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## The Rhetoric of Indoctrination: Cultural Marxist Propaganda in American Schools

The conservative American pundit William F. Buckley, Jr. reportedly declared that he would rather be governed by the first 500 names in the Boston phone directory than by the faculty of Harvard University. Buckley said this in 1961. He came by this judgment honestly, since it was incubated during his own college experience at Yale University in the 1950's, which he commemorates in his engaging book *God and Man at Yale*. His words rang true then, but they remain timely. Buckley witnessed the encroachments of Marxism in American education during his day. In fact, if Buckley were alive, he would attest that his worst fear had been realized. The Leftist values that were common at an Ivy League campus during Buckley's day have proliferated, bearing the fruit of an incremental cultural Marxism that has influenced American society. Leftist values have been exported out of the Ivy League and have become endemic across the wider landscape of American higher education. In fact, sadly, cultural Marxism flourishes even in primary and secondary education.

With regard to the university, research uncovers that there has been considerable change even since Buckley's day. Evidence is catalogued in Dr. John Ellis' arresting book *The Breakdown of Higher Education*<sup>1</sup>. His study discovers how Left-Wing ideology has gradually dominated the university over the past couple of generations. For example, a Carnegie study revealed that in 1969 there were three ideologically radical professors for every two conservatives on campus. By 1999, the ratio was 5 to 1. Ellis reports that today the ratio is 13 to 1. But even more dramatically, Ellis reveals, the ratio is 48 to 1 among the population of recently hired and untenured professors. Since the university is the training-ground for most of society's professions, Leftist influence is bound to have had its impact. Arguably, almost every significant profession is dominated by Leftists and their sensibilities. This is certainly true of the schools, the media, the courts, the legal profession in general,

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<sup>1</sup> John Ellis, *The Breakdown of Higher Education: How It Happened, The Damage It Does, and What Can Be Done* (New York: Encounter Books, 2020).

the government, and even the clergy. Buckley's judgment about the university portended socialist ideological influence in society at large

At any rate, the past few generations in the university have been subjected to a not-so-quiet form of cultural Marxism. This practice has been in keeping with Antonio Gramsci's call in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to undertake "a long march through the institutions." Rather than encourage overt, violent revolution (à la the Bolshevik uprising of 1917), he proposed instead a gradual take-over of political, cultural, and economic institutions. The university, by virtue of its power to train and influence future professionals, is a crucial tool for this transformation of society, a transformation that first seeks to change the civil society, the mores, traditions, and customs of a people which are historically unregulated by government. This sets the pattern, as a rule, for how so much of classroom education proceeds. First, the professor encourages that students doubt the values they get from their parents and the rest of the civil society, and secondly the professor deconstructs Western Civilization.

This strategy has been very effective as Leftist educators have prepared generations of students to matriculate into the world and influence it. Accordingly, Gramsci's vision has been exquisitely executed in America. The conservative American journalist, Andrew Breitbart, founder of Breitbart News, once observed that politics is downstream from culture. This is why Gramsci realized that cultural Marxism, even more than economic and political communism, should have primacy. If leaders can change the culture, the mores, traditions, and religious habits of the civil society, they will eventually impact politics, enabling Marxists to eventually secure the arms of government. This is why Breitbart used to rail against Republicans who naively avoided cultural issues and questions of social morality which made them uncomfortable. Breitbart recognized that Republicans were just sitting ducks for the machinations of Marxists who were undermining American civil society. While Republicans wanted to display that they were nice and polite, sitting on the sidelines, their civil society was being eroded. Now cultural Marxists in America are enthused, since they have accomplished much of their objective. After all, leaders like Gramsci saw that if Marxists could take over America, they would win the grand prize, since America is a conspicuously successful bourgeoisie society and a powerful engine of capitalism. Sadly, many Americans think that politics and culture proceed as usual and are oblivious to the fact that their society is in peril. Soon, I fear, they are about to have an uncomfortable awakening.

