



A New Breed Of 'Historian'

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In the next few weeks, thousands of young Australians, having just finished 12 years of schooling, will be preparing themselves for what should be their first, exciting foray into higher education. Their minds should be expanded, their eyes opened to new ideas and concepts. Many of them will have applied to study history.

It appears however, that if they don't choose their courses wisely, many fresh-faced undergraduates will be in danger of knowing less about history after they graduate than they did before they began. History is no longer being properly taught in our universities.

Two years ago, the Institute of Public Affairs conducted a systematic and thorough review of the 739 history subjects offered across 39 tertiary institutions in Australia, and published its findings in *The End of History... in Australian Universities*. The title says it all.

The survey illuminated some of the more profound problems with a great many undergraduate history degrees in this country. If Western Civilisation was mentioned at all, it was portrayed in an

unremittingly negative light. Furthermore, the old 'historical' canon was well on the way to becoming obsolete, itself confined to history and replaced with a new canon of subjects, thematically and enthusiastically arranged around the usual suspects of post-colonialism, class, race, gender, sustainability and climate change.

This thematic approach meant that the subjects on offer had become fragmented and parochial. Undergraduates were being taught a sort of 'flashcard' version of history which left them completely bereft of the broader historical developments or wider historical contexts.

The survey also revealed that early modern and medieval histories were being deemed as either no longer relevant or simply not popular enough to offer to students. Instead, the shift had moved firmly and squarely to 20th century and Australia histories; both worthy subjects in themselves, but which studied in isolation result in a narrow and shortsighted view of the world. Modern Australia has a rich and exciting heritage which extends far beyond 1788 and evolved from Britain, North America and Continental Europe, and it is the duty of our universities to ensure that future generations are aware of this remarkable heritage.

It is safe to say that since *The End of History...* was published, history has continued to draw to an end in Australian universities. A review of the various 2017 Handbooks currently available online leaves the distinct impression that there is some sort of one-upmanship (or in the case of our hypersensitive institutions one-uppersonship) between subject coordinators to see who can slip the most politically correct, least historical subjects into the curriculum. The next generation of budding historians is being offered an unappealing smorgasbord of subjects with nonsensical titles and vacuous content such as 'Memory and Politics of Difference: Sex, Race and Belonging', 'Activism, Selves and Histories' and 'Performing Masculinities: Australian Histories of Context and Change.'

Unfortunately, some of Australia's finest institutions of higher education are among the chief offenders. In 2017, for example, second year students in ANU's School of History will be able to choose 'Human Variations and Racism in Western Culture, c.1450-1950.' According to the course description, students will 'practise tracking the development of a particular social process (in this case, the process of racialisation) over time, thus learning that racial identities, and their attendant qualities, are neither entirely natural nor inevitable.' Forget the momentous intellectual and artistic achievements to emerge from the West such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment or the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions. By the end of this module, undergraduates will have learnt that we in the West have been racists for an awfully long time.

Still at ANU, history students can also elect to study 'Sexuality in Australia.' This appears to be a module based entirely upon thinking, reading and writing about the sex lives of our ancestors. It is unlikely that Australia's heroic early settlers would have imaged this would ultimately fascinate future generations of twenty-something voyeurs.

Not wishing to be outdone, Monash offers a unit entitled 'The History of Sexuality 1800-Present.' Though disappointingly not available in 2017, this course will allow final year students the opportunity to delve not only into the history of Australians' sexual proclivities, but also that of



Europeans and North Americans. Who says we're narrow minded and insular?

At the University of New South Wales, keen first year undergraduates can elect 'Global Feminisms: Competing Visions, Varying Histories.' By the end of the course, this next batch of historians might not be able to tell you much about the Reformation, but they will be highly knowledgeable champions of 'the rights connected with new reproductive technologies, Leftist feminists and ecofeminists.'

It is highly likely that there will be a decent smattering of ecofeminist and their ilk enrolled in 'Paradise Lost? Sustainability and Australia' at Monash. Apparently this course gives its students the opportunity to venture forth on a series of field trips to 'the Rocks, Indigenous and wilderness areas' to see for themselves just how terribly non-Indigenous Australians have done. This new breed of activist will emerge from uni with a distorted, ultra-left thematic view of the world in which the past is divided into two groups: Western Civilisation and all its trappings as the aggressor, and non-Whites, women and the environment as its victims.

The consequences of this lamentable state of affairs should be a deep cause of concern for Australians, as universities continue to indulge in a dangerous game of anti-intellectualism and biased teaching. By undermining hard knowledge in favour of an outdated version of Marxist historiography, our history faculties appear to be in the business of forging a new type of Social Justice Eco Warrior. These graduates will no longer be able to recognise the aspects of our heritage that have allowed Australia to flourish as a prosperous and stable liberal democracy.

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