

The Unhinging of the Academic Left: History, Hate, and Hysteria

The Organization of American Historians (OAH) has responded to the Trump presidency in a manner showing all the seriousness and bravery its thousands of members can muster: a lecture series univocally condemning Donald Trump and the nation they blame for electing him.

One thing the announcement has in great abundance is self-importance:

The OAH Distinguished Lectureship Program, with support and guidance from the OAH Executive Board, has framed a new initiative in these fractious times. More than 80 OAH Distinguished Lecturers stand ready to speak about the deep historical roots of a variety of divisive issues revealed by the 2016 presidential race and the election of Donald J. Trump.

Thank goodness these brave souls “stand ready” to share their knee-jerk prejudices with audiences of captive students and clone-minded colleagues; thank goodness they are brave enough to address the same “divisive issues” they have been using for two generations to turn campuses into crybully echo chambers. Issues to be addressed center on, as one lecture title puts it, “Racism, Violence, and the American State.” Perhaps a few other lecture titles can convey the groupthink at work, here:

- Trump’s America in Historical Perspective: The War against Women, the Fight against Unions, and the Assault against Mexicans, African Americans, and Muslims.
- The Rages of Whiteness: Race, Class, and the Rise of Donald Trump.
- The Problems with the Electoral College: History,

Racism, and the Idea of "One Person, One Vote."

- Teaching on Trump: Experiences Teaching a Course on the Far Right in America, Past and Present.

The dreary uniformity of diatribes against our nation as a bastion of racism, sexism, and homophobia is nothing new. These same talks have been standard on campus for decades; they have been merely repackaged as attacks on a President who dared deny the "truth" that the United States is a cesspool of injustice that must be fundamentally transformed through radical political action. That not one academic on the official OAH program has anything nice to say about our President, or those who voted for him, also is unsurprising. We have known for many years, and finally have multiple studies corroborating the fact that, college faculties are virtually unanimous in their leftism. Ratios of "liberals" to "conservatives" vary from 5:1 to 12:1 depending on the study and reach even more astronomical levels of leftist uniformity depending on the particular institution and region on the country (e.g., few liberal arts colleges in New England have heard of, let alone seen or employed, a conservative professor since at least the time of Chairman Mao). Even where they exist, many vaguely conservative faculty members generally hide or even deny their political views for fear of bullying, targeting, and potential firing.

Pretty much everyone knows at this point that campuses are fortresses of leftist groupthink. Less well known, or at least less acknowledged, is just how extreme the universal views really are. As most Americans are aware, President Trump is no white supremacist, extremist, or even traditional conservative, particularly where marriage issues are concerned. Nevertheless, he constantly is referred to in these terms. Part of the reason is the perceived political utility of such smears. More important, however, is the skewed perspective from which academics in particular view him.

Even within the tiny group of "conservatives" represented on

campuses, by far the largest proportion are not conservative. Professors identified with the “right” on campuses almost always are libertarians (that is, liberal individualists) or political moderates who have strayed off their intellectual reservation on one or more issues important to the ruling ideology. Where does this leave the vast bulk of academics? To the left of Hillary Clinton. The political spectrum on campus begins with the ideology of a woman committed to socialized medicine and a government dedicated to doling out life-chances according to perceived group grievances, then moves left from there. Far more on campus were behind the candidacy of the avowed socialist Bernie Sanders than Hillary Clinton, and many saw Mr. Sanders as only a useful standard-bearer in a continuing leftward movement.

For decades, now, academics have gotten away with the obvious falsehood that their Marxist analysis is merely a form of critique, giving intellectual heft to a benignly liberal worldview and program. Whether in history, political science, law, or pretty much any other field, academics, in part through their writings but mostly through their indoctrination of captive student audiences with no ideological options, have pushed the public significantly to the left in its political and cultural assumptions. We have gone from demanding public morality to disparaging it, from assuming the goodness of our nation to viciously attacking its fundamental character as matters of public faith, from demanding public civility for all to attacking anyone who fails to toe the latest line of political correctness. Why? Because two generations of students have heard nothing else than, and been downgraded for disagreeing with, a pervasive orthodoxy in which infinite injustices are blamed on America, Christianity, and tradition.

