

Re: Mob rules at the U of O,
March 25.

As someone who attended Princeton University from 1955-59, I take issue with the contrast you draw between Princeton and Harvard (pro free speech) and the University of Ottawa (bush-league non-respecter of free speech).

I can't speak for Harvard, but when an outspoken Roman Catholic chaplain, Father Hugh Halton, attacked the university's liberal philosophy and engaged in derogatory comments against faculty he was declared persona non grata and ordered by the administration to be barred from use of all campus facilities.

As for student behaviour, a letter to the same student newspaper complained that certain students "by their cleverness and penny-throwing, forced [a different] lecturer to feel that delivering the rest of his lecture would be useless" so that he ended it after 20 minutes (May 27, 1957). I think in this case it was boredom rather than provocativeness, but at least one student seemed concerned enough to complain of the behaviour.

Free speech issues are complex. We often confuse tolerance with what is really indifference. It's easy to tolerate hate speech when you are deficient in empathy for a targeted group. The students at the University of Ottawa showed that they are not indifferent to Ann Coulter's deeply insulting rhetoric, and good for them on this. Coulter's "bush league" epithet is hardly deserved.

I would not have cancelled her talk (but did the university?). I would have recommended pairing her with George Galloway, who is equally gifted (if that's the right word) at impromptu invective.

What's really nasty about Ann Coulter is that her tasteless ironies often target people who have suffered immensely from the U.S. bombings of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other parts of the world. Her language encourages bellicosity in general, but U.S. bellicosity in particular and the world can ill afford this.

RANDAL MARLIN, Ottawa

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JEAN LEVAC, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Randal Marlin writes that it is easy to tolerate hate speech if we lack empathy for the targeted group.

OTTAWA CITIZEN
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Good for U of O students in protesting Coulter's nastiness