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Faculty

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A Radical Anthropologist Finds Himself in Academic 'Exile'

By Christopher Shea

Who's afraid of David Graeber? Not the dozens of D.C.-area residents who showed up on a recent night at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library to hear the anthropologist and radical activist talk about his new book, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (Spiegel & Grau). Aimed at the mainstream, the book discusses Mr. Graeber's involvement in the Occupy Wall Street movement and the idea that principles drawn from anarchist theory—a wholesale rejection of current electoral politics, for starters, in favor of groups operating on the basis of consensus—offer an alternative to our present polity, which he calls "organized bribery" (or "mafia capitalism").

On this warm spring evening the rumpled scholar was interviewed by a friendly and more conventionally telegenic writer, Thomas Frank. Graying lefties and young liberals and radicals in the crowd alike seemed impressed. Even the token skeptical economist in the audience framed her question respectfully, and C-Span broadcast live.

Mr. Graeber is a star in the left-academic world. Indeed, it's possible that, given his activism and his writings, he is the most influential anthropologist in the world. He played a part in establishing the nonhierarchical "organization" of the Occupy movement, in its early days in Manhattan, and his 500-plus-page *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Melville House, 2011) struck scholars for its verve and sweep. It made the case that lending and borrowing evolved out of humane, communitarian impulses in

premodern societies—out of a free-floating interest in the common weal—and only later became institutionalized actions spawning moral guilt and legal punishment.

The book ranged from discussions of ancient Sumerian economics to analyses of how Nambikwara tribesmen in Brazil settle their affairs to the international monetary system. "An argument of *Debt's* scope hasn't been made by a professional anthropologist for the best part of a century, certainly not one with as much contemporary relevance," wrote the British anthropologist Keith Hart, of Goldsmiths College, University of London, in a review on his Web site last year. The book won a prize for best book in anthropology from the Society for Cultural Anthropology in 2012 and according to his agent has sold nearly 100,000 copies in English alone.

But strikingly, Mr. Graeber, 52, has been unable to get an academic job in the United States. In an incident that drew national attention, Yale University, in 2005, told him it would not renew his contract (which would have promoted him from assistant professor to "term associate" professor). After a fight, he won a reprieve—but only for two years. He never came up for tenure.

Foreign universities immediately sent out feelers, he says. From 2008 through this spring, Mr. Graeber was a lecturer and then a reader at Goldsmiths College and, just last month, he accepted a professorship at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

But no American universities approached him, he says, and nearly 20 job applications in this country (or Canada) have borne no fruit. The applications came in two waves: directly after the Yale brouhaha and a couple of years later, when he concluded he wanted to return to the States for reasons that were partly personal (a long-distance romantic relationship, the death of his mother and older brother).

His academic "exile," as he calls it, has not gone unnoticed. "It is possible to view the fact that Graeber has not secured a permanent academic position in the United States after his controversial departure from Yale University as evidence of U.S. anthropology's intolerance of political outspokenness," writes Jeff Maskovsky, an associate professor of anthropology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, in the March issue of *American Anthropologist*.

That charge might seem paradoxical, given anthropology's reputation as a leftist redoubt, but some of Mr. Graeber's champions see that leftism as shallower than it might first appear. Anthropology "is radical in the abstract," says Laura Nader, a professor in the field at the University of California at Berkeley. "You can quote Foucault and Gramsci, but if you tell it like it is," it's a different story, she says.

Mr. Graeber "talks about possibilities, and God, if there's anything we need now it's possibilities," she says. "We are in tunnels. We are turned in. We are more ethnocentric than ever. We've turned the United States into a military zone. And into this move-to-the-right country comes David Graeber."

When he applied to Berkeley in the early 2000s and the department failed to hire him, "we really missed the boat," she says.

Jonathan Marks, a professor of anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, who had no direct experience with any Graeber job search, agrees: "Whoever had a chance to hire him and didn't missed out on having the author of one of the most important books in recent memory on their faculty," he wrote in an e-mail.

'Incredibly Conformist'

Mr. Graeber was at first reluctant to talk about his failed job searches, for fear of coming across as bitter and souring future

chances, but he decided to open up after the LSE job became official. As he recalled, the places to which he applied twice were the City University of New York Graduate Center, the New School, Cornell University, and the University of Chicago. The others were Hunter College, Emory, Duke, Columbia, Stanford, and Johns Hopkins—as well as the University of Toronto. He heard indirectly of colleagues at other universities trying to secure him a position, to no avail.

