

# THE COLLEGE FIX

ORIGINAL. STUDENT REPORTED. YOUR DAILY DOSE OF *RIGHT-MINDED* NEWS AND COMMENTARY FROM ACROSS THE NATION.

## 'The Case for Colonialism' at Texas Tech How 23 professors and a president almost shut down debate.

CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER - SENIOR COLLEGE FIX REPORTER  
JANUARY 28, 2019

Last November, Portland State University political science Professor Bruce Gilley was scheduled to deliver a speech at Texas Tech University, where he was to discuss his findings from years of research on global colonialism – research which argued that in many cases, when European colonialism ended, life got much worse for the populations which had once been under foreign rule.

In a recent phone interview with *The College Fix*, Gilley noted the argument that there were benefits to colonialism isn't a new or novel one. He has collected a 25-page bibliography "gathering together evidence supportive of a strong and overwhelmingly positive impact of colonialism on the colonized areas." Not only was colonialism objectively beneficial, Gilley said, "colonized peoples recognized it as such and welcomed it, and supported it and made it legitimate."

Nonetheless, Gilley's planned speech was met with virulent resistance from Texas Tech faculty members — nearly two dozen of whom signed a **letter** to the school's president attempting to have Gilley's talk, titled "The Case for Colonialism," canceled. They called a 2017 peer-reviewed paper Gilley had published in the journal *Third World Quarterly* "discredited" and "racist."

"We are concerned that the rhetoric of the 'positive impact' of European colonialism and 'specially cordoned zones' is a thinly masked allusion to supremacism and segregation on racial lines," the letter read. "We don't need our students thinking ideas advocating colonialism are valid," the faculty members continued, citing the fact that several thousand people had signed a change.org petition asking for Gilley's removal as evidence his scholarship was flawed. (Fifteen of the letter's signatories were professors in the English department; only one taught history.)

The next day, Texas Tech President Lawrence Schovanec **responded**, telling the dissenting professors that Gilley's speech would go on. Yet while appearing to support free speech on campus, Schovanec added he emphatically believes "there is no case for colonialism." "We believe that even speech we disagree with intensely — that we consider objectionable and potentially harmful — is protected by the Constitution," Schovanec wrote. "Thus,

notwithstanding our strong disagreement with Gilley's ideas regarding colonialism, out of respect for the right to free speech, we will not cancel the lecture."

"The university president did this out of ignorance and fear," Gilley told *The Fix*. The professor noted the Texas Tech president is a mathematician by trade, and "clearly had no idea what he was talking about or really cared what he was talking about."

Gilley accused Schovanec of being a "typical university administrator wanting to check the box of being diverse and inclusive." Yet as soon as colonialism became the opposite of those things, Gilley accused Schovanec of being "a puppet ... run by these 23 faculty." He called the Texas Tech president's letter a "silly statement" on one of the "greatest historical issues and debates in history."

"If that was Texas Tech's institutional viewpoint, they would have to go through their library and empty it of all the books that have made this argument over the last 50 years," Gilley said. "They would have to somehow censor all the journal articles they've subscribed to that make this argument. ... It's just ridiculous."

The Texas Tech imbroglio was just the latest episode in academia's attempt to discredit Gilley's scholarship. After his article was published, Gilley faced demands for his firing and a subsequent administrative **probe**, for which he was later cleared. (Portland State denies the probe was politically-motivated; Gilley **disagrees**.) Over 16,000 people signed a petition denouncing his article; a week after its publication, it was taken down when the journal's editor received death threats.

Just a year previously, Gilley published an **article** in Oxford University's *African Affairs* journal that documented the works of noted anti-colonial Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, who later in life expressed some sympathy for colonialism. Achebe's novel "Things Fall Apart" still frequently appears on high school reading lists.

At his Texas Tech speech, Gilley did not back down, **citing** 18 different studies done showing the benefits to economies and human rights when colonialism took hold. "From this research, we know that, in terms of body count, nothing comes close to anti-colonialism in terms of having cost lives and prevented lives," he said.

"You simply have to do the math and compare trajectories in the late colonial period of the 1920s onward – when populations were growing, food supply expanding, life expectancy leaping upwards, government administration improving, wages and living standards bowling forward, and plans for self-government unfolding — and compare the widening gap of those trends with where most, but not all, former colonies ended up by, say, the late 1980s."

None of this, of course, has pacified Gilley's colleagues in academia, many of whom are determined to silence voices that don't conform to their progressive agenda. "Most anti-colonial critics will roll their eyes when you try to engage in them in questions of social scientific research because their real motivation is not getting history right but

getting the present right," Gilley said in his speech. "Either they reject research findings as yet more evidence of Western imperialism and the need to 'decolonize research' and replace it with some kind of ideologically progressive form of story-telling. Or they fear that formerly colonized peoples have such fragile psyches that they could not withstand an encounter with facts that make them uncomfortable."

Nonetheless, Gilley noted a number of academics who have added his paper to their course teachings in order to provide context. But to him, that doesn't excuse the lack of support he's gotten from administrators at the top.

"There are no consequences for an ambitious administrator to simply censor unpopular views," he said. "But that's supposed to be their key role, above all, to protect unpopular views."

-END