

December 1 2015

Dear editors,

It is admittedly unusual to seek to exercise one's right of reply to a piece in which one is not mentioned. But that is what I am doing, following an op-ed by Niall Ferguson in *The Sunday Times* (November 29) that criticizes "Professor Jason Stanley, author of the classic Orwellian article "When Free Speech Becomes a Political Weapon," which I was the [first listed author on](#). (Our names were listed alphabetically, our being equal contributors.) But this does raise the question of how Ferguson – and the editors of *The Sunday Times* – managed to overlook my contribution.

The question is a timely one, in view of a [recent op-ed in *The New York Times* by Justin Wolfers](#), detailing the common practice of omitting to mention the names of leading female economists, or demoting them to second author, in popular write-ups of research they co-authored with their male economist husbands. But Jason Stanley and I are happily married to other people, so this raises the question of whether the phenomenon is a broader one. (Answer: [of course it is](#).)

Ferguson follows in the well-trodden footsteps of commentators of a certain age in the US who have been dismissing the students protesting as whiny, irrational, and coddled. These commentators range from across the political spectrum. But this is an especially convenient myth for arch-conservatives like Ferguson to peddle, since they would doubtless prefer not to focus on the fact that pretty much [the only millennials who are currently thriving, economically, are those with rich parents](#). The idea of the self-made person is increasingly apocryphal in the US context. But no, millennials are moving back in with their parents after college, not buying their own homes, and are chronically underemployed relative to their level of education, not because they demonstrably lack the opportunities baby boomers had, but because they are *childish*. This constitutes a neat and characteristic exercise in victim-blaming.

Then we come to the systemic racial injustice endemic in American universities being protested at the moment. Ferguson reassures us that “not trusting my own judgment, I asked one of my African-American colleagues what he made of the protests. He was dismissive: “They pout about stuff that does not matter.”” Is this supposed to settle it? Consulting one Black colleague, and asking them to confirm that one’s hunches are innocent of racial bias, is the very epitome of tokenism. It recalls the quip about the White person who defends themselves against charges of racism on the grounds that they have a Black friend, co-worker, or [girlfriend](#).

One wishes that Ferguson had listened to the many African-American authors – professors and student activists among them – who have been [telling us](#) what these protests are [really about](#), and arguing that the issue of free speech is merely a [diversion](#) – conclusions which Jason Stanley and I echo in our *Chronicle* piece. So why didn’t Ferguson heed this message or, if he did, take it seriously enough to actually engage with it?

Ferguson ends his piece by asking, “What’s the right emoticon for “Back to the real world”? For my own part, I am forced to wonder: what is a fitting emoji to express the sentiment, “Dude, check your privilege.”

Oh right. It is an eye roll.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kate Manne', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Kate Manne
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Cornell University
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