

CURTIS L. HANCOCK

WHY AMERICAN EDUCATION TODAY OUGHT TO BE COUNTER-CULTURAL

In a recent conversation with a friend, I lamented that American society, if not Western Civilization as a whole, was suffering a precipitous cultural decline. He rebuked me for my pessimism, reminding me that despite past episodes of decay, America had always reversed her decline. He volunteered an example to make his point. “Don’t forget the Hippies,” he said, recalling the fringe, anarchical, drug-obsessed movement that fascinated American popular culture in the nineteen sixties. “Don’t you remember,” he added, “that the Hippies seemed to be a permanent fixture on the American landscape. And yet, where are they now? By the mid-seventies, they had disappeared from the cultural scene.” I smiled at his historical interpretation. I explained that his conclusion was erroneous: “Do you really think that the Hippies retired from their social activism and withdrew from the culture? That is not what happened,” I insisted. “This is the real story about the Hippies: after a decade of annoying social visibility, they cut their hair, put on a coat and tie, gave America a big middle finger, and insinuated themselves into America’s cultural, economic, and political institutions. The Hippies used to condemn the ‘establishment,’ and vow to ‘stick it to the Man.’ But by the beginning of the nineteen eighties, the Hippies had become the Establishment. They were the Man!”

The Hippies and their radical confreres quickly occupied positions of leadership in universities. Their impact was transformative since the universities train future leaders. Accordingly, the gradual domination of Leftists in the universities eventually affected all American institutions, so evident today in the left-leaning attitudes of the media, the legal profession, the bureaucracies, the government, and even the clergy. Because of this transformation, if one is to assess the state of American society, one must address what has happened

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in the universities. Since the universities have normalized cultural Marxist principles and attitudes, a critic of higher education must expose these Marxist tendencies in the schools. Since this Marxist sensibility now dominates university culture, one should demand that reform of higher education today be “counter cultural.”

A few examples of the machinations of such radicals are illuminating. Sometimes a single case can speak volumes. Consider the example of William Ayers. He is a distinguished professor of early childhood education and is a senior university scholar at University of Illinois, Chicago campus. He has also occupied positions of leadership in educational associations. There is nothing unusual about having academic credentials. But it is revealing that Ayers’ earlier resumé as an unrepentant terrorist seems to have made him attractive to university authorities. In the 1960s, Ayers was a member of Students for a Democratic Society, a group that encouraged a Marxist overthrow of American society. Ayers was not content to “talk the talk;” he decided to “walk the walk” and encouraged participation in the Weatherman Underground (named after a lyric from a Bob Dylan song), a Marxist terrorist group, envisioned by certain members of the Students for a Democratic Society. Ayers was once asked to sum up the Weathermen’s ideology. He replied: “Kill all the rich people. Break up their cars and apartments. Bring the revolution home, kill your parents.”¹

This prescription for violence was acted on by several members of the Weathermen. For example, Susan Rosenberg and Linda Sue Evans in 1984 ignited a bomb in the chamber of the U.S. Senate. The former was pardoned by Bill Clinton.² The Weathermen assaulted policemen and bombed other buildings, including the Pentagon. In 1970, three of their members blew themselves up in a Manhattan townhouse where they were making a bomb they planned to detonate at a soiree for military recruits and their dates at Fort Dix New Jersey. Because of his own activities, Ayers himself was indicted but his case was eventually dismissed because of a technicality involving the FBI use of surveillance.

Ayers has written several books. One titled *To Become a Teacher*, and other books on the challenges of teaching in the inner city. He has written several books arguing for “restorative justice,” on grounds that certain populations—like illegal immigrants, groups that suffered past discrimination (like blacks and

¹ See Jay NORDLINGER, “The Perfect European, K-Mart’s Good Deed, a Personal Story,” in *National Review Online*, September 17, 2001. Quoted in David HOROWITZ, *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2006), p. 29.

² Rosenberg is presently official chief fund-raiser for Black Lives Matter.

Native Americans), and felons—are victims of an oppressive society. Accordingly, they cannot really commit crimes and should be absolved of alleged wrongdoing. This view, still common today among cultural Marxists, resembles Lenin's claim that the Proletariat cannot really commit crimes, since they are victims of unjust institutional systems and do not have autonomy or moral agency.

