“The Once and Future Liberal” Book

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Book Review

Identity Politics and Lilla’s Central Argument

Identity is about belonging, in the sense that the common or differentiating factor between two individuals or groups gives people the feeling of individuality at its primary state. Every individual also lives with various identities that are always conflicting with each other, that require allegiance to a person or group, either as men or women, black or white, able-bodied or disabled, etcetera. These tend to find a sense of belonging depending on various factors, but the central aspect is the shared values or those an individual wishes to share. Identity politics developed from the need to creatively integrate the diverse but divisive members of society, making identity politics the central idea in modern politics. However, identities are not neutral, and their quest is affected by different and often conflicting values.

“The Once and Future Liberal” discusses the impact of the strain “identity politics” has had on American liberalism, basing arguments on the recent unexpected election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States. The author of the book, Mark Lilla, believed that the basis of determining the healthiness of national politics is commonality rather than differences. It is on this basis of commonality that he wishes to unite the fractured liberals who have seen the takeover of American liberalism by identity politics. He further argues that political identity ccoststhe American identity, in that it values cultural and ethnic differences more than American identity.

Over the years, American politics has evolved from Roosevelt’s liberalism, through the Reagan dispensation, to Donald Trump, who he suggests is the herald of the death of the Reagan dispensation. Rooseveltian liberalism was a positive force that unified American politics and culture through vigorous ideas, charismatic leaders, strong institutions, as well as its accomplishments. Then came the Reagan dispensation in which both the Right and Left proposed views that would make the political arguments based on the individuals or groups. However, this Reagan dispensation had significant impacts from which American politics has not recovered. He notes that it is time that the liberals rallied and reinvented the Rooseveltian liberalism’s vision, which is articulated in modern times.

Katherine Franke on Liberalism and White Supremacy

In Making White Supremacy Respectable Again," the author Katherine Franke argues that Lilla is advocating for white liberalism and simplifies the integration of social movements. She adds that Lilla's work centers on white life, claiming that it is the most important one in the United States. Also, Franke makes an essential note in the sense that Lilla's work sets a bad background on which white supremacy is made respectable. Lilla, in his work, blames Trump, which he terms an adverse outcome on the people of color, women, and LGBT because of Hillary Clinton's election campaign strategy that focused most on these groups in most of her speeches. Therefore, the liberals have developed an identity politics that is obsessed with individual feelings. Furthermore, he argues that to get back on the right track, liberals should commit themselves to pursuing their commonality rather than differences or diversity.

However, Katherine Franke, who is a colleague of Lilla at the University of Columbia, presents that this type of liberalism that Lilla is pursuing is the liberalism of white supremacy. It calls for placing the politics of common interest on the unmarked terrain of the lives and interests of whites. This liberalism disregards the protests by people of color and women as just complaints, whereas they are based on facts. It is progressivism that respects the endeavors of ethnic minorities and ladies to get out types of energy that support racial oppression and man-centric society as a diversion. In this liberalism, human suffering and systems of power that produce the suffering as beside the point. Therefore, what matters are the liberal values and the idea of America as a "shining city on a hill" that derives allegiance, not our protest.

Identity Politics in British Liberalism

In "The Limits of Identity Politics," the author relates the work of Lilla to the current political situation in Britain. The author further chooses to discuss these impacts by basing his argument on Lilla's view on how to help minorities in a democracy. Lilla wrote, "There is a good reason that liberals focus extra attention on minorities since they are the most likely to be disenfranchised. But the only way in a democracy to assist them meaningfully – and not just make empty gestures of recognition and 'celebration' – is to win elections and exercise power in the long run, at every level of government."

The left of Britain has been considered the labor out power since 2010, failing in the 2017 election despite seven years of austerity. The right wing is boosted by the press, such as BBC, which has an established business in an instance such as the 2016 referendum where the executives also rebranded themselves campaigners for the conservative party, rather than their initial broadcasting role. The left-wing, however, is active in universities and cultural institutions in Britain.

Nevertheless, the left in the university is characterized by their inclinations and affiliation toward

cultural politics representing identity politics, as explained by Professor Lilla. The focus of cultural politics is on racial, gender and sexual identity instead of the commonality of politics for the good of the country. In Britain, there were cultural wars in the 1960s, and social liberals realized victories and gains at that need to be welcomed. These gains and triumphs are with respect to bigotry and homophobia that were profoundly established in the way of life. Thanks to those cultural wars that significantly improved tolerance and harmony in Britain, which is considered one of the most tolerant and harmonious countries to live in.