Responding to anthropologists' frequent claim that they embrace activist scholarship, he echoes Ms. Nader: "They don't mean it"—at least when it comes truly radical activism.

"If I were to generalize," Mr. Graeber says, "I would say that what we see is a university system which mitigates against creativity and any form of daring. It's incredibly conformist and it represents itself as the opposite, and I think this kind of conformism is a result of the bureaucratization of the university."

He and his allies also suspect that false information emanating from his public fight with Yale, garnered secondhand, has hurt him.

When Yale announced it was not renewing his contract, students and some professors rallied behind him, and he gave interviews suggesting that the decision was politically motivated. (The story made *The New York Times*.) He had spent part of a sabbatical working with the Global Justice Movement, which has mounted protests against such groups as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Perhaps surprisingly, he did not take much part in the heated Yale debate over graduate-student unionization. He was, he likes to say, "a scholar in New Haven and an activist in New York."

During the dispute over his Yale position, he says, he was accused of not doing service work (though he did all he was asked, he says) and of being late to class. Yancey Orr, a graduate student in religion

at the time who took courses from Mr. Graeber and is now an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Alberta, says Mr. Graeber was also accused of being ill-prepared to teach—a charge he calls absurd: "He was easily the most helpful seminar leader you could ask for."

Being denied tenure at Yale is hardly unusual, but not getting rehired at Mr. Graeber's stage is. Some professors Mr. Orr has talked to at institutions that failed to hire Mr. Graeber were under the impression that he went nuclear over a tenure denial, but the situation was more complex, more unorthodox, says Mr. Orr.

The chairs of the departments to which Mr. Graeber applied who could be reached all cited confidentiality in declining to talk about the decisions—or, typically, even to confirm he'd applied. But several denied that politics would affect such decisions. "I can say without hesitation," wrote James Ferguson, the chair of anthropology at Stanford, in an e-mail, "that I personally would not regard Graeber's political orientation as in any way disqualifying, nor would I expect such views to be held by my colleagues."

"As is known throughout the world," wrote Janet Roitman, chair of anthropology at the New School, "the New School prides itself for its longstanding tradition of radical politics; David would not have been the first hire or tenured faculty member to pursue 'radical' political positions or to engage in activism."

Some anthropologists, including Alex Golub, a contributor to the popular blog *Savage Minds* and an assistant professor at the University of Hawaii-Manoa, suggested that a general dearth of jobs in the field would be enough to explain Mr. Graeber's run of bad luck—especially because the book that brought him fame, *Debt*, had not been published at the time of the searches. (Though he'd published four others by 2009, as well as a much-read pamphlet, "Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology," with *Prickly Paradigm*.) But Mr. Graeber scoffs at that: "Gee, I applied for 17.

Somebody got those jobs." Moreover, Britain is not brimming with anthropology jobs, either, yet he's had little problem there.

"I believe it's possible that his politics have helped him in some cases and hurt him in others," says Mr. Maskovksy, of CUNY, who in his *American Anthropologist* essay raised the issue of what Mr. Graeber's academic exile to England meant for the profession. "He has a huge following among graduate students because of his protest work and because he links his protest work to the kind of anthropology he wants to do. But there's a huge gap between generating that kind of interest and respect, on the one hand, and job-hiring decisions. I don't know what makes people hire and what makes them not."

On Collegiality

One charge that has dogged Mr. Graeber is that he is "difficult," an attribute that's obviously hard to gauge. Ms. Nader says she urged him to soften his rough edges—to send thank-you cards, even, when protocol suggested it. (Mr. Graeber does not recall that counseling session on manners and says he always sends thank-you notes.) But she finds it deplorable that scholars would value superficial clubbability over originality of thought; she decries the "'harmony ideology' that has hit the academy." She also thinks the fact that he "writes in English," eschewing jargon, hasn't helped him.