A book expressing pride in his terrorist exploits is *Fugitive Days*. In this rambling text, Ayers makes it clear that he has hated America since his youth. "What a country," Ayers once said. "It makes me want to puke." Shortly after Ayers stopped his violent activism, some reporters in the nineteen eighties discovered Ayers teaching in a kindergarten. He agreed to an interview in which he confessed to his crimes: "Guilty as hell, free as a bird! America's a great country." Ayers is also on record saying: "I don't regret setting bombs. I feel we didn't do enough." When asked whether he might contemplate violence again, he replied, "I can't imagine entirely dismissing the possibility."³

Two other curious facts about Ayers are mentionable: (1) He is married to Bernadine Rae Dohrn, who for years was number one on the FBI's most wanted criminal list. She too was a Weatherman operative, responsible for aiding and abetting crimes. She is now professor of law at Northwestern University. (2) It was in the apartment of William Ayers that Barack Obama announced his political career, deciding to run for State Senator of Illinois.

Ayers, Dohrn, and other radicals notwithstanding, the additional disturbing issue is what their station in the American professoriate says about the "values" of that university system. In other words, one may ask which is worse: the occasional employment of radicals like Ayers and Dohrn or the countless other professors and administrators who populate a university system welcoming and endorsing the likes of Ayers and Dohrn?

Thus far, I've spoken somewhat anecdotally, but the above reports are fortified by hard statistics showing how the university has changed in America. John Ellis' fascinating book, *The Breakdown of Higher Education* details how the professoriate became politicized with Marxist beliefs over the last few generations.⁴ But even inside-university sources have revealed the trends. For example, a 2020 *Harvard Crimson* survey found that 41.3 percent of the faculty members identified as liberals. Another 38.4 percent identified as very liberal. Moderates amounted to 18.9 percent. Only 1.46 percent declared that

³ Peter COLLIER, and David HOROWITZ, *Destructive Generation* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 68.

⁴ John ELLIS, *The Breakdown of Higher Education: How It Happened, The Damage It Does, and What Can Be Done* (New York: Encounter Books, 2020).

they were conservative.⁵ Similar findings appear in a survey sponsored by *Yale Daily News* in 2017. Among the large number of faculty who responded, 75 percent identified as liberal or very liberal; 7 percent said they were conservative; only 2 percent identified as very conservative. In the humanities, the numbers were even more striking: 90 percent called themselves liberal; 90 percent also volunteered that they opposed Trump. Interviewed by *The Wall Street Journal*, a liberal Yale professor declared what he thought were the motivations behind the left-wing domination at the universities: “Universities are moving away from the search for truth,” and toward “social justice.”⁶

The cumulative numbers remain striking. One indicator of the mind-set of professors is the kinds of political candidates they prefer. A Campus Reform survey found that among college professors, donations to Democrats were greater than those to Republicans by a 95:1 ratio.⁷ A study in *Econ Journal Watch* discovered that of the 7,243 professors registered to vote at forty leading universities, Democrats far outnumbered Republicans: 3,623 to 314, to be exact.⁸

Ben Shapiro has sized up the situation in an arresting way:

The Carnegie Foundation surveyed professors about their political affiliations. In 1969, and found 27 percent were conservative; by 1999, just 12 percent were. Samuel Abrams of the Higher Education Research Institute suggested that since 1984, the ratio of liberals to conservatives on college faculty has increased 350 percent. By one study, just 2 percent of political science professors were estimated to be conservative; just 4 percent of literature professors. These are political identification numbers that would make Fidel Castro blush in envy.⁹

These differences are no accident. The faculty and the university culture in general have decided that enlightened attitudes ought to exclude conservatives and faculty who embrace traditional American values. “According to sociologist George Yancy, 30 percent of sociologists openly admitted they would discriminate against Republican job applicants, as well as 24 percent of

⁵ See Ben SHAPIRO, *The Authoritarian Moment. How the left weaponized America’s institutions against dissent* (New York: Broadside Books, 2021), 91.

⁶ Ibidem, 92.

⁷ John STREET, “Study: Profs donate to Dems over Republicans by 95:1 ratio,” CampusReform.org. January 22, 2020, Accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.campusreform.org/?ID=14255>.

⁸ Bradford RICHARDSON, “Liberal professors outnumber conservatives nearly 12 to 1, study finds,” WashingtonTimes.com, October 6, 2016, Accessed November 20, 2021, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/oct/6/liberal-professors-outnumber-conservatives-12-1/>.

⁹ Ben SHAPIRO, *The Authoritarian Moment*, 92.

philosophy professors; 60 percent of anthropologists and 50 percent of literature professors said they would discriminate against evangelical Christians.”¹⁰

