



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on April 8, 2016

## The West Will Rise Again? PC Thought Police Resist Western Studies at Stanford

“Go Western, young man” is the message. Some Stanford University students want required Western Civilization curriculum reinstated at their school, 28 years after it was nixed following the agitation of protesters chanting “Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western Civ has got to go!” But with the latter’s politically correct spirit alive and well, will meaningful Western studies remain dead?



The Daily Beast [reports](#) on the story:

Fifteen texts — a “core list” that included Plato, Voltaire, St. Augustine, and [Marx](#) and Engels — were replaced by a more diverse canon [after the ‘88 activism].

It was the beginning of a wave of protests against Western culture on college campuses in the 1990s that, today, has seen a resurgence in the form of trigger warnings on syllabi, safe spaces, and policed speech.

At Stanford, a backlash against this censorious student culture is taking shape in the form of a [petition](#) to reinstate the university’s Western Civilization curriculum.

In the next two days, students will vote on a referendum proposed by the *Stanford Review*, an undergraduate political magazine, urging the Stanford’s Faculty Senate to require a two-quarter course for freshman “covering the politics, history, philosophy, and culture of the Western world.”

Sophomore Harry Elliott, editor in chief of the *Stanford Review*, says that his magazine’s proposal to study more humanities is gaining support on campus. And well it should. Just consider the importance of historical knowledge. History can be viewed as a record of man’s social experiments. And it’s as with scientists: The record must be accurate so they can say, “We tried that before, and it didn’t work” or “That was successful; let’s now see if we can build on it and advance.” Only in this way can the repetition of old mistakes be avoided. And only in this way can man’s triumphs be perpetuated.

A good real-life example is the resurgence of [support for communism](#) and polls showing that the “Millennial” generation has a [positive view](#) of “socialism.” Is this a surprise? That socialism was an abject failure hasn’t been taught; instead the young hear, “It’s successful in Sweden” (Sweden doesn’t have true “socialism,” and what they do have isn’t truly successful). A delectable delight cannot be replicated if its recipe is forgotten. And when a toxic brew is recorded as a body-building benefit, impurities are imbibed and civilization dies.

This brings us to a deeper problem. Elevating Western studies is a positive step, but what of the West will be studied? Consider that the Beast also tells us, “Under the new curriculum, Stanford students would ‘immerse themselves in the writings of Homer, Plato, Locke, Douglass, and [Simone] de Beauvoir,’ the petition reads.... ‘We would lament the horrors of slavery and oppression — and applaud those who fought for freedom.’”



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So again we see inordinate focus on slavery, as if this once ubiquitous institution was unique to the West and should define its history. But the fact students should be taught here is this: The West was likely not the first civilization to practice slavery.

But it was the first to eliminate it.

As for the list “Homer, Plato, Locke, Douglass, and de Beauvoir,” it would actually be a good what’s-wrong-with-this-picture exercise. De Beauvoir, aside from being a sexual abuser of underage girls and an alleged Nazi collaborator, was the Marxist-leaning feminist who once said, “No woman should be authorized to stay at home and raise her children.... Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one.” Studying de Beauvoir (or her longtime lover, Jean-Paul Sartre) is only relevant insofar as we want to understand the causes of the West’s decline.

Of course, the petition’s citing of slavery and de Beauvoir is to an extent marketing — an effort to blunt criticism that a Western-civ course would mainly teach the works of “old white men” and doesn’t serve to “break both the legacy of white leadership and cisgender male leadership,” as the Beast reported. Yet both the attacks on Western studies, and the toxin-infused version of it, reflect the same problem: relativism-infected modern thought.

The teaching of history in general is much like the teaching of the history of science. Scientists who discovered great truths should be remembered, while those who advanced error should only be featured as cautionary tales. Likewise, general history must recognize those who expressed and actuated Truth while using the purveyors of lies only as bad examples. Of course, this is where the kneejerk critics will exclaim “Whose truth?” or “Everything is a matter of perspective.” And this is the problem.

To analogize the matter, imagine you wanted to devise a healthful diet plan or instruct students on how to do so. You’d teach the principles of human nutrition — the Truth as it relates to it. But what if you subscribed to “nutritional relativism” and came to believe there essentially were no rules governing diet? How then could you decide what to put in your mouth?

The only yardstick you’d have left is taste. Then you might gravitate toward junk food or, worse still, might sample those pretty red berries on the bush outside. After all, who’s to say what’s “bad”? One man’s poison is another’s pleasure, and if it tastes good, eat it.

Similarly, without the yardstick of Truth, choosing what figures or events to showcase in historical records becomes a matter of taste, or feelings, or preference. The Truth-oriented person doesn’t care about race or sex, only whether a given individual did something *objectively noteworthy*. But relativists have nothing but prejudice and preference, which currently include a preference for quota-driven selection. And that’s when curricula and history books start to reflect modern, diversity-driven political appointments: All civilizations must be given “equal time” (although the West can be diminished since there’s a prejudice against it), and historical figures must include a certain number of women, blacks, Hispanics, and other “minorities,” all chosen based on group identity, not quality. The result is that man’s triumphs are forgotten and the classics lost as youth get lost in a sea of revisionism.

So there are those at Stanford who would apply a quota system when deciding whether Western studies should be required. And they’re opposed by those who would apply a quota system when deciding what should be required teaching in Western studies. It is almost as if it’s heads political correctness wins, tails Western tradition loses.



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Still, though, teaching Western Civilization is a step in the right direction. Perhaps then students will know there's a Homer other than Homer Simpson, a St. Augustine that's not a city, and won't think Plato is the ninth planet from the sun.

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