The author asks, “But are we too diverse?” and tries to answer this question using the identity politics in Britain. The author guarantees that the left wing is more than the rainbow coalition of these repelled bunches with personality interests. Solidarity and related feelings are affected by an obsession with self-affirmation, which will eventually trick the liberals into accepting illiberal behaviors to accommodate these multi-cultures. Ultimately, these behaviors cause weakened historical bonds in the class of institutional loyalties. The author finally concludes by challenging the progressive of Britain to reflect on Steve Bannon’s, former Trump’s chief strategist, a statement on crushing Democrats so long as the Democrats focused on identity politics while they focused on economic nationalism.

Fred Siegel’s Critique of Lilla

Fred Siegel, in his article “It’s All Reagan’s Fault,” criticizes the book “The Once and Future Liberal” and argues that it missed the point it was supposed to bring home. Siegel argues that the book by Lilla loses its anticipated importance by using placating statements to discuss the dangers associated with politically correct identity politics. Throughout the article, Siegel points out the inadequacy of Lilla to relate his almost bizarre sense of history and the emotional underpinnings of political correctness. Siegel discusses the book in connection to the statement, “no recognition of personal or group identity was coming from the Democratic Party, which at the time was dominated by racist Dixiecrats and white union officials of questionable rectitude.”

Scrutinizing the statement above, Siegel wonders to which time of the Democratic Party Lilla is referring in the comment. There is evidence that Lilla was ignorant of the history because there was no mention of the McGovern Democratic Conception of 1972 when the minority seat for women and blacks was introduced. Siegel’s father states that Lilla left out the contribution of Herbert Marcuse on the left. Marcuse contended that leftists and liberals were qualified to limit anti-extremist and reasonable discourse because the colleges needed to go about as a stabilizer to society on the loose.

One significant setback of “The Once and Future Liberal,” according to Siegel, is that the aim of the book is more practical than principled. Identity liberalism weakens its main want of politic power that is defined by its element of persuasion. He, however, contradicts this statement by suggesting that the primary objective of politics is to gain the power to defend the truth. Furthermore, Lilla claims that in case of a crisis such as the one in the mid-70s, the country blames the liberals without giving any

evidence to support this statement. In fact, this is contrary to what happened in instances such as Keynesianism that led to inflation without growth during Carter's presidency.

As if the bizarre political and historical claims were not enough, Lilla continues to explain identity as Reaganism for the lefties. He describes citizenship as the tool to combat Reaganism, but instead of indulging in the expected issue of immigration and border, he criticizes the "Black Lives Matter" movement as an example of how not to build solidarity. It is in the last passage of the book that he indulges in the characteristics of zigzagging through concepts without providing any sufficient evidence to support his claims. Siegel then concludes his article by passing his verdict on the book as disappointing on most of the pages because of the insights into identity using conventional soothing rhetoric.

Aurelian Craiutu on Liberalism and Political Division

The topic of identity politics in "The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics" by Mark Lilla has received several criticisms, both positive and negative, from different people. Aurelian Craiutu, in his article "Against Identity Politics", criticises as well as applauds Lilla's work in some instances. Craiutu, in the first part, discusses various works by such as Charles, Thomas E. Mann Norman Ornstein, and David Brooks about Lilla's work. He then explains Lilla's view of the two ideologies that have been ruining liberalism. He then discusses Lilla's advice to both sides of the political spectrum before taking a stand on his view of the book.

In reaction to the article "A new specter is haunting America: the specter of "coming apart" by Charles Murray, Thomas E. Mann and Norman Ornstein claimed that the situation is worse than it looks. They displayed the Republican Party as extreme ideologists who have polarised the partisan while the Democratic Party is less extreme in their ideologies but still not perfect. Craiutu claims that the rise of Trumpism has been imminent because of the two different sides of the United States' living conditions. Whereas some parts of the United States live languishing lives, the rest live in the opposite situation. Therefore, the two are compared to two planets that are linked together, but the link will break at any moment. The book "The Once and Future Liberal" by Mark Lilla makes it clear that the hypothetical situation described above is a possibility shortly if not remedied immediately.

