

Safe Spaces and
Campus Protest

Annie Dillard
Reads Her Mail

Rebecca Solnit
Visits Death Row

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AMERICA'S BEST IDEA

In defense of our public universities

BY MARILYNNE ROBINSON



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THE FEDERAL AGENCY THAT KILLS BALD EAGLES

BY CHRISTOPHER KETCHAM

DRONE WAR! VEGANS VS. HUNTERS

BY JAY KIRK



Double Shadow LIV, a collage by John Stezaker, whose work was on view in January at Richard Gray Gallery in Chicago.

the participants' lack of realism or resilience. A world without hierarchy and violence is impossible, say the pragmatists; the psyche itself is violent, say the psychoanalysts. To me, the college students who are attempting to highlight inequity seem more admirable than the people who sneer at them. To suggest otherwise is to shrug off the dismal prevalence of sexual and racial violence, which exists on an eerie continuum from Abu Ghraib to campus hazing. The safe space does not guarantee protection, but it does offer a method for thinking harder about cruelty. The contingent, strategic demand for safety is not a retreat from reality but a closer examination of reality's contours—not in every case, yet often enough that its critics should be more careful.

A few years back, I was called out, or challenged, for using transphobic language. I know from this experience that it hurts to be experienced as hurtful, or at least that it stings the pride to be wrong. But I was wrong, and now I know it. I would have been no less wrong for not knowing I was wrong, no less hurtful if no one told me they felt hurt. Like the writers of ungenerous caricatures of campus politics, I don't enjoy being yelled at, or hearing that I've wounded someone, or being made to feel ignorant. My first

response is also a kind of panicked cringe, or a lashing out: No, you can't mean me! It's you who are wrong! But I did, eventually, thankfully, realize that my suspicion of trans people was based on the worst kind of self-justifying nonsense. There is no reason why my sense of someone else's gender should override their own. I am grateful to the people who yelled at me, told me that I'd hurt them, and made me feel my ignorance, to get me to this now-obvious point. The experience was not intellectually limiting, or an attack by the thought police: to the contrary, my realization about the complicated untruths of gender, and of my own previous bigotry, was one of the most intellectually expansive experiences of my life. It released me into a new, gentler conception of my own body and the bodies of others. It brought new people into my life and gave me a greater, sometimes scary, sense of possibility.

Don't the columnists and op-ed writers ever have the terror and joy of becoming suspicious of their certainties? Because of my race, perhaps, some things came easier: it is not hard for me to understand that whiteness comes with social rewards that are subtended by violence against those outside the magic circle. I mean not only that, as the child of a black