effort

to secure the South China Sea and establish a maritime sphere of influence, China began building a series of artificial islands, using them as military bases, complete with fighter jet hangars.

In building these military bases, China violated the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), infringing on Manila's sovereign rights. Since the United States is a treaty ally of the Philippines, China's encroachment on Philippine territory can be understood as an indirect attack on U.S. influence in the region.

With this new escalation in militarization, China has additionally lessened the supremacy of the American Seventh Fleet, the preeminent military force in the region, in the eyes of U.S. and Chinese allies alike.

The threat of a direct attack on U.S. forces in the region, however, is also plausible. This summer, the International Court of Justice ruled that most of China's claims to the South China Sea have no legal basis. Following the decision, anti-American protests, some of which called for war against the United States, broke out in Beijing. While an all-out war with China seems far-fetched, small naval

Tweets of the Week



Charles C. W. Cooke ✓
@charlescwcooke

I still can't believe that the next president is going to be one of these people.



Josh Barro ✓
@jbarro

The "bad memory" attack on Clinton is funny considering how often Trump claims not to know people, or to have seen things that didn't happen



Comfortably Smug
@ComfortablySmug

Bernie Sanders volunteers phone banking for Henry Kissinger's endorsed candidate will be the icing on the cake



Lachlan Markay ✓
@lachlan

[@SaysSimonson](#) "border wall futures slipped 2% on Wednesday on the news of Trump's Mexico visit..."

skirmishes most certainly do not.

Thankfully, China has yet to resort to military action. Instead, the nation has rejected the court's ruling and redoubled its island building efforts, a calculation that resembles the U.S. naval strategy in the nineteenth century.

To counter China's actions and influence, the United States has implemented Freedom of Navigation operations, sending warships and patrol aircraft since October 2015, as part of a muscle-flexing maneuver in the region.

Nevertheless, China is deter-

mined to do whatever it takes to write its own navigation rules in South China Sea, including the setting of "red lines" for neighborhood countries. Recently, China warned Japan to "not send Self-Defense Forces to join U.S. operations that test the freedom of navigation in the disputed South China Sea."

If not stopped, China may reach its ultimate goal of denying foreign access to the South China Sea altogether, damaging U.S. influence and, potentially, U.S. ships.

Chicago Dean Defends Free Speech

By Will Utschneider // Associate Editor

The University of Chicago ranks as one of the world's finest universities. It has produced more Nobel Prize winners than any other university, Milton Friedman in economics and Saul Bellow in literature, for example. The university has also led the way in breaking barriers. In 1942, for example, Chicago anthropologist Allison Davis became one of the first African-Americans to obtain tenure at an elite U.S. university. In 2016, the Chicago has risen to the fore again, this time to defend the most sacred principles of higher education.

As the class of 2020 arrived on the Chicago campus, students

found awaiting them a letter from Dean of Students John Ellison. "You will find," he wrote, "that we expect members of our community to be engaged in rigorous debate, discussion, and even disagreement. At times this may even challenge you and cause discomfort." Chicago's "commitment to academic freedom means that we do not support so-called 'trigger warnings,' we do not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual 'safe spaces' where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own."

Ellison and other members of the administration were well aware that "recent events nationwide have tested institutional commitments to free and open discourse." Disturbing protests that convulsed Yale, the University of Missouri, and many other campuses the previous academic year had received national media attention.

Chicago has a long tradition of championing academic freedom. Its first president, William Harper, declared: "the principle of complete freedom of speech on all subjects has from the beginning been regarded as fundamental in the University of Chicago," and insisted that "this principle can neither now nor at any future time be called into question." No better starting point for research into the history and meaning of academic

freedom exists than the work of University of Chicago sociologist Edward Shils. Thus, perhaps it is no surprise that this university would once again rise to the fore to defend freedom of inquiry and of expression against their assailants.

But not all—nor even most—of this country's academic leaders joined the chorus. Many remained silent; some openly attacked the University of Chicago, denying that it had acted on principle. Thus Wesleyan President Michael S. Roth, whose own school has had issues concerning campus censorship, described it as a way of "coddling donors." One article from The Daily Beast claimed that the policy is about "keeping right-wing donors happy."

Continued on Back Page

Continued from Front Page

Perhaps the initiative's popularity will entice some donors. Still, that does not make the result an explanation for the cause.

Despite such criticism, University of Chicago President Robert Zimmer did not back down. Defending Ellison's letter in the Wall Street Journal, Zimmer wrote: "Universities cannot be viewed as a sanctuary for comfort but rather as a crucible for confronting ideas and thereby learning to make informed judgments in complex environments."

He's right.

That college administrators need to make such statements is a

revealing commentary on the current state of higher education.