The author discusses the impacts of identity politics on liberal views and the birth of these sentiments. He claims the political ideologies over the past few decades are to blame for the conception of identity politics into liberalism and the disintegration of the community as a result. Both sides of the political spectrum have embraced extreme individualistic ideologies. The right adopted "Reagan Dispensation" that eventually made the talk of common good a "taboo". The left, on the other side, was affected by the Reagan Dispensation in that they stopped thinking politically as well as lost their older focus on elections and policy (Lilla, 2017). Ultimately, the left is fragmented politically, and the efforts to win office and pursue legislative agenda are paralyzed. Hence, to the

left, the politics of identity is a form of Reaganism blunting the liberal and conservative visions of politics. To remedy this situation, Craiutu claims that Lilla calls for pragmatism to achieve equal citizenship.

Lilla then goes ahead to appeal to the possible influencers who can help remedy this situation, such as the younger and narcissistic left-wing readers, conservative readers, and fellow academicians. In addressing the younger and narcissistic readers, he appeals to them to reject "the Facebook model of identity" characterized by its presentation of an individual as a mere "homepage" and personal brand. There is also the appeal to fellow like-minded academics on the need to have more arguments as well as on the consequences of concepts of difference and intersectionality on shared citizenship. However, the conservatives blame them for their failure to control their camp, such as Sarah Palin and Donald Trump.

Craiutu finally puts forth his views on the book by Lilla, agreeing in some cases and disagreeing in some instances, too. Craiutu states that Lilla is biased in the way he picks his targets, leaving out legal and policy development that helps promote identity politics. Lilla's view of citizenship and duties is somewhat sentimental and abstract. Also, there is the issue of the type of liberal Lilla is, according to Craiutu, who claims that it is the center-right liberalism of the Europeans. He finally suggests that Lilla is in many aspects similar to Raymond Aron, who passionately thinks politically, leading to criticism from almost everyone and reaching his conclusions.

Beverly Gage on Contradictions and Evidence

Beverly Gage, in the book "An Intellectual Historian Argues His Case Against Identity Politics," criticizes almost every aspect of the discussion put forth by Mark Lilla. He believes that such provocation that is finally to be compiled as a book needs additional research and substantial evidence to support one's argument. Besides recognizing that commonality should be the focus of shared citizenship, Lilla conveys his message in a way that will cause disunity in his audience. Lilla chooses to mock movements such as Black Lives Matter and mean statements towards the campus' left.

Gage criticizes Lilla for not failing to provide the relevant literature through research to provide enough evidence to support his argument. Through such methods, he fails to describe the correct narrative of the modern conservative movement and ignores conflicts and structural inequities caused by the golden age of liberalism. Gage further accuses Lilla of failing to realize the feelings of those involved in the identity politics, such as the college activists. Also, Gage notes Lilla contradicts himself on the role of movements like feminism and civil rights in American history and currently finds this movement counterproductive.

Despite conceding that most American view themselves as members of an identity group, he states that these identity crisis needs prioritizing one over the other. He also calls for solidarity from his

fellow like-minded comrades, yet he scolds those who are identity-conscious. Finally, Gage suggests that Lilla needed to inspect his contradictions and biases regarding identity. He concludes that “The Once and Future Liberal “is a missed opportunity of the highest order, trolling disguised as erudition.”

Jonathan Rauch on Identity and Political Power

Jonathan Rauch gives one of the most insightful criticisms of Mark Lilla’s “The Once and Future of Liberalism,” considering a wider perspective of identity politics and liberalism. He believes that Lilla’s book is polemic rather than a comprehensive history sociological study or a policy brief. Rauch further believes and encourages critics to base the criticism of this book on standards rather than as an academic scholarship. He further lauds both Lilla’s timing and how he chose his language to relay his message. In “Speaking as a…” Jonathan Rauch starts by appreciating identity politics as one of the main contributors to his marriage, just because it is an identity that caused the legalization of homosexuality. He, therefore, considers identity politics as one of the most influential agents of social change. It is with this respect that Jonathan Rauch discusses Mark Lilla’s take on identity politics for the liberals, issuing reasons why identity politics should be abandoned in liberalism.