There is some evidence of Mr. Graeber's contentiousness. During an online seminar about Debt on the blog *Crooked Timber*, Henry Farrell, an associate professor of political science at George Washington University, said Mr. Graeber had—for example—provided insufficient evidence that in the first Gulf War the United States had attacked Iraq partly because Iraq had stopped using dollars as its reserve currency and turned to the euro. In Mr. Graeber's response, he accused Mr. Farrell of "consummate dishonesty" and said he had failed to engage with the argument and instead sought to show its maker was a "lunatic." Mr. Farrell

responded that he was "very unhappy" with Mr. Graeber's charges and tone.

From February to April 1, J. Bradford DeLong, an economist at the University of California at Berkeley, baited Mr. Graeber by setting up an automated Twitter stream that sarcastically recounted dozens of alleged (or actual) errors of fact in Debt. For example: "Learned that 12 Regional Fed Banks not private banks like Citi or Goldman Sachs? Stay away until you do! #Graebererrors." Mr. Graeber responded aggressively. At one point he wrote, on Twitter, referring to Mr. DeLong's work in the Clinton Treasury Department on the North American Free Trade Agreement: "I bet the poor guy had a rough time at 14. Tried to compensate by gaining power, then look—destroyed Mexico's economy."

Mr. Graeber calls some of Mr. DeLong's postings "libelous"—a virtual campaign of harassment. "He has been on a crusade to hurt me in every way," he says, growing angry.

"Yet these guys are considered mainstream and I'm the crazy guy who can't get a job." He adds, "I don't even write negative book reviews."

Mr. Graeber, who says he gets along just fine with his colleagues in London—and, indeed, with most of his former colleagues at Yale—has his own take on what scholars mean by "collegiality": "What collegiality means in practice is: 'He knows how to operate appropriately within an extremely hierarchical environment.' You never see anyone accused of lack of collegiality for abusing their inferiors. It means 'not playing the game in what we say is the proper way.'"

In his American Anthropologist essay, CUNY's Mr. Maskovsky said that the many graduate students who took part in Occupy Wall Street might view Mr. Graeber's difficulty finding a job as a cautionary tale. Would their advisers see their activism as, at the

least, a distraction from their research?

Manissa Maharawal is one such student, at CUNY, a participant in Occupy now studying the activist projects that emerged from it. She says she has received nothing but support from her advisers and doesn't understand the politics of academic hiring, but finds the Graeber situation perplexing—in a bad way. "His work is really good, he's well reviewed, he's become pretty famous in the last year," she says. "I'm not sure what's going on. You can have all the boxes you're supposed to check checked and still not get a job. It's scary, for sure."

Correction (4/25/2013, 5:19 p.m.): Some information in this article about Mr. Graeber's dispute with Yale was incorrectly attributed to him. It was Yancey Orr, a former graduate student at Yale, and not Mr. Graeber who said his detractors in Yale's anthropology department had described him as sometimes ill-prepared to teach. Mr. Orr mentioned the allegation in the context of rejecting it. The article has been updated to reflect this correction.

Comments

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gmcsweeney 1 week ago

"What collegiality means in practice is: 'He knows how to operate appropriately within an extremely hierarchical environment.'..." Bow down before the one you serve...

 **imgutierrez** 1 week ago


it looks to me as if he has only sought out positions in more elite schools, which i think is rather ironic given his politics.

1 person liked this.  

 **big_tony** 2 weeks ago


Twenty? A whole twenty? Thank goodness some were duplicates.

(Seriously, can you see this guy as a Search and Screen chair facing triple-digit applications for a single position?)

2 people liked this.  

 **Hershel Parker** 2 weeks ago

Has anyone ever offered a better definition of collegiality?

1 person liked this.  

 **waratah104** 2 weeks ago

Though I am certain I would disagree with the professor's politics, I am reminded of what one advisor said to me a long time ago -- we need at least one of everything in our department. Intellectual vitality demands it. And I have to agree with the commenters who are critical of that well worn, but not well defined word, "collegiality". That has to be a smokescreen, used only when someone wants to punish someone else. I have often found that if we are collegial, then others are too. So I suspect the professor was in an uncollegial environment to begin with. Control what you can control and let go of everything else.

3 people liked this.  

