

bove the roaring waterfalls and placid slopes of Ithaca, Cornell University stands as a testament to American intellectual prowess, an Ivy League institution with over a century and a half of storied history and contributions to this country and the world at large. It represents the eternal mission of human learning, and the value of America at her best: it has produced great scientists, writers, and thinkers, contributed to advancements across every field of study, and endured as a centerpiece of international academia. But this university was not made great by its professors, or its patents, or its published works; Cornell’s success was originally founded on its commitment to unapologetic debate and free academic discourse. This is the bedrock of a Western education, as significant and as firm as the concrete poured under our libraries and our dormitories.

Today, this vision is being challenged, both at Cornell and at institutions throughout the country and the world. There is so much to be lost: academia, and with it the country, faces escalating threats to rigorous deliberation, sensible governance, and the entire American social structure. Few on campus today subscribe to the Western educational model; on the contrary, there exists a diligent project to erode free expression and minimize academic opposition, and to equivocate between those who seek to uphold these values and those who seek to demean them through petty political opposition. In this climate, we acknowledge the mission of the Cornell Political Union, which stands quite nearly alone in its effort to encourage and protect academic inquiry at this university. We affirm its founding spirit and champion its importance as a core part of a meaningful educational experience. Without this organization, there would remain no formal venue for the exchange we seek.

Our platform is striking, both in the modern university and in modern politics. We understand that ideas have consequences; we have therefore carefully committed ourselves to our ideas, values, and principles, not the trendy politics that grips much of American discourse today. Where others increasingly emphasize the politics of comfort, we embrace an unflinching commitment to Truth. Where others strive, with escalating focus, for the utopian reordering of society, we seek the preservation of this constitutional republic and our inherent liberties. Most importantly, where America’s liberal elite, animated by a myopic moral and cultural relativism, have called into question the merits of modern republicanism, free enterprise, and the American experiment, we stand firmly in defense of each one.

We enjoy a remarkably comfortable existence here, in large part due to this country’s commitment to fostering and protecting free and competitive markets. These very markets enabled both the physical and metaphorical construction of this university as it stands today. It bears repeating: our economic model provides an avenue for human ingenuity to address human need, has uplifted the American people in totality, and has produced the wealthiest nation on Earth. Nor has this success been limited to the United States; countries the world over, by adopting this same philosophy, have successfully achieved an unprecedented level of human flourishing, and no system has come close to rivaling this one in its capacity to raise masses from desperate poverty and countries from economic misery.

Our flourishing has never been limited to dollars and cents. The American experiment is a moral and civic masterpiece, the crown jewel of the Western political project, and there is much to celebrate about its great success. Too few in academia acknowledge this reality, recognized abroad by friends and enemies alike. On the contrary, a near-consensus has emerged that the righteousness of American society is mere propaganda, crafted to disguise the injustices of the Western model. In the era of value relativism, even well-intentioned people have resigned themselves to a kind of political nihilism, choosing to simply accept the constant denigration of American values rather than vigorously challenge such attacks. The resulting political environment has made it such that in academia nearly any idea seems to be permissible, no matter how deplorable its real world implications. Ironically, the only perspectives limited from discussion are the ones on the Right, which are subjected to close scrutiny in the first place; in this respect, we have consistently encountered to our frustration the elitist dogmatism of modern American progressives.

The problem is not that there are those with different perspectives or other honest disagreements; rather, it is the American intellectual, too meek to take a stand, who agonizes over these questions while the left gradually advances a project of total societal restructuring, all with complete moral clarity. America’s adversaries abroad similarly advance their own national interests, without gentlemanly doubts about the superiority of their motives to ours. The only way conservatism-- or, for that matter, the West-- can overcome forces like these is with a moral firmness of its own. American presidents from Washington to Bush appealed to this resolve when America was in peril. The bravery of our armed forces, the prudence of our diplomats, and the goodwill of the American people have demonstrated and defended time and again the merits of our experiment.

It must be acknowledged that sensitivity and rationalism have historically been the West’s greatest strengths, but also pose a serious challenge to those seeking to preserve this political project. We do not advocate for an authoritarian, state-imposed value system, and understand that in so doing we would compromise a core facet of American governing philosophy. Still, moral virtue is never irrelevant, and must be a constant consideration for the political leaders of any society. Here we confront the modern-day importance of the conservative movement: there must be potent forces which advocate for these values and traditions and stand for a true political alternative to the progressive hegemony of the modern day. The harrowing alternative is completely surrendering the space of appearance to the left, which will never think twice about the value of our perspective relative to its own, of capitalism relative to socialism, or of America’s promise relative to anyone else’s.

We appreciate the stakes, but still find ourselves flying many colors, despite our common stripes. Though we are unified by conservative values, loyalty to Truth, and an unflinching belief in the potential of America, we do not confine our membership to a single party line or corner of the inherently vague political spectrum. We welcome debate: democratic institutions are fragile, made resilient only by constant challenge. Freedom itself requires contest to survive. However, we firmly distinguish well-intentioned dialogue on these fundamental issues from the overtly partial, biased, and hostile threats to the American system that have become increasingly caustic in recent years. Our ideals, although up for discussion, face serious challenges at home and abroad and therefore must be defended.

Even within the Political Union, this perspective is still much too rare, representative of both Cornell and higher education writ large. Conservatism is uncommon in these spaces, and facing a bitter and hostile student body, morale can be difficult to maintain. Recognizing this environment, we are well aware that without our efforts, there would be almost no one attempting to represent and advance our mission, much less with the sincerity, passion, and candor which inspired us to author this document. We embrace this challenge, and are inspired by this organization; although it began as a triviality, a small but heartfelt dream whispered over lunch and carelessly planned over drinks, it is today a reality thanks to those willing to become the standard-bearers of conservatism at Cornell.

Enter the Freedom Caucus, committed to the essential value of constitutional democracy and limited government, and equipped with a strong sense of citizenship to the American political project. When launching the National Review, Buckley outlined his opposition to the “cultural menace” of the “conformity of the intellectual cliques … in education as well as the arts,” and at a university like this one we too encounter every day the “modish fads and fallacies” that characterize their politics. Our Freedom Caucus is, as Buckley then proclaimed, “without reservations, on the side of excellence (rather than “newness”) and of honest intellectual combat (rather than conformity).”

Therefore, cherishing our country and our way of life, striving to preserve liberty, endeavoring to promote dignity, and firmly standing beside our Western intellectual inheritance and the ideals of the American founding, we hereby form the Freedom Caucus of the Cornell Political Union.