A PRESUMPTIVE MARXISM

Why did American universities come to resemble indoctrination centers in Leftist politics rather than disinterested occasions to pursue the truth? In recent times, intellectuals, under the influence of Marxism, have changed the meaning of truth. Truth is no longer an objective representation of reality. Instead, it is a political construction, a conception of truth as Marxist *praxis*, action for results that replace traditional society. In other words, the university has become willfully ideological. This has had implications for the teaching profession. If truth is understood to be a political construction, then there is a short step for an academic to define himself as a political activist. In today's university, the pursuit of truth as contemplation has been replaced by social justice, a clever expression since, at face value, nobody would oppose an exhortation to justice. Such an expression has currency because it panders to society's traditional expectation that citizens cultivate the virtue of justice. But it is crucial to distinguish justice as classically understood from so called social justice. The inclusion of the adjective social is a Marxist trope, a device, deflecting justice from a personal virtue demanding respect for others as individuals to a system of institutional relations. Social justice is a device to persuade people into thinking that they are exercising justice as traditionally understood when in fact they are participating in a deconstruction of the traditional Western conception of personal virtue. Without realizing it, they imbibe a Marxist conception of fairness which aims to dismantle and replace traditional Western institutions and behaviors.

Ideas have consequences. Cultural change does not happen overnight. To appreciate the emergence of the radicalism endemic in the modern university, one must recognize its historical genesis. The university's long march to Marxist radicalism has its distant inspiration in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's ideas swept up in the enthusiasms of German philosophy charmed Karl Marx. Four ideas especially were decisive: (1) Education is an excuse to enculturate children in a bourgeoisie system which perpetuates inequality across the generations; (2) human nature is a myth; (3) no objective morality exists since there is no natural law to ground it; (4) God is irrelevant since

¹⁰ Ibidem, 93-94.

human beings can get along without him; history determines itself, needing no Providence. These four ideas became revolutionary principles among Rousseau's successors.

Curiously, Rousseau's followers deconstruct Christian millenarianism and transmute it into a secular teleological utopian vision for history. The Kingdom of God is no longer God's business; it is man's business, transmuted ironically into a Godless project that can be realized on earth. The echo of Rousseau resounds in Marxism.

Once this Godless secular agenda is set in motion, the next step is to deconstruct the Christian foundations of Western Civilization. The human person now is defined by the state. Institutional structures dictate the status of the individual as a citizen. Whereas Christian societies have argued that the individual person has dignity and liberty on account of being a special creature of God, the Marxist view is that the human person is only an animal. Animals do not have unalienable rights. Once reduced to mere animals, human beings only have "rights" as privileges authorized by the state. The state can give "rights" and can just as easily take them away.

The denial of nature and natural law means that human life is malleable. Society gets to indefinitely re-define what it is to be human. Human life becomes a political project. Accordingly, what is right and what is wrong (to the extent those words have any currency) become political constructions, social projects. The acid of skepticism prevents modern intellectuals from correcting this nihilism. Rather than contesting it, they have come to accept it as the status quo position for educators.

Beyond distant historical sources like Rousseau and Marx, one might inquire about more proximate forces that drive Marxism in American schools. The most obvious influence is Critical Theory, the variety of communism that emanates out of the Frankfurt School. Americans outside the university are familiar with the Frankfurt School indirectly on account of attention to Critical Race Theory, promulgated by Ibram X. Kendi.¹¹ Critical Race Theory contends that American society is irredeemably flawed on account of systemic racism. Critical Race Theory asserts that the legacy of white patriarchy in Western societies has prejudiced social order to advantage white people.

This racial application of Critical Theory is a recapitulation of the work of Noel Ignatin (originally Ignatiev), a proponent of the Frankfurt School who believed that cultural Marxism was best served through the engine of racial conflict. This has been an excuse to reject and undermine traditional

¹¹ Ibram X. KENDI, *How to Be an Anti-Racist* (New York: One World, 2019).

Christian Western values about inclusion and tolerance. Instead of celebrating the fact that past societies have struggled to overcome racial bigotry, the Frankfurt School embraces such bigotry, rationalizing it by racial stereotypes and by changing the color of its targets. Ignatin announced this version of Critical Theory by pioneering a publication in “whiteness studies,” a magazine titled *Race Traitor: Journal of the New Abolitionism*, edited by Harvard faculty. The magazine played to Ignatin’s conviction that “Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity.” While few professors in today’s classroom will have heard of Ignatin, his influence is palpable in the way Critical Race Theory has invaded the schools (much to the bemusement, if not alarm, of parents).¹²

Critical Theory attacks the foundations of Western Civilization: Christianity, free-market economics, respect for authority, the family, morality, tradition, the virtue of sexual restraint, loyalty, patriotism, and the idea of national sovereignty. The aim is to eliminate these essentials of civilization. By destroying and replacing them a communist utopia can be realized. In a *Catholic Insight* magazine article, author Timothy Matthews listed the Frankfurt School’s key goals for Western society that grew out of Critical Theory. It is an instructive, concise summary:

1. The creation of racism offenses
2. Continual change to create confusion
3. The teaching of sex and homosexuality to children
4. The undermining of schools’ and teachers’ authority
5. Huge immigration to destroy identity
6. The promotion of excessive drinking
7. Emptying of churches
8. An unreliable legal system with bias against victims of crime
9. Dependency on the state or state benefits
10. Control and dumbing down of media
11. Encouraging the breakdown of the family

These themes are standard fare in the university classroom today. Critical Theory has come to be known as Cultural Marxism or Political Correctness.

