

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
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HOW THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE,
THE PRESIDENT OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY,
AND “VICTIMOLOGY STUDIES”
ARE RELATED TO THE
NEW AMERICAN POLICE STATE

Addendum 2



On Shirley Tilghman, Meaning, and Words

Shirley M. Tilghman, Princeton’s president, said in a telephone interview yesterday that she hoped the effort would help the university contribute greater insights to issues like the nature of racial identity and help train a “new generation of leaders to solve problems that have persisted too long.”

“Of all the challenges that confront America, none is more profound than the struggle to achieve racial equality and understand the impact of race on the life and institutions of the United States,” she said.



That’s what my students used to say at points like this: When I would ask them, for example, why they didn’t write or speak clearly; why they didn’t look harder for an accurate word or words; why they didn’t *say what they mean*—they’d retort, “You *know* what I mean.”

But I’m sorry. It just isn’t true. No, I *don’t* know what you mean.

Let’s just take a look at what Tilghman’s words really do, might, or could *mean*. This is an easy task, pitifully so, since almost all of her words are lies by merit of their being empty, of their being filler-words, of their being jargon *that can mean anything the speaker or listener wants them to mean*. Her words are “equal opportunity” words: They mean *nothing* to *anyone*, in real truth, but at the same time they’re perfectly chosen to mean *anything* to *anyone*.

For starters: Exactly *how* is the university going to “contribute”—is it by *teaching* (and if so teaching *what*)? by donating *money* (and if so where, to whom, and why?) by *proselytizing* (and if so *whom*, and in the name or for the sake of *what*?) by *conditioning* (and if so *whom*? *how*? *why*? and *in* what?)?

If, as Dr. Johnson said, “Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel,” <http://www.samueljohnson.com/refuge.html> we can, I’m convinced, say with equal certitude that clichéd boilerplate is the last refuge both of the non-thinker, which is to say, the last refuge of the blind person, *and* the last refuge of the *propagandist*. (On propaganda innocently replacing thought, see *A Nation Gone Blind*, especially chapter one, “Watching America Go Blind”).

And am I calling the president of Princeton University a *propagandist*? I am, and I’m accusing her as well of being a most pernicious and powerful one. I would go—I *will* go—so far as to say that she’s as pernicious and powerful a propagandist for false, destructive, and enervating ideas in the world of *academia* as George W. Bush, another president, is pernicious and powerful as a propagandist for his own crimes against humanity in the form a fraudulent, criminal, and in fact non-existent “*war on terror*.”

When it comes to fraud, lies of omission can be no less heinous and destructive than those of commission. Bush’s lies are primarily (but by no means solely) lies of commission, the declaring of a false thing to be a true thing. President Tilghman’s lies, on the other hand (like those of most of her colleagues in our now well blinded academia), are *almost entirely* lies of omission.

We’ve already looked at the meaninglessness of “contribute.” How about “insights”? All the same questions can be asked of this awful word—awful partly because it’s been put to work here in a context far beyond its powers, reducing it thereby to emptiness. And what’s up next? Ah ha, one of the most popular weapons of the hollow men, the infamous “issues.” Granted, this word isn’t left, here, to stand by itself—though it’s drained of strength even more than usual by Tilghman’s ambiguity-producing solecism via the word “like”—but it’s assigned some kind of unknowable duty by being placed in the full phrase “issues like the nature of racial identity.”

And what exactly *is* “the nature of racial identity”? We rightfully dare ask, but as for an answer, death will find us before we’ll ever hear. Still, we do now learn that whatever it is the university is going to “contribute”—though we still don’t know where or how—it does seem to be related somehow or other to an interest the university has of producing “leaders.” So here come the same questions, this time about “leaders”: What are *they*? What *kind* does Tilghman mean? Is it the kind like Billy *Graham*? the kind like Grandma Moses? maybe the kind like George W. *Bush*? Tilghman hasn’t told us what kind, hasn’t used words to express a thought, has left the field open for the word to mean—well, to mean two things: Anything, for one, or nothing, for another.

And so it goes, on and on, more words upon more words all empty of meaning because they’re *code*, because nobody—speaker or listener, writer or reader—knows

what they do mean but *feels* assured that the knowledge or understanding of what they really, really, really *do* mean, refer to, clarify, or define is already shared by all—so *that nothing truly need be said*.

We are the hollow men, indeed.

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