



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on June 22, 2016

Purification of America

In 2008, Barack Obama promised a fundamental transformation of America. Where that promise has gone unfulfilled the most is in areas of sexual and racial discrimination. What's worse is the official sanction given to such discrimination. Let's look at some of it.

Visit just about any California men's prison and you will see that one's race determines whom he cells with, the toilet and shower he uses, and what recreation areas he enjoys. Then there is sexual discrimination. Female correctional officers earn the same pay as their male counterparts. However, when it comes to extracting a dangerous inmate from his cell, it is always a five- or six-male officer team that risks bodily injury. How fair is that? Why not have both male and female cell extraction teams?



Harvard University has announced new rules that will punish students who join single-sex clubs, including fraternities and sororities. Part of that punishment will make them ineligible for college endorsement for top fellowships, such as the Rhodes and Marshall scholarships. As an aside, Rhodes scholarships should be banned; Cecil Rhodes was one of the architects of South African apartheid.

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Harvard University, like most other universities, is two-faced when it comes to sexual discrimination. It segregates sports teams by sex. It has women's basketball and men's basketball, women's ice hockey and men's, a women's swim team and a men's swim team. If Harvard's leaders were consistent, they would also punish students joining a single-sex sports team. Each sport should have one team on which all students, regardless of sex, are eligible to compete. Also, sports racism in college has ended — except in men's basketball, where no college team's starting five looks anything like America.

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Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter has called for the elimination of the ban against women in combat, but he is keeping other forms of discrimination. Passing the Army's physical fitness test in basic training is a requirement. To pass, 17- to 21-year-old males must do 35 pushups, 47 situps and a 2-mile run in 16 minutes, 36 seconds or less. Females of the same age can pass the test with just 13 pushups, 47 situps and a 19:42 2-mile run. That's grossly unfair. As a black man, I can relate to the unfairness of different requirements. Literacy tests in some Southern states used to ask black voters, "How many bubbles are in a bar of soap?" and "How many seeds are in a watermelon?" White voters were exempt from that test — presumably because they knew the answers. I'm wondering why men do not bring sexual discrimination lawsuits when they face different treatment based upon sex.



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There is one highly celebrated area of our lives that's misogynistic, vicious and cruel to women yet goes completely ignored. It is nothing less than sadistic voyeurism. You might ask, "Williams, what is that?" It is the opera and its near celebration of cruelty to women. Giuseppe Verdi's "Rigoletto" regales us with tales of the Duke of Mantua, a licentious womanizer. From "Aida" and "Carmen" to "Lulu" and "Madama Butterfly," opera is extravagantly cruel to its female characters. This suggests an important job for university music departments. They must either change operatic script in a way that respects women or simply ban the performance of such works. There is precedent for banning and revision in the arts and literature. Some schools have removed the offensive words from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and some have banned the book outright.

While in office, former Memphis Mayor A C Wharton was an energetic purifier. He wanted to purify his city by removing the bodies of Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest and his wife from a city park. At a news briefing, he asked, "Which African-American wants to have a picnic in the shadow of Nathan Bedford Forrest?"

There is a historical precedent for the purification of America. Back in the Roman days, when the Romans wanted to erase the memory of people they deemed dishonorable, they had a practice called *damnatio memoriae*, Latin for "condemnation of memory." It was as if they had never existed.

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