Rauch identifies two aspects of identity politics practice that many left-center activists and intellectuals undertake, which makes Lilla uncomfortable. The first is that their definition of identity politics drives away support. In this aspect, Rauch states that once the liberals lost trust in electoral politics, they changed their approach to social change to incline toward the legal avenues. In the process, the liberals lost their bases, such as political organizations, eventually losing their original supporters: the blue-collar workers and white populists. The second aspect is that the liberals often do not practice politics at all in the recent past. He uses the data of the last election of 2016 to argue that the liberals have lost their touch in politics that consisted of almost similar gender and racial composition of the votes. Also, he observes that Lilla states that the liberals no longer conceive politics as not a common struggle but as a tool for the struggle against specific forms of oppression.

Rauch goes on to agree with Lilla’s view on identity politics in that identity groups work to divide people rather than unify people on shared commonality. Rauch then supports this claim by his own experience during his speeches where the view of class or race is either judged offensive or intolerant. Therefore, it is right to conclude that putting off the conversation on color, gender, or class will only cause disunity, losing its objectivity. Moreover, there is a difference in the economic status of citizens and tools such as education create a great divide among the citizens.

The main obstacle that faced the liberal movement was the eschewed politics rather than the embraced identity, for example, when some political machines, such as the District of Columbia, embraced identity politics, but ethnic favoritism still existed. Rauch agrees with the criticism of the whites using identity politics to their advantage. However, he also notes that Lilla made a distinction a section of the liberals were concerned with power, but the rest such as academics and activists have lost touch with power politics. He further blames these intellectuals for their role in letting the

younger generation the conception of politics and justice, with their understanding of politics as more dangerous than the notion of justice. These academics lefts concentrated on training students about personal identities rather than winning elections and governing.

Rauch then discusses Lilla's argument on the conservatives. He states that conservatives have set out to take over the Republican Party. However, Rauch does not miss to point out that Lilla uses ineffective examples of the movements that had decisive electoral impacts, such as the Tea Party. He instead chose to use the Black Lives Matter movement, which had the objective of ending police brutality against blacks. This example creates certain disunity among those sympathetic to the cops and the victims of police brutality, even though it is a morally right move. Liberals who align themselves with such movements by identifying themselves with identity politics forsake their political thinking at the expense of sacramental thinking.

Rauch further believes that, despite the failure of liberalism in their political ideology concerning identity politics, Lilla has made two crucial points. He agrees with Lilla's claim that there has been a drift of progressives' politics from power, little investments by activists, and intellectuals failing to organize to swing the state legislates and influence congressional redistricting. He points out that Obama is, in a way, responsible for the current weakened party's institutional capacity by undermining party building and campaign activities, failing Clinton's pursuit of the presidency.

Also, Rausch agrees with Lilla's complaint that the academics of the left have lost their touch and consequentially failed liberalism. These intellectuals are responsible for convincing and shaping the culture of liberalism by teaching their students and other professors. Therefore, Lilla believes that the only way the Democratic Party can reform is through reforming, repudiating, or distancing itself from these academics left. The paper further emphasizes the progress of liberalism throughout history, stating the consequences of liberalism during Bill Clinton's and Obama's eras as president. However, despite the achievements of the liberals under these two democratic presidents, there is a need to incorporate different thinking styles and integrate practical politics in their conception of social justice rather than treating politics as an afterthought and a distraction.

The End of Identity Liberalism

On November 20th, 2016, the New York Times published an article, "The End of Identity Liberalism," which focused on dissecting identity liberalism as discussed by Mark Lilla in his book "The Once and Future of Liberalism." The paper starts by appreciating the diversity in modern America and its successful incorporation of different ethnic groups. However, it claims that such a difference is a disaster to the democratic policies in this ideological age. However, in recent years, American liberalism has plunged into identity politics, causing moral panic and preventing the commonality of citizens from unifying Americans.

The paper then supports Lilla's view that as a result of the last presidential election's outcome, it is

time the liberals start to “kill” identify liberalism. Despite Hillary Clinton’s maturity in politics and at her best, she couldn’t manage to garner enough voters to win the election because of pf her campaign strategy. Rather than concentrating on the American citizens as a whole when asking for votes, she tragically slips into the rhetoric of diversity that cost her votes, as shown by data. This strategic mistake was the direct result of identity liberalism that has been haunting the liberals since the Reagan dispensation.