 **sand6432** 2 weeks ago

One wonders at the degree of arbitrariness in some of these decisions about hiring and promotion. I recently had a scholar whose book I handled as acquiring editor for a well-respected academic press tell me that he was denied tenure because the chair of his department claimed that his book should have been properly reviewed by having every chapter read by two external reviewers--not just the book read by two reviewers, as it was,

but each chapter! I have never heard of this being a review process used by any university press anywhere. (I directed a university press for 20 years and was president of the Association of American University Presses in 2007/8.) How is it possible for people to get away with such outrageous and patently untrue claims as a basis for denying tenure? Is there no accountability in higher education?---Sandy Thatcher

5 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



willynilly 2 weeks ago

At this point in our history, there is little interest and/or tolerance among the masses for extreme positions at either end of the political spectrum. There is now a strong yearning throughout the nation to unite around the middle. It appears that this movement will not be denied, that it will pick up momentum and be reflected in subsequent national, state and local elections. In the meantime, it is best if we all ignore the extremists, allowing them to remain on the fringes as their impact on national life declines and fades on a daily basis.

1 person liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



22067030 2 weeks ago

He sent out 20 applications. A quarter century ago, I sent out 135, and the situation is even more extreme now. Of course, mathematics is different, but I wonder if he just sent applications to research powerhouses (which may be prone to play it safe, or have their own agenda, or whatever). Did he try those great but little liberal arts colleges (whose undergraduate programs are largely superior to the Ivy League)? Did he try the mid-level public institutions out to raise their profile? There are more than 20 places even in Massachusetts...

Greg McColm

6 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



rdawes4 2 weeks ago

It is interesting to read - in juxtaposition with this CHE article and the discussion of it in which David Graeber has unhesitatingly engaged - the review of Debt: The First 5,000 Years that came out this week in the New York Review of Books:

<http://www.nybooks.com/article...>

LIKE

REPLY



perplexed 2 weeks ago

"You never see anyone accused of lack of collegiality for abusing their inferiors."

This just isn't so.

2 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



11182967 2 weeks ago

Coming from (an older, pre-culture studies version of) literary studies, can someone explain to me why anthropologists seem to be so prone to committing and/or being the objects of so much verbal violence and so many internecine attacks (cf. Napoleon Chagnon, eg, and even Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict back in the day)?--a tradition Graeber seems to have joined as both recipient and perpetrator? Is the discipline so unfocused that there is no objective or strongly intersubjective framework within which to operate? Is anthropology more a tribe or a cult than a discipline? Is it at bottom the sort of charade featured in Krippendorf's Tribe? Are they so removed from the center of intellectual activity that they only have themselves to fight with? Did all those French dudes Foucault up the field? Are there no more Gergory Batesons or Clifford Geertz to calm things down? What gives with these folks?

4 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Chris Livanos 1 week ago in reply to 11182967

I think the belligerence has something to do with anthropology's origin in military science.

LIKE

REPLY



mtyler 2 weeks ago

One would think that being an anthropologist even Mr. Graeber can grasp the concept of not biting the hand that feeds you.

2 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



dian3486 2 weeks ago

Although I don't blame David for not applying to regional state universities, definitely his idea that they wouldn't hire him is wrong. We have a lot of people from Yale and Harvard among our faculty, and even some who have taught at these and similar places. I agree that the bureaucratization of the university makes the job almost unbearable for those who remember why they went to grad school in the first place, and want to contribute to making the world more livable, whatever. This is how I feel, certainly. However, I am as disturbed and sickened by the classism and elitism of academics, and unfortunately David's assumption that he can't work at a regional state university reinforces those distinctions.

14 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Aurolyn Luykx 2 weeks ago

Good god, the unwarranted generalizations in this thread are thick as cobwebs. Yes, many depts. make cowardly and self-defeating hiring decisions, prioritize factional loyalty over solid scholarship, etc. That's no reason to paint all of academia with the same broad brush. Both my dept. chair and I were active in the Occupy Movement (among others) and suffered no professional backlash whatsoever. I'm at one of the most working-class universities in the country, and we are thrilled to hire brilliant scholars when we can get them -- my chair is among the top border scholars in the country, and another faculty member just won the PEN/Faulkner prize -- but most high-profile candidates balk at our relatively low salaries and high teaching load. DG says that no one gets called "uncollegial" for abusing their inferiors, but then says that if people hear "uncollegial" they assume you're a jerk. Well, jerks are people who abuse their inferiors. They're also people who think sexist insults (e.g., "she who looks her age") are clever. I acknowledge that many depts.--even anthropology depts.--are full of racist, sexist & classist BS, but (speaking as a woman who is quite content to look her age) JW Young doesn't sound like someone I'd want to work around either.

