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## Bloom, In-Humanities and the Gay-Marriage Regime

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Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Touchstone, 1987).

There is something in Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*, even this many years after it was written, that smacks of hubris. It belongs to a heady historical moment: the book was published in 1987, in the latter years of a Cold War that no longer felt as scary as it once did, and which was bound to end in two years. Ronald Reagan was the president of the United States but the professoriate of the United States had comfortably defined its members as the counterweight to what they viewed, quite self-righteously, as a reactionary regime led by a brainless Hollywood actor.

In that critical juncture when the collapse of Communism loomed, writing such a book was not entirely intuitive. American professors had plentiful reasons to be complacent about the left-leaning postmodernism slowly casting its pall over higher education, and not make such a grouchy fuss about the supposed doom caused by "historicism," ethnic studies, relativism, and other such things Bloom found vexing. The various constituencies of grievance-mongering—defined by the triumvirate of race, class, and gender—were still less than a generation away from an earlier period when they were truly suffering. Very bad things had happened to women, people of color, and poor people, not long before Allan Bloom sat down to write *Closing*. In light of the visceral wounds only beginning to close by 1987, the effete manipulations of college curriculum were at least a welcome departure from the violent upheavals at places like Cornell University of twenty years prior.

When Allan Bloom's book was published, I was in the process of applying to college, including Yale, where I ultimately got accepted and attended. My Puerto Rican lesbian mother's health was declining and the toll of the unorthodox way that I was raised was starting to wear on me, but these specific details will be more relevant later in this essay. For now here is what matters:

One of the first things I learned when I got to New Haven was that the acceptance of women to the campus had not yet lasted **twenty years**. There were people in New Haven who had been around during the famous **Bobby Seale** trial of 1969–70.

In the late 1980s, the race/class/gender triptych still set a high bar for anyone wanting to make “liberation” claims. To have any credibility with the ascendant Left, one had to speak to categories that registered true and well-documented injustices. In those days, a wealthy gay white man would be challenged if he wanted to lead any leftist coalitions, nobody took transgenderism seriously, and the question of gay marriage was unthinkable since marriage was a politicized institution belonging to the “white male patriarchy.” The grievance caucuses had calmed down from the violence of the 1960s, but still had a kernel of legitimacy to their complaints.

That Bloom would author a polemic so powerfully indicting political correctness *then*, as opposed to now, speaks to either a prophetic instinct, or recklessness. He defends prejudice saying, “The mind that has no prejudices at the outset is empty”<sup>[i]</sup> at a time when Asian American freshmen might include people who were airlifted out of Saigon, and when some students had older brothers who remembered the day Martin Luther King Jr. was shot.

Such historical juxtaposition leads us to the second reason that Bloom’s writing of *Closing* was quite a bold act for its time. Just as the Left still had a point, so to speak, because memories of truly benighted days were still fresh in people’s minds, there were few signs that could alert the average intellectual to what was to come in the next quarter century. The Left wing’s shenanigans might have struck some of the more cautious minds of the day as a possible glitch on college campuses, but who could have guessed that gay causes would end up overshadowing and devouring social-justice causes? (For instance, as Charlotte Allen **reported in 2013**, the Southern Poverty Law Center withdrew from defending blacks on death row but went on to spend untold millions on pet causes dear to wealthy gays, such as shutting down **Jews offering new alternatives to healing** or **suing a school** in Michele Bachmann’s district to make them offer more gay curriculum.)

In 1987, who could have envisioned the two-year nadir of 2009–10, when not only the Democrats, but indeed, the very caricatured and politically correct academia of Bloom’s nightmares, would come to control the entire government of the United States: both houses of Congress, the White House, the military, most media, and indeed, all of higher education? Barack Obama’s ascendancy marked the rise, not of African Americans, but of the academic Left’s identity politics, including the bizarre primacy gained by gay men, to whom Obama has shown excessive favoritism, and whose claims to historical oppression are almost laughably skim compared to slavery, women’s being denied the right to vote, serfdom, and peonage.

Bloom’s dismal vision of American universities ended up being far more prescient than even he would have intended. He feared that “openness, nevertheless, eventually won out over natural rights” (29)—something whose destructiveness became frighteningly apparent in the movement

for gay marriage, which Bloom had no way of foreseeing. The scale on which Bloom was operating was too small to do his insights justice. Bloom claimed that his worries were directed only at a small elite of bright minds, which he feared might not attain their full transcendence because of their distracted and misguided professors. He describes his target subjects as “thousands of students of comparatively high intelligence, materially and spiritually free to do pretty much what they want with the few years of college they are privileged to have—in short, the kind of young persons who populate the twenty or thirty best universities” (22).