¹² “Noel Ignatiev,” Wikipedia, Accessed November 19, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noel_Ignatiev. Note how Ignatiev has perverted the meaning and the goal of abolitionism. The abolitionist movement was able to end slavery because it rejected identity politics. Slavery could be overcome by the power of human transcendence: the cognitive ability of the human person to imagine the plight of a fellow human being. Identity politics, which is today’s version of cultural Marxism, is pernicious because it denies our power of transcendence, another indication of Marxist debasing of the human person.

Writing in *American Thinker*, Linda Kimball summarized Frankfurt School objectives:

The primary goal of the Frankfurt School was to translate Marxism from economic terms into cultural terms. It would prove the ideas on which to base a new political theory of revolution based on culture, harnessing new oppressed groups for the faithless proletariat. Smashing religion, morals, it would also build a constituency among academics, who could build careers, studying and writing about the new oppression.¹³

Throughout these iterations of Marxism has been the persistent idea that to have well-adjusted, enlightened peoples, politically correct institutions must replace traditional ones. Rousseau taught that the wrong institutions dominated society. He prescribed tearing down these structures and replacing them with institutions that will liberate people, people who are oppressed and harmed without even realizing it. One can see that such a worldview radicalizes social life. Since ideas have consequences, and the university is where ideas are purportedly discussed and authorized, university culture impacts the shape of society. As I stated earlier, such a view deflects the task of education away from the exercise of contemplation and the pursuit of truth toward prescribing how students can change society. Moreover, after students matriculate through the university and begin to participate in professional life, they envision that their professions, like the university, exist purely to change society.

This background helps one see what passes today for education. Marxist presuppositions abound. With thinkers like Rousseau and Marx as their forebears, today's professors dress up their principles and beliefs in sophisticated academic language. But one must always remember that for Marxists because truth is *praxis* (activism), not *theoria* (contemplation of reality), they are willing to advocate Machiavellian tactics, especially end justifies the means reasoning. Results are what count; results are the measure of political truth and value. Since truth is realized in politics, truth is validated in political outcomes, which, in the end, happen to be what the Marxists like. Hence, Marxism has a legacy of brutality that shocks the historical record.

The academicians through revisionist history try to mute this evidence. One must overtly resist Marxism, which is a culture of lies. The university needs reform and a critical mass of new professors who have the wisdom and courage to resist. Because of the influence of the universities, if this resistance is not sustained, our civilization will remain in peril.

¹³ Kimball, "Cultural Marxism," *American Thinker*, February 15, 2007, Accessed November 22, 2021, http://www.americanthinker.com/2007/02/cultural_marxism.html.

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Summary

In his article, the author points out the gradual domination of leftists in universities, which eventually affected all American institutions. This is very evident today in the leftist attitudes of the media, the legal profession, the bureaucracy, the government, and even the clergy. The author argues that because of this transformation, if one wants to assess the state of American society, one must address what has happened in the universities. As universities have normalized Marxist cultural principles and attitudes, the critic of higher education must expose these Marxist tendencies in schools. Because this Marxist tendency now dominates university culture, it must be demanded that higher education reform today be countercultural.

Keywords: university; American education; Marxism, the Left; culture.

DLACZEGO DZISIEJSZA EDUKACJA AMERYKAŃSKA
POWINNA BYĆ KONTRKULTUROWA

Streszczenie

Autor w swoim artykule zwraca uwagę na stopniową dominację lewicowców na uniwersytetach amerykańskich, która dotknęła w końcu wszystkie amerykańskie instytucje. Jest to dziś bardzo widoczne w lewicowych postawach mediów, zawodów prawniczych, biurokracji, rządu, a nawet duchowieństwa. Autor zwraca uwagę, że z powodu tej transformacji, jeśli ktoś chce ocenić stan amerykańskiego społeczeństwa, musi zająć się tym, co stało się na uniwersytetach. W związku z tym, że uniwersytety unormowały marksistowskie zasady i postawy kulturowe, krytyk szkolnictwa wyższego musi zdemaskować te marksistowskie tendencje w szkołach. Ze względu na fakt, iż ta marksistowska wrażliwość dominuje obecnie w kulturze uniwersyteckiej, należy domagać się, by reforma szkolnictwa wyższego była dziś kontrkulturowa.

Słowa kluczowe: uniwersytet; szkolnictwo amerykańskie; marksizm, lewica; kultura.