Were they awake now, they could see that American Marxists have cultivated a number of tactics to accelerate their momentum toward social transformation on the basis of their conviction that the locus of social reality and value resides in groups and institutions and not in the interests of individuals. In practice, this point of view involves stereotyping people. Leftists often complain about stereotypes but in actuality Leftists are masters of the practice. Their strategy is to divide people into

groups and then stereotype them. Afterward, Marxists prescribe social change by pitting these groups against each other, defining some groups as victims and other groups as oppressors. This application of the Marxist worldview has been effective and is now roiling American society. Last summer in several cities across the United State, Black Lives Matter activists, who advance a Marxist agenda, fomented strife in America arguing that the nation has been permanently disordered by systemic racism. If one doubts that Black Lives Matter is a Marxist movement, consult their website BlackLivesMatter, inc. It reads like pages out of the Communist manifesto, calling, for example, for an end to the nuclear family and to capitalism. Claiming that America has been and is still in the clutches of systemic racism, Black Lives Matter fomented social unrest that led to 2 billion dollars in property damage, 25 murders, and over a thousand injuries to police officers in the summer of 2020.<sup>2</sup> While it is certainly true that America has had, like most societies, racist episodes in its past, it has admitted them and has instituted social measures, like the American Constitution and the Civil Rights movement, to correct these wrongs. America has spent trillions upon trillions of dollars to repair the effects of racism. It even fought a Civil War (1861-1865), in which 600,000 white people died, to end slavery.

Leftists, like activists in the Black Lives Matter movement, brush this history aside and assert that there is deep unconscious racist bias in our society, and that there is no going forward unless white people admit their prejudice. One's denial that he is a racist is taken as confirmation that he or she surely is. Given white guilt and the Marxist prejudgments about racism, one has to be prepared with some courage to resist these attitudes when they prevail in classroom and curriculum. Critical race theory, a Marxist ideology that emanates out of the famous Frankfurt school, tries to reduce human life to the outcomes of institutions formed by racial inequality. This ideology has become official, not unofficial, pedagogical policy in a plurality of American schools partly because Critical Race Theory is endorsed by the teachers' unions, which have incredible power over American public education. Critical Race Theory and its effects are hard to challenge in American education since its followers brazenly condemn anyone who dissents from its ideology. Dissenters are judged to be impediments to progress. Society must marginalize them in order to advance. Since the university influences the outside society, such an attitude prescribes practices in other elements of American society, such as the media, which seeks to cancel out voices that diverge from accepted narrations, and even corporations, which virtue-signal left wing causes to insulate themselves from social criticism and benefit their profit margins. The self-anointed judges of cultural well-being and progress act as mind-readers, claiming to understand people's behavior and to discern their nefarious motives. University culture today is plagued with this kind of tyranny. Let me close my lecture by offering an

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<sup>2</sup> *Daily Mail* March 30, 2021. Also see *The Guardian* October 31, 2020.

example. I refer to an incident at Smith College, a prestigious women's college in Massachusetts. The incident took place in July of 2018.

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A black student at Smith was asked by a cafeteria worker why she was eating in a closed dormitory lounge. The worker was concerned because the dormitory was without air-conditioning that month. She recommended that the student instead eat in the air-conditioned cafeteria where she would be more comfortable. The student immediately accused the worker and the janitor of racially profiling her, even posting pictures on social media, accusing them of being racists, guilty of the crime of "eating while black." But the janitor she named wasn't even working that day! Still, the college forced the cafeteria worker and the janitor to apologize to their accuser. Not content with that gratuitous demand, the College arranged that all the service workers employed at the College had to undergo mandatory anti-bias training. But just before the training commenced, an investigation found that the workers had been wrongly accused.

But it didn't matter. The anti-bias, re-education training was still mandated.

So, in reaction, 44 black intellectuals led by Civil Rights leader Bob Woodson, who oversees a civil rights organization called 1776 Unites, wrote a letter to the College President, Kathleen McCartney, expressing their outrage. I quote part of their letter here:

"Many of us participated in the Civil Rights Movement, fighting for equal treatment under the law, which included due process and the presumption of innocence.

We didn't march so that Americans of any race could be presumed guilty and punished for false accusations, while the elite institutions that employed them cowered in fear of a racial media mob. We certainly didn't march so that privileged blacks could abuse working class whites based on lived experience."