3 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



JW Young 2 weeks ago in reply to Aurolyn Luykx

I'm sorry you feel that way. I'm sure if you knew the whole story--including the classist insults I had to endure, the jokes made in my direction because I am from the west coast and not the South, along with the way I was treated on the job while I was pregnant and after I had my first child--you wouldn't feel the same way. I was sucked into some pretty catty behavior and, as I implied in my post, I should've known better and acted my age rather than play into the pettiness.

Your place of employment sounds like a small beacon of light compared to my former workplace. Also sounds like you and your Department are doing great work.

I'm also sorry that my comments are taking away from the initial article. If anyone would like to discuss with me further, you can find me on facebook and send me a message.

5 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



ninedenltd 2 weeks ago

Since David is actually interacting here, I thought I'd post an open question that is both something I think should be discussed and something he may be able to respond to.

I find it odd that the article here does not refer at all to any of David's scholarship in terms of journal articles or books published in academic press. I don't know his work first-hand, but I've seen his work from the mid-90s cited extensively in the papers of some colleagues. A quick search of Google Scholar, though, turns up relatively little in the 2000s until a slew of articles that appeared in scattered academic/leftist journals around the time of OWS and the

publication of Debt.

So based on this (brief) review, I guess I am wondering if there is a perception that David has shifted focus from his academic origins into more overt theory/activism-based publication and if that has hurt his search for employment--not the politics being expressed, but the shift itself. It seems that regional/thematic borders are less rigid in anthropology than in history, but I can imagine some committees looking to fill specific regional needs and being suspicious of a candidate whose scholarship has ranged so much recently. That doesn't change the conformity/institutional conservatism argument, but the article here is very much in the context of "he is an anarchist so he doesn't have a job," and I wonder if it could also be put in terms of academia's hostility to popular press/public intellectualism in general. It is taken for granted that David's notoriety outside of the academy--the success of Debt, coverage on CSPAN, a NYT write-up--would be viewed favorably if not for his politics.

(Edited by author 2 weeks ago)

4 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Enzo Rossi 2 weeks ago in reply to ninedenltd

I can see why you'd think that Graeber's recent writing --which I admire-- is not a good fit for academia's increasingly narrow and myopic conception of scholarship. But it seems pretty clear that there must have been issues beyond strictly academic considerations that prevented him from getting an American position. My selfish self says: "all the best for us here in the UK".

Anyway, I'm an 'analytic' political philosopher who reads a lot of social science (which is not typical of my field, alas), and I can say that Graeber is one of the very few social scientists whose work I'm beginning to use to hone my own philosophical arguments (James C. Scott and Erik O. Wright are other examples). And I'm talking about strictly academic journal articles, not opinion pieces or activism. If being influential beyond his discipline makes him a bad anthropologist, then so much the worse for anthropology. Glad that the LSE seem to know better.

(Edited by author 2 weeks ago)

4 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



ninedenltd 2 weeks ago in reply to Enzo Rossi

Oh, no, I don't want to give the impression that *I* think his recent writing is not a good fit for academia. I think it is appropriate for professors who have something valuable to say in the public arena to say it. Clearly it does not detract from the quality of academic work. I am just wondering if it may have had an affect on some of his applications. Less the content of what he was saying than the fact of him saying it to a broad audience. It is a point that isn't discussed in the article that I think is important--both here and generally. How big of a role should the academy have in public discourse? Personally, I think more people *should* be doing what David is doing. But I am of the impression that a lot of academics disagree.

LIKE

REPLY



lookingforit 2 weeks ago

Intrigued by Socratic's comment - why didn't The New School hire Dr. Graeber?