Bloom was simply carping about things going on at Cornell, whereas the triumph of relativist “openness” over “natural rights,” which he dreaded, would do much more than render dormitory conversations banal in Ithaca. The trend destroyed the sacred institution of marriage and undermined the basic social unit, the family, for everyone on earth from the richest to the poorest.

To critique Bloom from my admittedly strange vantage point—from the perspective of a conservative classicist and son of a Latina lesbian, who would help form a countercultural movement of **children of gays** (COGs) *against* gay marriage and adoption—presents a paradox. For someone with such prophetic powers, he was shockingly naïve about what his oracles were denouncing, even as he was a lone voice warning the public that something was amiss. There is a wry air to his critiques, belying a sense on his part that the Left will do some pitiable damage, but nothing world-historical or fundamental. On the crumbling of education, he says, “the grownups are too busy at work, and the children are Left in a day-care center called the humanities in which the discussions have no echo in the adult world” (372). This is a shrewd and promising witticism, which could have, with only a little more brio, led Bloom to address the much severer phase of the decline he mourns.

Discussions that lack an echo in the adult world are bad enough, but why did Bloom halt there, and not speak to the future ugliness of 2015, when the people having these deracinated discussions have remade the world in their distorted self-image, *and now the world has no echo of any reasonable ideas*? Bloom chose the comparatively harmless nursery space as the allegory for the closed American mind with his reference to the humanities as a “day-care center.” A more suitable allegory would be in the spaces of real power: banks, legislatures, courts, and corner offices filled with cruelty and venality. The frivolous conceits documented by Bloom came to exercise real power over people’s lives and inflicted damage. Bloom had the foresight to know the academy would be wrong, but he lacked the breadth to anticipate that the vacuum of “humanities” would be filled by *inhumanities*. Proof of this arrived on April 28, 2015, in the 40-mile corridor between Washington DC and Baltimore, Maryland.

### **Bloom Comes Full Circle**

On Tuesday, April 28, 2015, riot-stricken Baltimore was literally **burning**. Broken glass littered the sidewalk before gutted storefronts, militarized police units faced off against angry youths hurling debris, and smoke issued from cars and garbage cans set ablaze. Meanwhile well-heeled attorneys debated marriage before the Supreme Court, about forty-one miles away in

Washington. It was a good time to revisit a line from Paul's letters to the **Corinthians**:

*But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (1 Cor 7:8-10)*

Is it better to marry than to burn? The collapse of a clear definition of marriage seemed to benefit wealthy gays, who were bound to keep more money with new tax breaks, but not people in poor neighborhoods, where most children were born outside of marriage. In the latter realm, larceny had come to replace the discreet redistribution of wealth that was so dignifying for lesbian millionaire Edie Windsor, the woman at the heart of the 2013 *US v. Windsor* case.

On April 28 the question—is it better to marry than burn?—was less allegorical and less rhetorical than it was meant to be, when Paul asked it of himself two thousand years earlier. For a nation to process the contradictions in what was happening in Washington and Baltimore simultaneously, there would have to be citizens with creativity, vigilance, acute perception, and critical thinking.

The nation would have to be a country of humanities, a tribe of people made perceptive by their sense of a deep connection to history and by an awareness of the past follies of civilization. The nation would need troubleshooters with knowledge of precedence and appreciation for human beings' tendencies to make mistakes. They would have to follow the path of what Thomas Jefferson envisioned as the necessary trajectory of humanities students:

*History by apprising them of the past will enable them to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views [and] to render even them safe their minds must be improved to a certain degree.[ii]*

It seemed these qualities, the ones Bloom warned would atrophy under the reign of post-60s relativism, were lacking. The ironies were lost on people. As images flashed across CNN of shattered store windows, roving gaggles of rioters prodding and goading phalanxes of full-armored cops, and cars smoldering in the all-American streets of Maryland, **Mary Bonauto** stood in a tasteful business suit and fielded questions about whether gay couples should receive marriage licenses.

