

August 23, 2017

President Phil Hanlon
Dartmouth College
Office of the President
207 Parkhurst Hall
Hanover, NH 03755

cc: Professor Elizabeth Smith, Dean of Faculty

Dear President Hanlon,

Since the violent neo-Nazi attack in Charlottesville, we have watched with gratitude as our junior colleague Mark Bray, on the strength of his historical scholarship, has become *the* national expert on a subject that is suddenly, terribly urgent: the twentieth-century history of fascism and anti-fascism, in Europe and, more recently, the United States. European radical political movements were the subject of his 2016 dissertation at Rutgers under the direction of Distinguished Professor of History Temma Kaplan, research supported by both Fulbright and Mellon scholarships. He has been interviewed by roughly fifty outlets, from NPR and the BBC to *Rolling Stone*. His earliest contributions included an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, and thoughtful reflections on MSNBC's "Democracy Now" and in two appearances on NBC's "Meet the Press" with Chuck Todd. With the appearance last week of his new book on the subject—which has already sold 10,000 copies and been reviewed in the *New Yorker*--he is embarking on a 30-city book tour. He is speaking by invitation at campuses like Duke, NYU, and Colby. In short, his historical expertise is in demand around the country and internationally.¹

This is, of course, the kind of public recognition of Dartmouth scholarship that is celebrated in most situations. Instead, in this case, Professor Bray has been disavowed by Dartmouth at the request of a right-wing organization, Campus Reform, whose goal is to "smash left-wing scum" and which offers bounty prizes to students who will turn in professors' names for a campaign of harassment.²

The following statement now appears on the College's website:

Statement on Lecturer in History Mark Bray

Recent statements made by Lecturer in History Mark Bray supporting violent protest do not represent the views of Dartmouth. As an institution, we condemn anything but civil discourse in the exchange of opinions and ideas. Dartmouth embraces free speech and open inquiry in all matters, and all on our campus enjoy the freedom to speak, write, listen, and debate in pursuit of better learning and

¹ <https://www.mhpbooks.com/no-platform-for-fascism-a-qa-with-antifa-author-mark-bray/>

² <https://thinkprogress.org/right-wing-activist-launches-college-social-networking-site-to-smash-left-wing-scum-on-campus-3f970c43d1cc/>

understanding; however, the endorsement of violence in any form is contrary to Dartmouth values.³

As soon as this statement was issued, Professor Bray began receiving death threats. This is how he learned of it.

No one seems to have checked to find out what Professor Bray actually said on NBC and in his other appearances and op-eds. The characterization of his remarks in the Campus Reform piece and Dartmouth's statement is simply inaccurate. The story was then linked to associated right-wing sites like Breitbart—purveyor of Pizzagate, a conspiracy theory that produced a real-life armed attack-- and the Daily Caller, formerly the platform of Jason Kessler, who organized the Charlottesville “Unite the Right” fascist demonstration that resulted in the death of Heather Heyer and the injury of 19 other people. This is a new media environment, and as we know you experienced earlier this year, it is capable of lasting harm to the College as well as to the individuals targeted.

Professor Bray was exposed to violent threats, without so much as a basic effort even to warn him that the College intended to endorse the mischaracterization of his position and the implied attack on his scholarly standing by making clear he had no institutional support. By submitting the statement to such a site, the College has placed Professor Bray and his family in Hanover in real danger, as well as undermining his professional reputation and signaling to potential recruits to our campus that they cannot expect to be supported or even consulted if an external agent—howsoever avowedly hostile to the norms of civil conduct and academic freedom--takes issue with their research.

At no point in his interviews did Professor Bray call for violent protest.

He *did* make the irrefutable historical point that fascism has not been stopped by usual recourse to public debate and democratic electoral politics; we fought a war because of that fact.

He *did* assert his opinion that self-defense can be necessary at the hands of violent fascists. While that is of course a position open to debate—one entirely within his rights to express--in an article that ran almost simultaneously, Dartmouth quoted its own Distinguished Visiting Professor Cornel West to this effect:

. . . West told his Dartmouth class he was standing with 20 clergy members and social justice activists singing *This Little Light of Mine* while nine military-style units of white nationalists marched past them shouting and cursing in their faces.

“We would have been crushed like cockroaches if it were not for the anarchists and anti-fascists,” West said.⁴

³ https://www.dartmouth.edu/press-releases/bray_statement.html

⁴ <https://news.dartmouth.edu/news/2017/08/classroom-cornel-west-addresses-charlottesville-incident>

Most often quoted in the right-wing coverage has been Bray's statement that free speech will not defeat fascism.

This statement has recently received endorsement from an unfortunate source: As one of the Charlottesville Nazis reportedly told his father, "'The thing about us fascists is, it's not that we don't believe in freedom of speech. You can say whatever you want. We'll just throw you in an oven.'"⁵

In the context of the interview, however, it is crucial to note that Professor Bray's assertion came at the end of a discussion of organizing against Fascists in the 1920s and 30s. It was historically situated. Southern Poverty Law Center's Richard Cohen argued that "the answer to bad speech is more speech." Bray said: "We've seen that fail historically. I mean, fascism cannot be defeated through speech. . . . I can tell you from my book, from my research, there's lots of empirical examples historically of anti-fascism working and stopping these groups from growing."

These statements were intentionally, and predictably, distorted by the former *Dartmouth Review* editor Sandor Farkas, and then by right-wing media which feed on Campus Reform by mutual design. The tone and content of Dartmouth's statement takes at face value the distortions presented as truth by Farkas, Breitbart, and Daily Caller reporters, as though they were somehow more credible sources than Professor Bray himself—had anyone contacted him—or the transcripts and published pieces widely available for the College's representatives to check for themselves.⁶ There is nothing that Professor Bray has said that is in violation of Dartmouth's stated free speech and academic freedom policies.

We urge you to consider the lasting damage to Dartmouth's reputation that follows from such actions as well as the personal danger in which Professor Bray now finds himself. We request that Dartmouth remove the statement on Professor Bray; apologize to him for exposing him to entirely predictable possibility of physical harm; and initiate a review of peer-institution norms and recommended procedures⁷ on how to react when such a situation arises again—as it most certainly will.

Sincerely yours,

⁵ <http://www.inforum.com/opinion/letters/4311880-letter-family-denounces-teffts-racist-rhetoric-and-actions>

⁶ <https://www.mhpbooks.com/mark-bray-wants-to-pull-the-emergency-brake-on-white-supremacy/>

⁷ <https://www.aaup.org/issues/resisting-harassment-faculty>