Again, mere consideration of the “brave” professors’ lecture topics should give one an inkling of their extremism. Then again, this is the staid, establishment face of the academic left. The real face of the academy—the face it showcases for

its own members—is even more extremist than might appear, here. For a peak at what is going on within the profession itself, one need only look at the program for the 2017 OAH annual meeting. Take for example (there are many of the same general type to choose from) a panel titled “Solutions to the Overwhelming Whiteness of American History.” The description merits quotation in full:

The history profession is in the midst of disruption and fundamental change. In the late 1970s the Combahee River Collective’s Statement articulated the politics of interlocking identities and the destructive forces of racism. Nearly forty year later, American history remains overwhelmingly white in approach, structure, content, allocation of resources, administration, and faculty. Students are demanding action against macro- and micro-aggressions around race and difference. Public discourse is often confused and reactive. On the front lines of these disjunctions, public historians are confronted with the task of making sense of history, the needs of visitors, and the work of scholars. This session uses the experiences of public history professionals to explore solutions to the enduring whiteness problem in American history and the creeping dangers of irrelevancy that accompany it.

One with a stronger stomach than mine might write a book on all that is intellectually wrong with this statement—from its privileging of a “collective’s” statement representing no one of note to its assertions that “students” are demanding what their teachers have programmed them to demand in a pervasive atmosphere of related rewards and punishments in class, after-school activities, and the dormitories. The panel’s central point, however, is distressingly simplistic, namely, that “truth” is whatever “public intellectuals” find useful in service to their political program. The past itself, on this view, is something to be created and re-created in line with current political objectives rooted in ideological resentment

and hostility toward traditions of thought and action, and entire classes of persons deemed oppressive on account of their identification with “the wrong side of history.”

The “cutting edge” of historical study is a set of exercises in studied fabrication. There is no pretense, even, of a commitment to finding out what actually happened in the past. No tolerance is to be exercised toward those who fail to rewrite events of the past to emphasize the narrative of grievance. All that is left is the drive to destroy what we know about the past and replace it with something more useful for contemporary political purposes.

It has proven all too easy for observers to dismiss this revolutionary groupthink as intrinsic to campus life. Such dismissal empowers academic elites by treating college as something to be survived or recovered from upon graduation. Students’ whose parents care at all about education mostly are just warned about what to avoid; they have almost no options or guidance in opposition to the ruling orthodoxy. As a result, most students succumb to the pressures of groupthink and come to either despise their own society or dismiss the very idea of understanding it as leading only to hateful fantasy.

And, lest we forget, radical historians do not indoctrinate only college students. They also shape the education of even very young children. California’s Common Core, for example, has been fundamentally altered to enfold it within the LGBT “narrative.” The state has adopted academic “standards” requiring, among other things, the teaching of sexual “diversity” beginning in the second grade. The project was spearheaded by historians who took it upon themselves to create a pro-LGBT narrative for students beginning in the second grade.

There increasingly is no avoiding such transformative policies. Religious institutions in California are under

increasing pressure to conform with the radical agenda. To suggest that sexuality is an intimate matter best entrusted to parents is now deemed so retrograde as to merit shaming, at best. And one had best not think of questioning the premises of such radical actions. To do so—whether one’s grounds are scientific, cultural, or religious—is to court career suicide. The response to anyone (especially among academics) who opposes such conduct is that they are extremists seeking to undermine academic freedom and spawn hateful bigotry, or worse.

Before we can even begin to return sanity to our educational institutions, before we can gain a hearing for research and teaching rooted in the quest for truth rather than the imperative of radical action, we must recognize just how radical those we have entrusted with the commanding heights of our culture really are. And to do that we must first recognize that the university, for better or worse, really does occupy those commanding heights. It is in the university, or worse yet the public school, where most young people’s minds are formed, where they gain the mental and spiritual habits they follow in shaping the dominant institutions, beliefs, and practices of our society.

So long as the government continues subsidizing radical groupthink through its tax, research, and other policies, we will continue to see our children indoctrinated into an ideology that denies reality, precludes self-awareness, and undermines ordered liberty. The “diversity” extolled by academic radicals always has been a false front, covering a drive for ideological uniformity. It is long past time to cut universities loose from forms of public support that enable maintenance of a radical hothouse in which even moderate republicans are considered bigoted extremists and Maoists are considered slightly eccentric carriers of the light of progress. A program of reform could easily be outlined. It would include requirements that universities actually use

their endowments, rather than socking them into billion-dollar funds protecting them from all forms of reality, that governments award research grants to persons rather than institutions, and disallow university's calculated theft of the bulk of the money disbursed, and that subsidized loans not be used to pay tuition prices inflated by the enforcement mechanisms of political correctness. It is time for these simple solutions to gain the hearing, and support, they deserve.

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