The paper notes the importance of identity in cases where affirmative action has been used to reshape and improve corporate life, such as Black Lives Matter. Nonetheless, it contends that there has been an obsession with assorted variety in both the schools and the press, raising a generation that has no idea of the happenings in the world yet is just aware of the episodes in their identity groups. Since their enrolment into school, children are taught of their identities heightening diversity issues. The assorted diversity instructed in schools has been indirectly assimilated into the liberal media with governmental policy regarding minorities in society concentrated on ladies, and the minorities thought about a most critical accomplishment in the media.

However, despite such positive impacts, identity liberalism has failed at the electoral level. Commonality indicates a national health politics, unlike the differences. The paper further states the role of Reagan and Bill Clinton in the absorption of identity politics in liberalism. The two ensured used their time as president to accomplish various domestic programs for different groups, hence planting the seeds of identity among the different social groups among the citizens.

The article explains the “whitelash” concept and the impacts it has on the liberals’ view of identity. At its basic form, this concept frees the liberals from the obsession with diversity that has led to the emergence of white, rural, and religious Americans as a possible disadvantaged group with regard to their identity. This emergence is regarded as a reaction to the rhetoric of identity rather than the questions of diversity. Liberals failed to understand that identity movements such as the Ku Klux Klan still exist, and whoever plays this identity game is bound to lose.

The author of the article finally calls on post-identify liberalism, which has its principles drawn from the successes of pre-identity liberalism. The best way to way achieve such identity liberalism is by providing a platform where Americans discuss and emphasize the shared commonality. Therefore, such programs will promote a nation where citizens realize the weight of citizenship and hence strive to work together and help each other. The teachers, on their part, need to accomplish their political responsibility by teaching students to become committed citizens. It expresses that one prevailing characteristic of post-identity progressivism is that democracy not only advances rights but furthermore gives obligations, for example, voting by the citizens.

Work Report

Identity politics is the political activism of various social movements such as the civil rights

movement, feminists movement, gays and lesbians, ethnic separatists, etc., with the aim of political recognition, self-determination, and elimination of discrimination (Fukuyama, 2018). Its central premise is that these social groups receive social injustice, and they will need to rise to defend their groups' interests collectively. It can be defined as mobilizing a society with regard to culture, identity and politics. Therefore, depending on the school of thought identity politics can either refer to cultural or political activism. Identity politics strives to differentiate the perceived privileges, social, political, and occupational, received by the dominant group and the assumed discrimination towards the oppressed group.

Lilla's Definition of Identity Liberalism

Mark Lilla, in his book "The Once and Future of Liberals: The End of Liberal Liberalism," discusses the identity of liberal ideologies. Lilla blames a bunch of liberals for their role in the election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States. Lilla's concern is that the liberals have adopted the concept of identity politics in liberalism. Although Mark Lilla does not define the term "identity politics" in his book, analyzing the text gives the reader an idea of what Lilla is talking about in the text. Analysis of the books makes the reader understand that the identity politics about liberalism that Lilla describes is where the liberals forsake the politics that unite the nation on the common good rather than diversity of citizenship. Lilla means that by allowing ideas, the liberals incorporate the concept of diversity and rhetoric of identity into liberalism, hence forsaking the needs of the American citizens in general. Lilla decides to give his thoughts as a liberal, citing various historical claims that have led to this unfortunate disaster of identity liberalism, which he believes cost the liberals political seats and offices.

The concept of identity liberalism had its seeds planted in the mid-twenties after the election of Reagan. After this election, the liberals failed to develop an ideology that is fresh and politically sold the dream of a shared destiny that is compatible with modern times. The liberals, due to frustration decided to take part in the movement whose basis of operation is personal identity. As a result, the liberals lost their focus on the commonality of the citizens that helped unify the country, especially in the Roosevelt era liberalism, which initiated the support of political movements and ideologies. In fact, Lilla refers to the identity liberalism as the Reaganism of the left.