Setting aside the unproductive debates about whether to call the rioters “thugs” or “social

justice warriors,” even the staunchest law-and-order conservatives must acknowledge the sheer anguish in Baltimore. I do not endorse mob violence or destruction of property, but I cannot fail to see that blacks in this city—in cities across America—feel abandoned. Many of them, too many, have been literally abandoned by their fathers and/or mothers. Most feel abandoned by the entrenched institutions that have been so loyal to gay marriage supporters and so helpful to their cause: the legal system (remember that gay marriage won, not by convincing Americans of gay people’s dignity, but rather, by getting judges to cede them concessions), the two-party political system, the schools, Hollywood, academia, the Obama-industrial complex, and corporate America with its hundreds of wealthy organizations lavishly funding gay charities while black unemployment outpaced the national average and poverty persisted.

### **Is it better to marry than to burn?**

On that Tuesday morning, Mary Bonauto, a well-groomed lesbian lawyer, stood before the nine justices of the Supreme Court. She argued confidently that the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution meant that people of the same sex had to be issued marriage licenses and given the right to adopt children. To be given the right to adopt children means, effectively, to be given children, and since no same-sex couple can have their own children, this means to be given other people’s children, and more likely than not, the children of people who have not the means to keep their own children—in other words, poor people similar to those who were rioting in nearby Baltimore. This strange notion that the Constitution could guarantee one class of citizens control of other people’s children never caused particular anxiety on April 28.

“Adoption” by this point had already been buried under so many obfuscations that gay advocates could talk about gays “adopting” children into loving homes when the reality behind these code words consisted of the brutal economics of **surrogacy** and **sperm banking**. They could quote the generously funded social-science research that claimed there was “no difference” between people raising children they conceive by lovemaking and people buying children from other people. The social scientists who supported gay marriage could *claim* things they could never possibly *prove*, because such was the state of the American mind. They could, essentially, lie with a straight face, and not even feel bad about it, because the rise of the gay movement had worked such devilish magic on language that the very obligations of speaking were erased in favor of an amoral economy of language.

With a glibness veering into unfathomable callousness, Ms. Bonauto and the nine justices of the Supreme Court toyed with the heritage of potentially millions of future citizens, as if playing, “he loves me, he loves me not” with flower petals. Should Justice Kennedy decide with the four liberal justices to formalize gay marriage as a constitutional right, millions of Americans—including children forced into same-sex couples’ homes as a result of the new right to have loving and obedient children—would exist as a subclass outside of history, having neither a biological origin earlier than a twenty-first century laboratory, nor any cultural camaraderie with the billions of narratives of humans who came before, all with mothers and fathers. Should Justice Kennedy lean to the conservative justices’ view, then all would be different, and these millions of Americans would remain intact within “history” as it is commonly and

academically understood.

How does one belong to history at all, never mind the “right side” of history? Scholars have debated this endlessly. Let’s take a controversial model, put forward by Hegel. In *Reason in History*, Hegel writes, “World history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom—a progress whose necessity we have to investigate.”<sup>[iii]</sup> While I am not a Hegelian, I admit, it is worthwhile to humor this position for the sake of argument. In such a view the past lives on, even more powerfully when there is a rebellion against it, which leads Hegel to imply that all of human evolution is the collective struggle of slaves yearning to be free from oppression. To be part of history, people must have a relationship with and awareness of—even if antagonistically—their origins. Freedom is rebelling against origin (a crude earlier version, perhaps, of what Freud would detail in his reading of *Oedipus Rex*). A class of people cut off from, and ignorant of, the generations that preceded them, then forbidden to critique the ahistorical “creators” who arrogantly designed them to please a peculiar pro-gay and very recent zeitgeist, cannot be even part of Hegel’s history, much less a more positive one. How could an entire class of humans be so sloppily and whimsically denied History with a capital H and given only an impoverished and uncontestable history with a lower case “h,” existing as a subgenus to serve the emotional needs of others who claim their descent but deny such a rootedness to others?

The last time the United States had carved out a class of citizens so disenfranchised from history and targeted them to be bred for ownership, they called it slavery. This was the thing banned by the Thirteenth Amendment. The banning of such violence to human freedoms necessitated the Fourteenth Amendment, which was passed in 1868, three years after the Thirteenth. Yet the Constitution’s delicately balanced organs, designed to codify the wisdom learned from past history, were being set against one another in a kind of jurisprudential cannibalism. The Fourteenth Amendment was now cited to give a privileged group of citizens the right to violate the Thirteenth-Amendment rights of others, and breed children to own like property. Meanwhile, the masses of African Americans still carrying the weight of such mistakes in the past were setting fire to whole neighborhoods of Baltimore, feeling utterly abandoned by the mandarins of university faculties who were enthralled with the task of promoting gay marriage and its spawn, gay adoption. The LGBT advocacy community of Baltimore was particularly interested, not in protecting the descendants of slaves from the long-term social consequences left to them by history, but rather with the **sufferings of a male-to-female transgender person** who was arrested during the riots and detained with male arrestees rather than females. Why black heterosexual men should be exposed to the dangers of imprisonment with hardened male criminals, but black men who self-feminize should not, did not occur to these advocates as a relevant query.

