

Culture News

Portland State Professor Comes Under Fire After Advocating For Colonialism

<http://remezcla.com/culture/bruce-gilley-colonization/>

Thursday, September 14, 2017 at 7:03 PM EST

By Emily Prado | 2 months ago

A Portland State University professor and his recently published academic article entitled, “The Case for Colonialism,” are the subject of a Change.org petition that has garnered over 5,000 signatures since it was created on Tuesday evening. In the abstract of the article, Bruce Gilley, an Associate Professor of Political Science at PSU, begins, “For the last 100 years, Western colonialism has had a bad name. It is high time to question this orthodoxy.”

The Change.org petition probes Third World Quarterly to retract their publication of the article:

“The offending article has brought widespread condemnation from scholars around the globe. The article lacks empirical evidence, contains historical inaccuracies, and includes spiteful fallacies. There is also an utter lack of rigor or engaging with existing scholarship on the issue...We do not call for the curtailing of the writer’s freedom of speech. We instead hold ourselves and our colleagues in academia to higher standards than this. We expect academic journals to do the same. We call on the editorial team to retract the article and also to apologize for further brutalizing those who have suffered under colonialism.”

However, according to Gilley, suffering under colonialism is a mere liberal fabrication. “Colonialism could be resurrected without the usual cries of oppression, occupation, and exploitation,” he writes. “A preposterous idea? Perhaps. But not so preposterous as the anti-colonial ideology that for the past 100 years has been haunting the lives of hundreds of millions of people in the Third World. A hundred years of disaster is enough. It is time to make the case for colonialism again.”

Bruce Gilley.

Throughout the article, Gilley uses numerous African countries including Zambia and Nigeria to illustrate what he claims is evidence that colonization is good. Gilley further suggests that independence in Guinea-Bissau and Congo have been fruitless and presumes Guineans are asking when the Portuguese will come back. Regarding Congo, he states, “Maybe the Belgians should come back.”

This inflammatory rhetoric isn't a surprise for two of Gilley's former students at Portland State or to Dr. Farhana Sultana, an Associate Professor at Syracuse University. In a Facebook post that has since been shared hundreds of times, Dr. Sultana criticizes Third World Quarterly and details Gilley's history of authoring similarly incendiary work:

For those who are tempted to hate read the article, Sultana urges people not to direct traffic to the publication by downloading it or citing it and offers free, accessible alternatives like this and this.

In an interview with Remezcla, Sydney Scout, a recent graduate from PSU's new two-year Masters for Public Policy program (MPP,) said, "When I first started the MPP program, things got off to a super rocky start. Many of the inadequacies of the program were equity related, as he was Chair of the program at that time."

Amongst the issues relayed, Scout says Gilley awarded a program-specific scholarship to students without any clear parameters and a Professional Advisory Board he developed was, "Mostly composed of white men from the business community [and] not at all reflective of student interests or identities in the program."

"When I tried to bring this up to him in a meeting, he said that recruiting people other than straight white males to the board would be tokenistic and [he] refused to bring up the topic of recruiting new advisory board members," Scout continues. "I got together as many classmates as I could during our first term of the program and we held a meeting to discuss what was going on and what we could do."

One of those classmates was Raúl Preciado Mendez, another recent graduate of MPP. Alongside more than half of the student cohort, they penned a letter to Gilley with several demands including that the program be restructured to run through an equity lens and that the program needed more oversight than what was being provided by the program chair. Gilley never responded. "Apparently, people in the department got wind of what was going on in our program," said Scout. "Raúl and I ended up in a meeting with Sy Adler who is Dean of the College of Urban and Public Affairs at PSU. He asked us what our experiences with Gilley had been like, so we detailed the experiences I have just given you and told him about the letter." Gilley was later removed as Chair.

Scout and Preciado Mendez were unsurprised to learn about the subject matter of Gilley's article. While colonialism wasn't a topic either could recall having discussed in class, both recalled various instances in which they felt conversations around systematic inequality weren't taken seriously. "This seems fairly in line with what Gilley said and did throughout my interactions with him as program chair and a professor," says Preciado Mendez. "There were many instances where his stances on race and gender struck me as dismissive. It is also clear reading Gilley's interactions with the media in the past that he has really troubling attitudes on diversity, black-face, and the meaning of historical oppression."

"It's really disheartening," he continues. "PSU prides itself on valuing equity and working to be an inclusive campus. The MPP is a program that was designed to positively impact society. It is clear that there is a lot of work to do if publishing something that is so patently offensive and devoid of academic merit does not come with concrete consequences for Gilley on the part of the University."

In addition to redacting the article as the Change.org petition calls for, Scout and Preciado Mendez would like Portland State to take further action as an institution. "I don't think Gilley should have a job where he is allowed to teach students about public policy, especially given his track record of being unable to put his views aside to run the MPP program in an equitable way," says Scout. "At the very least, I'd like the institution to respond by distancing themselves from the views expressed in his works. This is an issue of student safety and having people at the institution who hold views like this does not create a safe campus for everyone." Preciado Mendez echoes these sentiments: "PSU has a responsibility, especially now to rescind Dr. Gilley's tenure and terminate his employment. This article comes on the heels of other incendiary comments that Gilley has made, and is clearly testing the limits of what is acceptable. This is, in no uncertain terms, racism."

UPDATE 9/15/17: Margaret Everett, PSU's Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, provided REMEZCLA with a statement regarding the controversy. "Academic freedom is critical to the open debate and free exchange of knowledge and argument. Because of Portland State University's commitment to academic freedom, we acknowledge the right of all our faculty to explore scholarship and to speak, write and publish a variety of viewpoints and conclusions. The university also respects the rights of others to express counterviews and to engage in vigorous and constructive debate about the faculty's work."