

'Hey, Hey, Ho, Ho, Western Civ Has Got to Go'

On January 15, 1987, Jesse Jackson and around 500 protesters marched down Palm Drive, Stanford University's grand main entrance, chanting "Hey hey, ho ho, Western Civ has got to go."

They were protesting Stanford University's introductory humanities program known as "Western Culture." For Jackson and the protesters, the problem was its lack of "diversity." The faculty and administration raced to appease the protesters, and "Western Culture" was formally replaced with "Cultures, Ideas, and Values."

The new program included works on race, class, and gender and works by ethnic minority and women authors. Western culture gave way to multi-culture. The study of Western civilization succumbed to the Left's new dogma, multiculturalism.

When I attended college in the 1960s, taking and passing the year-long course in the history of Western civilization was required for graduation. The point of the requirement was perfectly clear. Students were expected to be proficient with the major works of their civilization if they were to be awarded a degree. It was the mark of an educated person to know these things.

Because it was a required course, it was taught by a senior professor in a large lecture hall with hundreds of students. The course was no walk in the park. When I took the course, only one student got an A grade for the first semester. Students went down in wave after wave. Many dropped out of the course, planning to try again later. Others dropped out of school or transferred to another college or university.

Student protests were all the rage on campus in those days,

too. But nobody protested the Western Civ course, its contents, the difficulty involved, or the fact that it was required. Students evidently accepted the idea that studying the story of how we got here and who shaped that story was essential to becoming an educated person.

It is also not at all clear that the faculty in those days would have raced to appease student protesters chanting "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western Civ has got to go."

Many of the faculty, after all, had served in World War II. My best friends on the faculty had all served either in the European or the Pacific theater. They had put their lives on the line to defend Western civilization, and served with others who had lost their lives in that fight. Whether they were teaching Plato or Italian art of the Renaissance and the Baroque eras, they taught with the passion of men who had fought as soldiers and were working as teachers to preserve Western culture. Perhaps my fellow students would not have dared to present our teachers with that particular protest.

The protesting students at Stanford in 1987 were pushing against an open door. Radicalized professors, products of the student protests of the 1960s, welcomed the opportunity to do what they already wanted done. The protesters provided the excuse. Instead of doing the hard work of teaching Western civilization, they were free to preach multiculturalism – and the change was presented to the world as meeting the legitimate demands of students.

It is worth noting, I think, that the chant has an interesting ambiguity. Was it the course in Western civilization or Western civilization itself that had to go? Clearly, Jackson was leading the protesters in demanding a change in the curriculum at Stanford, but the Left, having gotten rid of "Western Civ" at Stanford and at most other colleges, is reaching for new extremes. Today, ridding the world of Western civilization as a phenomenon doesn't seem like such a stretch.

In the wee hours of the morning recently, in a nearly deserted international airport terminal, I got into conversation with a fellow passenger while we waited for our luggage. He told me he was returning from a stay at an eco-resort. He said because of cloudy weather there had been no hot water on most days – and little hot water when there was any – and the electric light ran out every night soon after nightfall.

The worst part for him, he said, was the requirement to put used toilet paper in a special container provided for that purpose. When I remarked that what he had experienced at the resort was what the Greens have planned for all of us, he cheerfully agreed. He went on to say that he believed the real purpose of the Greens' plan is population control, that a truly green future would only be able to support a much smaller population.

The amazing part is this: he conveyed a complete agreement with the environmentalist project and what he believed to be its underlying purpose. It seemed that what he had experienced at the resort had not caused him to re-think his attitude, or even to consider that there was a risk he might not survive the transition to a much smaller population.

As he spoke, I easily imagined him as a younger person chanting “Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western Civ has got to go.”

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