Colleges should facilitate critical thought and robust debate, both of which are necessary for a free society. They should not consistently reward or indulge those students who are the noisiest or most threatening. When presented with a statement one finds offensive, it is best to dispute it, civilly to be sure, by considering its merits. "I'm offended" is not an argument. "I feel," in and of itself, is not persuasive evidence. The best antidote to offensive speech is more speech, not less, especially speech that has been elevated by the kind of education the finest

liberal arts colleges should provide.

Subsidized safe spaces don't mirror the real world. Chic Silicon Valley startups do not offer them. Neither do medical establishments, law firms, or investment banks. One does not see anything of the sort in Chinese or Japanese universities.

With regard to cancelled speakers, consider the evidence provided by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) on speaker disinvitations on college campuses. In 2016 alone, of 25 attempts to thwart campus speakers, 14 speakers were successfully disinvited, in each case as a result of

forces on the left.

Ellison's position is hardly conservative. Take it from Michael Bloomberg, the well respected and moderate former mayor of New York City, or the left-of-center Boston Globe. Writing last spring along with Charles Koch in the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg warned schools: "Stop stifling free speech and coddling intolerance for controversial ideas, which are crucial to a college education—as well as to human happiness and progress."

Will more colleges and universities heed Bloomberg's advice? Don't hold your breath.

Flatiron: New Life for the Middle Class?

By Phil Parkes // Contributing Author

The Flatiron School sits on 20,000 square feet of prime real estate on Broadway in lower Manhattan. With airy, open rooms full of modern computing equipment, spacious tables, and snappily-dressed teachers, the school exudes the kind of educational wealth one would expect from a Columbia or an NYU. Except this school was founded in 2012, and with no centuries-old endowment or generations of loving alumni for support, it has relied on a mixture of grants and tuition payments to cover its highly sought-after classes. Flatiron is a school for aspiring computer programmers, and when participants lucky enough to make the 6 percent acceptance rate of its most recent class "graduated," 99% took full-time jobs. The average pay: north of \$70,000. At a time when cities across the United States still stand like so many crumbling monuments to the middle-class jobs of mid-century American industry, the technology industry is quietly but clearly filling the gap for well-paying jobs that do not require an expensive degree.

Flatiron is just one of many coding academies that dot the nation's most innovative and tech-friendly cities, but it in many ways espouses the blue-collar ethos of the manufacturing jobs it is almost surely now replacing. Perhaps most indicative of this trend is Flatiron's view of itself as directly servicing the needs of industry. Less about learning for its own sake, Flatiron and its competitors act like apprenticeship programs for tech giants such as

Facebook, Alphabet's Google, and the trendy Square. Like the human resources manual of a Kodak or U.S. Steel manager in years past, Flatiron's training is not the subject of endless review or debate. It is simply hitched to whatever pushes production efficiency in the "real world." It is almost as if Flatiron itself were part of the companies that hire its graduates. If Facebook's engineers, for example, decide to switch their entire programming platform from, say, Java to HTML overnight, Flatiron is agile enough to change its curriculum right with them, even in the middle of a class. It did just that when Apple made changes to its online products in 2014.

Straightforward access is an essential part of middle-class jobs, and Flatiron has made accessibility to industry opportunities the center of its mission. In doing so, it has revealed the potential for the tech industry to confer benefits on society far beyond job opportunities themselves. Financial security means so much more than good pay, safe work conditions, and wide-ranging benefits to a millennial population fraught with debt and job insecurity. It means the kind of job and identity stability that improves everything around it, from hobbies to charitable giving to family ties. Historically, this kind of stability has been a good thing. Given similar opportunities upon returning from war to the maturing industrial economy, many in the great generation soon found themselves wealthier than their predecessors. With its calls to "make yourself useful," Flat-

iron's mission of gainful employment is the 2020 version of the white picket fence 1950s: all of the benefits of economic opportunity, but, importantly, benefits attuned to the social expectations of the times, not stuck in the past. Coders work with computers, not assembly lines, and they exert more intellectual than physical energy, but in the end, they strive towards the kind of satisfying, well-paying employment that can boost the middle class and help ease income inequality across America's cities.

For all the positivity surrounding the generous "Flatiron" starting salary, the low time commitment of the training program, and the close relationship between Flatiron and industry giants, the coding education model is a limited improvement on the economy, not a general solution for its problems. It won't bring back the '50s or '60s, and some Trump supporters might desire. It probably won't

replace the role of the university in training future coders. And most importantly, it may not necessarily represent a panacea for people who want to skip an expensive degree. The average age of a Flatiron student is 31. Most have bachelor's degrees and prior work experience to boot. If markets act as we would expect them to, drawing people away from four-year degrees with the promise of well-paying jobs soon after high school, the percentage of students at schools like Flatiron with bachelor's degrees may eventually decrease. But industry employers warn of the limitations of narrow training. To them, the broad skills represented by a bachelor's degree are still necessary for many high-level jobs, especially in management. But all things considered, the unexpensively taught coders will benefit, and they can always 'go back' for their bachelor's. They can always "go back" for their bachelors.

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