LIKE

REPLY



MChag12 2 weeks ago in reply to lookingforit

The New School is actually one of the worst working environments in academia, and if there is any radical activity there, it ended long ago. It is the place where a former mean-spirited Dean (now at Hunter College) destroyed the anthropology department, leaving NO faculty members (most that were there are now at NYU or CUNY), where the past President was famous for making working conditions unbearable, where the Provost and Dean they hired for the Graduate Faculty quit after a year, and the place that has actively gotten rid of people they simply didn't like. It is not only not a place that does not accept radical, it doesn't even pretend to be humanistic. Just look at the controversies that happened last year and how they were handled and you can get a better idea of how they function. It still tries to live on a very old reputation, but in fact, it is one of the worst institutions of higher education in America.

(Edited by author 2 weeks ago)

1 person liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



chuckle 2 weeks ago in reply to MChag12

Oh yes, "Just look at the controversies that happened last year..." Tell more...I can't seem to get TMZ on this computer.

1 person liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



MChag12 2 weeks ago in reply to chuckle

If you weren't so cheap perhaps you could get a computer that does.

LIKE

REPLY



QueerFatstronaut 2 weeks ago

Interesting article. It seems like Graeber's issues in American academia go back to the liberal vs. radical divide. Many colleges are very liberal places, but radical ideas make everyone uncomfortable. For example, everyone supports gay marriage, but few people want to hear

a critique of marriage as an institution. The truth is, liberal politics allow for the maintenance of privilege. Radical politics don't. The liberal mindset allows people to feel virtuous without truly disrupting or challenging their privilege.

I don't know much about this person, and I doubt this article tells the whole story. However, I think his experience as presented here speaks to a larger issue within both social justice organizing and social justice-oriented academia.

12 people liked this.



SocraticGadfly 2 weeks ago

If a place like New School wouldn't hire him, I think more than just his politics is at work. Plus Debt, from what I've heard from a good friend (I've not read it myself) is reportedly uneven in terms of writing quality. And, I think its central thesis, while interesting, is a semi-unprovable, if not totally unprovable, conjecture.

6 people liked this.



fritz 2 weeks ago

LSE hired Hayek. De Long is generally regarded as a left of center economist. Interesting.

3 people liked this.



TA4EVA 2 weeks ago

My takeaway? Stop hiring the bland, predictable, risk-averse, plug-and-chug Foucault- and Gramsci-citers. Start hiring people with some actual radical ideas.

4 people liked this.



Colin 2 weeks ago

David

As a graduate of the University of Toronto's School of Graduate Studies, albeit eons ago, I am embarrassed that they didn't give you, at the very least, the courtesy of consideration.

London's gain is Toronto's loss, I am afraid.

Looking forward to reading my copy of "Debt" when I can carve out the time.

Best,

Colin

2 people liked this. 

David Graeber 2 weeks ago

I do want to add something to the piece, because it's important. It's not just that I didn't get a job. 17 applications and no offer could have just been a run of bad luck, after all. The remarkable thing is that at not one of those 17 places was I even formally considered.

There are three stages in a typical academic job search. Normally you start by advertising the job, whereon you receive, say, one or two hundred applications. Then you (1) do a first cut and hone that to a "long list" of maybe a dozen candidates, and ask all of those to send in their letters of recommendation and any other supporting material. After going through those you (2) cull it down to a "short list" of maybe 4 who will be invited to give job talks, be interviewed, on campus. Then finally you (3) choose one of them and make an offer.

So it's not that I never made it to #3. I never even made it to #1. Not a single one of those 17 places I applied even asked me for my letters or CV. I was taken out of consideration at the very first cut in every single case. This was still true as recently as last year when CUNY Grad Center advertised a senior position, and said they would accept outside nominations. I had a very senior scholar put in my name. I figured that way they couldn't completely ignore my application like everyone had before. But no. They just pretended it never happened. No one from CUNY ever contacted me, formally or informally, at all. And that was after Debt and at the height of Occupy!

So we're not even talking about my inability to get a job. We're talking about my inability to get anyone to even look at me.

Again - in America. In the UK, in contrast, the very first year I made it known I would be interested in a job there, I got feelers or offers from five different places, one offer, in fact, from a place I hadn't even applied to!

(Edited by author 2 weeks ago)

27 people liked this. 

