

How Identity Politics Is Changing Universities

By William Anderson via The Mises Institute, 28 May 2018

Ours is a politicized age from the college campus to the corporate boardroom, a situation in which things that once were personal now are utterly political.

The hard left now *controls* not only higher education, but also much of scientific research upon which the future of humanity as we know it depends. What began in 1969 as the establishment of a *single course* in Women's Studies at Cornell University and similar courses elsewhere in what then were called Black Studies has metastasized into a monster that almost completely dominates higher education in the United States and Canada. **Today, it is rare to find a college or university that does *not* have majors and programs in Identity Studies.**

This **long march of feminists and racialists from near-obscurity to absolute-dominance** is compared to the rise of Snopes family created by author William Faulkner in his 1940 novel, *The Hamlet*. In Faulkner's book, the Snopeses move into the Mississippi community of Frenchman's Bend and slowly take over nearly all aspects of life. Even though the locals seem to understand what is taking place, they are seemingly helpless because they heard the rumor that people that made a Snopes unhappy would have their barns burned to the ground.

In campus politics, the activists did not threaten to burn only the barns but rather the entire college campus. **Anyone in higher education that might allegedly say or write something that offends someone in a politically-protected group is likely to be the focus of the infamous Twitter Mob, and even a distinguished career and something as prestigious as a Nobel Prize offers no cover, as [Tim Hunt found out](#).**

For that matter, **truth itself is no defense**, as we found out in the infamous Duke Lacrosse Case.

All that matters is identity politics, and the Duke case demonstrates just how powerful – and destructive – such politics have become.

In March 2006 at Duke University, a black stripper falsely claimed that three members of the Duke men's lacrosse team beat and raped her at a team party where she performed, and the Duke campus exploded in anger as the story spread throughout the country, dominating newscasts and the Internet. ***Shortly after the accusations surfaced, 88 Duke faculty members signed an advertisement in the Duke Chronicle, a student newspaper, condemning the lacrosse players and thanking demonstrators for not waiting to see if the charges were credible.***

Some signatories, such as historian William Chafe (who publicly likened the alleged incident to the infamous 1955 murder of Emmett Till), were well-noted academically. However, ***most signees came from the humanities programs such as Women's Studies and African-American Studies and had sparse publication resumes and certainly nothing to compare with the publications records of Duke faculty members in the sciences and fields such as economics.*** For example, Wahneema Lubiano, who still teaches literature and African-American Studies at Duke, has almost no publications, but has listed two forthcoming books for more than a decade. A faculty member with that kind of record in the sciences or the business disciplines long before would have been dismissed for lack of academic productivity, but Lubiano received tenure and promotion at one of the nation's most elite universities.

This is beyond ironic.

First, the rape charges clearly were false, but Duke University officials, journalists, and many others – including the local District Attorney, Michael Nifong, who brought the rape charges – refused even to consider the players’ innocence.

Second, even though most of the signatories of the Chronicle advertisement were far less academically proficient than the rest of the Duke faculty, they dominated the campus discourse and cowed other more-accomplished faculty members into silence.

Far from finding themselves academically discredited, [many of the signers went on to promotions](#), being hired at Ivy League universities such as Cornell, Vanderbilt, and to strategic administrative positions at Duke.

Instead of weakening the thoroughly-politicized areas of academic study such as Women’s Studies and African-American Studies, creating a witch-hunt atmosphere seems to have strengthened the status and position of those faculty members. Since then, faculty in the Identity Studies disciplines seem to have even more power not only at Duke, but on campuses across the country.

Instead of being subordinate to disciplines such as the sciences, the Identity Studies dominate campus discourse and their advocates now force scientists and mathematicians to bow down to racialism and feminism. Professors that do not stoop quickly or those that resist often are pushed out of their jobs or are marginalized. The feminist uprising that threw Lawrence Summers out of Harvard’s presidency, along with the outcry responsible for [the ouster of Nobel Prize-winning scientist Tim Hunt](#) from his university position in Great Britain for remarks that he made as a luncheon speaker, speaks to the influence and power feminism has at the modern university.

In fact, ideologies of identity now are being embedded into actual scientific study itself, [a phenomenon embodied by a recent academic paper](#) in the science journal *Progress in Human Geography*, entitled “[Glaciers, gender, and science: A feminist glaciology framework for environmental change research](#).” The last sentence of the paper’s abstract declares:

Merging feminist postcolonial science studies and feminist political ecology, the feminist glaciology framework generates robust analysis of gender, power, and epistemologies in dynamic social-ecological systems, thereby leading to more just and equitable science and human-ice interactions.

The sentence is laughable on its face, but the politicization of academic study is real. Faulkner’s Snopes family consisted of dull, mediocre but dogged people who strategically-placed themselves in locations in which they gained control over others. The academic Snopeses have done the same, putting themselves not only in important governing and administrative positions on campus, but also in government regulatory jobs such as the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education. While many people in traditional academic pursuits sought to publish and expand knowledge in their fields, those in the Identity Studies sought to expand their own political power by threatening anyone who opposed them, accusing dissenters with accusations of racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Even traditional feminists cannot escape the campus witch-hunts that ramped-up enforcement of Title IX of the 1972 Higher Education Act has created. Highly-accomplished Northwestern University film professor Laura Kipnis in 2015 found herself being investigated by her employer for alleged Title IX violations because of an essay she published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled “[Sexual Paranoia Strikes Academe](#).” Kipnis, it would seem, had the necessary credentials of a feminist, but that did not matter to the new campus Snopeses. (*Northwestern did rule in her favor, but only after Kipnis fought back.*

She then published another essay, this one on her “inquisition,” and recently publishing a book, [Unwanted Advances: Sexual Paranoia Comes to Campus](#), about her experiences.)

The present situation is close to being a crisis, if not already one. Faculty members on many campuses [are being forced to sign “diversity statements,” which are little more than disguised loyalty oaths](#), which should be anathema in higher education. Universities are demanding conformity that is reminiscent of the [Lysenkoism](#) that infected universities and the scientific community of the U.S.S.R. for decades, and with disastrous results.

In the end, residents of Frenchman’s Bend were resigned to living under the thumb of the Snopes family.

Higher education is heading toward the same fate, but the results will be much more tragic than they were for a tiny hamlet in the imaginary Yoknapatawpha County.