Lilla appeals to other liberals to bring to an end identity liberalism and declares that its time is up. He states that it is the obsession of the liberals on the campuses and the influential people with personal identity rather than reasoned political debate. The education system has mainly been blamed for this crisis, which has failed the pass the founding fathers' visions of the United States. The students, from the start, are introduced to personal identities, which focus on what makes a particular group different from the rest rather than the conventional factor of citizenship. The academics need to teach students that besides the rights, each citizen must perform for the country. The influential leaders also need to promote the original ideologies of liberalism by devoting themselves to liberalism. He envisions post-identity liberalism, where the nations are united by the idea of their common

citizenship, and identity politics is treated as just another minor aspect of politics.

Historical Roots of Identity Liberalism

In his work, Mark Lilla puts forth a theory that the eras of Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and Franklin Roosevelt set the tone for the emergence of identity politics. Despite successfully uniting the citizens on the commonalities, the three left devastating impacts on some groups in America. For example, though the New Deal had significant benefits to most Americans, it left out the African Americans. Reagan promoted the idea of a small government that did not protect the vulnerable groups in society efficiently due to its limited power. Clinton's crime bill and welfare reforms created mass incarceration and disproportionately in the affairs of the communities of color, respectively. Therefore, by promoting equality in all the different types of nations, the presidents ended up creating a nation that focused its politics on identity instead of the common good. By absorbing this concept of identity politics, liberalism lost its initial political ideology of the common good and focused on movement politics. Ultimately, the result was the birth of identity liberalism.

The Case for Post-Identity Liberalism

The author devises methods that will help end Trumpism and usher in the age of post-identity liberalism. Lilla outrightly states that post-identity liberalism is liberalism based its ideologies on pre-identity liberalism but is developed for the modern era. The eradication of identity politics will require the liberals called upon to embrace citizenship as the common factor in the nations and build political ideologies to improve the lives of each citizen without segregating on racial or gender basis. He calls upon the academics to "march" in solidarity to mark the end of identity liberalism and teach the students about the dreams of the founding fathers for the United States. He further calls on influential liberal persons to take the initiative to build a party that is inclined towards shared commonality and not the diversity of the country. He draws most of his sources from historical incidents that shaped the politics of the United States.

Purpose Audience and Rhetorical Approach

After the 2016 presidential, where Donald Trump surprisingly won the seat, Mark Lilla wrote an op-ed in the New Statesman in which he criticizes and blames the left liberals for this win. In the follow-up, the professor wrote a book that dissects the "op-ed" and explains further the reason for such blame on the liberal. He chose a book as his source of publication because it provided him with enough length to drive his point home. The book can be classified as the genre of response, responding to Donald Trump's election. The book is called "The Once and Future of Liberal," in which Lilla turns his rage onto the intellectual-political class of the liberal for their role in promoting liberalism. It is only through a book that Lilla can put his sentiments extensively, in which he passionately urges the liberals to wake up using a somewhat harsh and forgiving tone.

The primary audience that Lilla wants to address is the liberals who have accepted the integration of the concept of identity politics into liberalism, thus accepting identity liberalism as a political ideology. However, even among the liberals, Lilla focuses on certain sections, such as the intellectuals, lefts, and students, that have the power to change and eradicate the aspect of identity from liberalism.

Firstly, Lilla relates they birth of identity liberalism by giving the liberals the history of how the previous presidents have promoted the idea, tainting the initial ideology of the pre-identity liberalism. He addresses the left of focusing on Reaganism, which is identity-focused, instead of the shared common good. Lilla also discusses the campuses for their failure to promote education and teach their students the visions of the Founding Fathers. The academics, he claims, focused on developing a personal identity among the students that focuses on differences and contradictions to the shared commonality in liberalism. The professor relates to his audience how this identity liberalism has affected the lives of the citizens. He appeals to the citizens of the United States to focus on citizenship- the shared common good instead of differences to “make America great. Again.”

The book in itself is not academic oriented hence less research and data that could be interpreted. Therefore, wishes to capture the attention of every citizen further and share his ideas to eliminate identity liberalism. Lilla also employs the historical narrative that focuses on bringing out the evolution of liberalism. In giving such a story, he ensures that the readers of the book can relate to the factors that he believes will play a crucial part in change in society. Also, the book is straight to the point and uses strong language while pointing to each target audience to make them think clearly about identity liberalism. Finally, when addressing intellectuals, he uses his professional affiliations with them to express sentiments and disappointments towards the quality of education they are offering their students.

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