

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

Boris Ryvkin '09: More nonsense from Brown activists

By:

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Activist schemes at Brown have grown at a fever pitch.

In a column last month ("Brown students should be forced to think green," Sept. 5), climate foot soldier Joshua Kaplan imagined the University as one giant laboratory, with sensors and displays providing daily reminders of our crimes against Mother Nature.

His allies at emPOWER, Students for a Democratic Society and the Student Labor Alliance have come together to promote the Real Food Challenge, which demands a more ethical campus in thought and in diet.

Kaplan's piece leaves little doubt as to the intentions of Brown's environmental extremists, just as the RFC demonstrates how far some are willing to go to force their lifestyles on others.

Whatever happened to tolerance, disagreement and individual choice? Aren't these the ideals liberals parrot on a regular basis? Apparently these only apply when the right kinds of choices are made and ideas held.

Kaplan's plan to rewire the University and "shove" our energy use in our faces is nothing short of frightening. His fanaticism about man-made global warming leads to the assumption that no amount of new evidence or testimony will make him question the alarmist consensus.

Whatever is floating around out there can be explained away somehow. The 17,000 scientists who signed a petition opposing United States ratification of Kyoto and similar climate treaties are kooks in the pockets of big oil. The National Academy of Science study that debunked the "hockey stick" model of temperature change in the International Committee on Climate Change Report is inconclusive.

Kaplan's view leaves no room for further discussion and those who remain stubborn on climate change must see the error of their ways: disagreement with alarmism is tantamount to a mental defect.

Perhaps unwittingly, Kaplan has taken a page from the playbook of successive Soviet governments, which confined scores of political dissenters to mental institutions under a policy of psychiatric detention.

Kaplan envisions the University transformed into a massive laboratory. Students are dehumanized. Those who do the right thing and watch less television at night get rewarded while the culprits are punished.

Kaplan believes this "mental impact" is worth the system's financial burden, despite the acknowledged low environmental effect. Brown students will feel confident their minds are in the right place on climate change by graduation. Four years of reprogramming should be more than enough to deal with

pockets of opposition.

The disdain for freedom and basic dignity inherent in Kaplan's vision is shocking. Worse, it goes to show how far environmental extremists are willing to go to subordinate their less enthusiastic peers.

Then there is the Real Food Challenge, whose proponents want Brown Dining Services to allocate 20 percent of its budget toward the procurement of "real food" (read: organic, fairly traded - you get the picture). It "tastes better, makes us healthier, supports small farms and saves the environment," while the normal variety brings on obesity, hurts farmers and pollutes.

All of these real food assertions are flawed.

To base a policy change that will cost real money on taste differentials is both absurd and, frankly, tyrannical. The health benefits of real food have been disproven by countless studies. One on milk, by Nutritionist Karen Collins at the American Institute for Cancer Research, contended that research does not support a health advantage of organic over conventional milk for any segment of the population.

Even if their food were healthier, who are the RFC activists to decide what I can and cannot eat with my tuition and meal plan dollars? If they like organic, they can buy it at the local store or farmer's market. Leave the food police arrogance at home!

What about farmers and the environment? The same distortions and economic costs imposed on small farmers by fair-trade coffee remain with the RFC, but on a bigger scale. Farmers are subsidized for their inefficiency and more workers enter the food industry. Food prices fall, hurting the very same small farmers Real Food attempts to help.

While RFC proponents stress how the extra resources farmers receive will be used for development and retraining, the economic realities of the matter suggest the exact opposite. The environmental impact of this will be miniscule and, to put it bluntly, my stomach and dietary rights come first.

On another note, given the higher per-unit costs of ethical food, a simple 20/80 budgetary division is unlikely. Brown students may get more real food, but they will have to settle for less food in total.

Joshua Kaplan's environmental laboratory scheme and the Real Food Challenge are not only bad ideas; they are affronts to individual liberty and tolerance. The former wants to alter our behavior by monitoring our energy use. The latter wants to alter it by controlling the food we consume.

It's time that "live and let live" became more than simply a fine slogan at Brown.

Boris Ryvkin '09 requires toxins in the air he breathes and the food he eats.

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