

Texas A&M's Next Mission to Preserve Freedom

Eighty years ago, the prospects for freedom appeared grim as totalitarian governments dominated most of Europe and Asia. Freedom was on the ropes and fascism looked like an unstoppable force. With apologies to the defenders of London and Stalingrad, the future of freedom depended on the citizens of towns like Brady, Texas, and institutions like Texas A&M, which provided more officers in World War II than anyone—including our military academies. Freedom prevailed because simple men of courage like James Earl Rudder believed that our way of life was worth fighting for.

But the price of liberty is eternal vigilance and the threats to it are not always so obvious. Many Americans are awakening to the reality that a collectivist totalitarianism is spreading out from our own college campuses and is today's greatest threat to our way of life. Poisonous theories, this time rooted in Marxism, promise "equity" but have provided only antagonism. Our *equal opportunity* society has been so successful it has led to a near-perpetual immigration crisis, while *equal outcomes* societies have failed literally everywhere they have been tried. But Texas A&M has an opportunity to lead higher education back from this abyss by building on our traditions and the foundation established by President Rudder.

As CS Lewis said, we all want progress, but if we're on the wrong road, the one who turns back soonest is the most progressive, and higher education in America is stumbling toward a cliff. Taxpayers, tuition payers, and donors are asking whether this increasingly costly investment has become more a source of our society's problems than a solution. Too many institutions once committed to providing a liberal and practical education have become virtual police-states of rigid orthodoxy. First in the social sciences and now spreading to the STEM fields, both conservatives and liberals have been professionally and personally attacked by woke mobs of progressive students emboldened by campus diversity bureaucracies. Such madrasas of progressivism are failing both their students and our nation by squelching diversity of thought while advancing a multi-cultural monochrome of indoctrination.

Texas A&M is by no means immune to this contagion but does not appear to be in any imminent danger of succumbing--where else would conservatives, centrists, or even traditional liberals go? Like the armed conflict that came to us 80 years ago, this ideological one was not of our choosing. But it has come to us still, and the differences are just as stark. Free speech or speech codes? Academic freedom or ideological conformity? Personal responsibility or critical theories? Individual merit or identity victimology? Tolerance or cancel culture? Integration and unity or neo-segregation and further division?

After completing his mission along with millions of other *actual* anti-fascists, Rudder went on to lead Texas A&M forward at a critical juncture in our history. Our university, state and

nation owe him a debt of gratitude for showing that a first-class, practical, and liberal education and promotion should be based on individual merit, not on gender, color, or creed. He was, of course, right. The only question now is, can such a legacy endure its latest challenge?

We believe that it can, and that *all* Aggies will be better off for having been shaped by such a place. They will be better prepared to serve in a real-world that revolves around facts not feelings and to succeed in it knowing success and failure are the result of their abilities and decisions and not due to the patronage of their "allies" or some invisible malevolent force.

The prospects for such freedom may appear bleak but this ain't our first rodeo here on the post oak prairie. Our mission statement declares that "In the 21st century, Texas A&M University seeks to assume a place of preeminence among public universities while respecting its history and traditions" Not only can we further assume that place in the landscape of higher education, but also show others the way forward by making the needed course correction. Could a school so far from the front lines of the battle actually accomplish this? It wouldn't be the first time--and if not us, then who, if not now, then when?

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