What Bloom saw as academic disintegration became social cruelty on a massive scale. Five other children of gays and I had submitted these **three amicus curiae briefs** to the Court attempting to explain the profundity—indeed, the severity—involved in estranging people from their mother or father during infancy, when the poor helpless baby has no way to consent or even understand the impending lifelong toll of never having what so many others have: the

knowledge and dutiful attentions of the man and woman who gave him or her life. While Ms. Bonauto, a woman who was never raised by a gay couple, had ample time to go back and forth with nine powerful justices, none raised by gay couples, the six of us and the seventy other same-sex parenting cases we had studied and documented never received mention during the oral arguments.

In the brief submitted by me and B.N. Klein, we made ample references to *Jephthah's Daughters*, a book that compiled copious documentation of children feeling deep harm and experiencing a serious loss of “freedom” because they were placed under the control of gay people who insisted on being their parents even though they were not. Nobody listening to the oral arguments on April 28 would have any idea this perspective even existed. History as an exercise, whether Hegelian or otherwise, had been demolished by decades of the soulless education and scholarship Bloom chronicled wryly in 1987. Ideas no longer had to contend with the collision of ideological difference—thought was rather inscribed by one side of fatuous debates and railroaded to dead ends, with all the prophets slain by modern-day Ahabs.

With the devastation of the humanities in colleges—not only the thirty best colleges that preoccupied Allan Bloom, but indeed all the colleges and trade schools that trained all the business moguls, teachers, reporters, statesmen, lawyers, judges, editors, and chairmen all around the world—we are left with a sense of ethical language not only deluded, but perilously *inhumane*. To whomever the speaker such as Mary Bonauto spoke, nothing was owed to those listening—certainly not honesty, nor kindness, nor even decency. All speech acts were bound to only one creditor, a neo-liberal “superego” (Freud’s detached and overarching consciousness limiting and trumping the id and the ego), which seemed to hover over all of society, its tendrils winding out to homes through the internet, its catchphrases and talking points ringing like Pavlovian bells in everyone’s ears.

The neo-liberal superego is a strange creature, conceived at first from the polygamous wedding of race, class, and gender: inclined to speak in economic terms or other statistics, obsessed with identity, oppositional toward a mythical “white male patriarchy” on which all problems can be flippantly blamed. As Allan Bloom warned us, this reliance on identity politics, grievance, and agnostic emotion leads us away from a true pursuit of ethics, higher meaning, or human dignity. We face, in a real sense, a rolling back of all the intellectual progress that brought us to the twenty-first century. The future may hold a place full of an imploded social science, and nothing but a physical, though not natural, science unfettered by any humanities. Computer programmers and genetic engineers will breed and indoctrinate people into the roles prescribed to them by global capitalism.

Bloom saw the American mind closing, but now we see it imploding. Bloom could see error but failed to understand cruelty; he thought the people ruining his beloved Cornell were merely foolish, but he never gave them the respect necessary to acknowledge that they could be self-serving and out to gain frightening power over others. Gay marriage became, for a world exhausted by its inability to fix class inequality, both a convenient distraction and the ideal battering ram for an elite to smash the last remaining social infrastructure that could protect

the autonomy of the poor. This may be, perhaps, because he could not grapple with the part of the Left's academic project that came from truth. There was racism, sexism, and classism. Minorities, women, and the poor had suffered serious hardships based on more basic human needs than the drive for sexual pleasure, which is the sole basis for the new group claiming to be "oppressed"—gay men. In only 25 years the progressive camps evolved from defenders of the downtrodden to champions of the privileged, eager to take away the downtrodden's children. Nobody had a language to contest this or even point it out. The destruction of the humanities was not, as Bloom says, the sinking of a decaying Atlantis (371). It was a kamikaze mission, a suicide bombing that took human kindness down with it.

[i] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Touchstone, 1987), 43. Henceforth referenced within the text by page number alone.

[ii] Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia," in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson, 198.

[iii] G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis: Bobb-Merrill, 1953), 24.

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