Smith College announced recently that it's reviewing the letter. But the College President is defending her decision to impose mandatory anti-bias training. She said that claims of a racially hostile environment for white people are baseless. She wrote as follows:

***"While it might be uncomfortable to accept that each of us, regardless of color or background, may have absorbed unconscious biases or at times have acted in ways that are harmful to members of our community, such self-reflection is a prerequisite for making meaningful progress."***

Hence, the anti-bias training at Smith goes on.

Robert Woodson persists in challenging Smith College's behavior and the ideology behind it. In his letter to the President, he pointed out that "before investigating the facts, Smith College assumed that every one of the people who prepare its food and clean its facilities was guilty of the vile sin of racism and that Smith forced them to publicly cleanse themselves through a series of humiliating exercises in order to keep their jobs."

In an interview with Martha MacCallum of Fox News, Woodson was asked about his motivation behind writing his letter to the Smith College President. This is what he replied:

"As a veteran of the Civil Rights movement, I recall that Dr. King said racism isn't bad because it's visited upon blacks by whites, but it is bad because it's evil, and we must unite to confront this evil. What we're witnessing at Smith is that the school is stereotyping by taking the actions of a few whites and by assuming that this can be generalized for the whole population. And on that basis the school punished them."

Mr. Woodson, then, volunteered an instructive example, showing its relevance to the Smith College case:

"Suppose" he said, "that among a group of blacks, one was accused of stealing, and then the school searched every black and after that exhaustive search found that this wasn't true. And suppose that the authorities said that the accused suffered from something unconscious and therefore he had to go through training. And then, suppose the authorities took an additional step to compound the punishment, demanding that every black person in the group had to submit to anti-bias training. With such an example, you can see that the civil rights legacy is being perverted here. And so, we are pushing back and demanding that the President of the College apologize to these workers and that she compensate them. This kind of incident has created havoc among the whole work force. It has created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. And that shouldn't exist today in our society. It's tearing the fabric of this community apart (and the fabric of other communities where this kind of thing happens)."

The point that Mr. Woodson is making is to remind us that the goal of the civil rights movement is to demand that all people will be treated equally, irrespective of the color of their skin, and that due process is an unalienable right, something that everyone deserves. Here we have a case, however, where authorities judged and acted prematurely, even precipitously.

The interviewer, Martha MacCallum, next said this to Mr. Woodson: "So, they condemned and punished the accused even before the investigation was begun. They just assumed that this student, the accuser, was telling the truth."

“They really did,” Woodson replied, “and even after the investigation concluded that the accuser wasn’t telling the truth, the President ignored it and said that nonetheless ‘there is unconscious bias and we’re going to continue with this mandatory anti-bias training.’”

Mr. Woodson ended the interview by reporting that one of the school’s cafeteria workers, a woman named Jackie Blair, has had her life threatened as a consequence of what this young lady (the accuser) did. On social media people posted messages that Jackie Blair should die.<sup>3</sup>

As I said, similar disturbing events have been replicated across the United States. But I’ll leave you to contemplate the significance of just this one example I’ve given.

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*The Story with Martha MacCallum*, Fox News Network, March 23, 2021.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Story with Martha MacCallum*, Fox News Network, March 23, 2021.

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**Summary**

The author of this article argues that the last few generations in American universities have been subjected to a not-so-silent form of cultural Marxism. This practice was in line with Antonio Gramsci's early twentieth century call to undertake a "long march through institutions." Rather than encouraging outright, violent revolution (à la the Bolshevik uprising of 1917), he proposed a gradual takeover of political, cultural, and economic institutions. The university, because of its power to educate and influence future professionals, is a key tool for this transformation of society, a transformation that first seeks to change the civil society, customs, traditions, and habits of people who are historically unregulated by government. This generally sets the pattern by which much of the education in the classroom follows. First, the professor encourages students to doubt the values they have received from their parents and the rest of civil society, and second, the professor deconstructs Western Civilization. The author shows what role propaganda plays in these actions.

**Keywords:** university, American education, propaganda, culture, Marxism, social transformation