MChag12 2 weeks ago in reply to David Graeber

While this is not an argument, I too applied for that position, was supported by 3 very senior and well known members of the discipline, and was never contacted or even informed that my application was received. I have also heard that from others. They seem to have picked up on the critically rude behavior that expect all from applicants but cannot be bothered by simple manners. Unfortunately, in my experience, that seems to be more the norm now than not. I am now of the belief that for senior position, hiring is no longer done. It is recruitment, and mostly friends of friends. At CUNY in particular, especially since the death of Eleanor Leacock and the departure of June Nash and to a lesser extent Eric Wolf, there is a lot of pretend community-minded radicalism that really isn't much of anything. They are mostly clawing for reputation, and with the retirement of David Harvey, I am told they are more anxious than ever.

(Edited by author 2 weeks ago)

3 people liked this.



chuckle 2 weeks ago in reply to MChag12

Could we please have even more gossip? It's so much fun to read.

Maybe CHE could just set up a special blog for second-hand stories and "insider" gossip?

5 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



22293837 2 weeks ago in reply to David Graeber

Wow, seventeen apps and no bites? That never happens! It's discrimination for sure.

19 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



MChag12 2 weeks ago in reply to 22293837

No, that happens all the time, actually. Hiring in higher ed has become a lottery, at least for entry positions. For senior positions, see my comment above.

3 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



idshore 2 weeks ago in reply to MChag12

Sarcasm my friend. 22293837 is being funny and sarcastic.

5 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



MChag12 2 weeks ago in reply to idshore

oops. I actually do have a sense of humor, but from the way academia operates, it would not necessarily come off as sarcasm....I know I am setting myself up--please exercise some control and leave it alone!...)

1 person liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



GentleGiant 2 weeks ago in reply to MChag12

Whoosh!

1 person liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Conceited Primate 2 weeks ago

"It is possible to view the fact that Graeber has not secured a permanent academic position in the United States after his controversial departure from Yale University as evidence of U.S. anthropology's intolerance of political outspokenness," The fact that this is the most accusatory quote in the article hints heavily at a cultural environment where brutal honesty is defacto illegal (as if we needed more evidence). I can think of people far less influential in their field, with strong reputations for unpleasantness, who were rehired almost immediately after messy tenure denials. I wonder to what degree the cause of this lies outside of the private beliefs of anthropologists. Of course hiring the author of a best-selling and influential book may sound like a no-brainer, but if it irks the administration, which views every dollar sent your way as alms for the poor, then maybe not. Also how many grants will Graeber get to help pay for graduate students?

10 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



wiseaftertheevent 2 weeks ago

The nasty truth is that universities have devolved from legalistic absolutistic hierarchies to authoritarian gang structures. The problem with this is that those in the gang have access to 'social technology' in more developed memes that they then use against whoever they don't like.

Collegiality is a great example. Collegiality is ostensibly a communitarian meme -- that we treat everyone in an egalitarian fashion. It is an elevated form of behavior.

But what happens is devolved narcissists don't have any problem with complaining about 'lack of collegiality' in trying to take someone down, because even if the actual issue doesn't apply, it doesn't matter. It is a powerful mental model that they can use to manipulate people's opinion of the target.

We are truly on the edge of collapse of our institutions of knowledge. We better wake up and organize.

13 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Conceited Primate 2 weeks ago in reply to wiseaftertheevent

Haha funny but I'd guess the practice of using "collegiality" or some close variant thereof as an excuse for canning politically volatile colleagues is as old as the hills. Sounds like a good old-fashioned pretext or perhaps Humian post facto explanation of an emotionally driven decision. Why do you hate him/her? "Oh they are rude." You just need enough others to agree with your impulse (being in the dominant gang helps) and you can help them to understand at the intellectual level why it is a perfectly legitimate one.

1 person liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



JW Young 2 weeks ago

I fell victim to "collegiality" at a College where I served diligently for seven years. After exemplary service that included over two dozen publications, invitations to speak at conferences, reviving their defunct literary journal, creating a reading series that brought in Pulitzer Prize-winning speakers, highest praise from colleagues and students, and chairing a reaccreditation committee, my chair denied me tenure in my final eligible year because of something I posted on my blog. She cited me as being "uncollegial." I'm now out of work and on public assistance. I can't find a job anywhere nearby and taking a new position would mean moving my family--three kids and a husband with tenure at another school--to another state. It's infuriating to me that so many colleges and universities don't even have a grievance procedure for cases like this.

37 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY

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