



Three Years In An Aussie Re-Education Camp

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The next cohort of prospective undergraduates who plan on studying Australia's history at university in 2019 should scrutinise the subject descriptions on offer with considerable care. If they are hoping that three years of a university education might provide an understanding of modern Australia in terms of our debt to Western civilisation, they should steer well clear.

If, however, they would like to know more about becoming a political activist, race relations or LGBTQ rights, they should ideally do a BA in Australian History. This is because Australia's history has been re-packaged and re-labelled by ideologically-driven academics and presented to undergraduates as a social and political commentary on contemporary issues rather than as a study of actual history. Students are, in short, being swindled.

A report released by the Institute of Public Affairs, *Australian History's Last Stand: An Audit of Australian History Teaching at Universities*, reveals that Australian history as a discipline is suffering from the same existential crisis which is currently crippling the humanities in universities across the West. Rather than being provided with a solid grounding in the key social, political and



economic events which formed our nation, students are being served up a flavourless, colourless and depressingly bland dish of identity politics.

Of the 147 subjects which were taught across 35 universities in 2018, a total of 102 treated to greater or lesser degrees, the left's favourite themes of class, race and gender. This means that three quarters of all subjects which purportedly focus on Australia's past do so through the modern fixation with identity politics. The examples are as ludicrous as they are numerous. In 'Race and Place' at the University of Wollongong, students were asked to consider the following: 'Why does race matter now? In a progressive, multicultural country such as Australia we highly value equality and therefore believe that racial heritage should not influence people's opportunities.'

At Monash University, those who enrolled in 'Australian Stories: People, Place, History' explored 'crime and punishment, gender and sexuality, the environment, family [and] race relations', while students at the University of New South Wales taking 'Inequality in Australia' were asked to consider 'How was inequality influenced by race, gender, sexuality, age and disability?' and 'When and why did it become a political issue?' Why indeed.

Students who took 'Migration Nation: History Culture Identity' at Melbourne University drew upon the work of 'historians, social and cultural theorists, policy makers, activists, writers and artists' to understand 'how history continues to shape contemporary society.' Meanwhile, over at Federation University, students who opted for 'From the Coast to the Outback' were promised a 'thorough overview of the major issues confronting Australians in the present.' By no stretch of the imagination could this be deemed as history. Those academics who are clearly more interested in writing the past as a way of empowering minorities and the oppressed than they are with constructing a narrative motivated by professional rather than present-day political concerns, should consider transferring to more suitable departments, such as sociology or political science.

This monomania and apparent addiction to applying identity politics to the past is disastrous on many counts. It does nothing to explain the origins of this free nation which has been built over the last 230 years. It fails abysmally to expose students to the ideas, values and institutions of Western civilisation which were brought to these shores by the British in 1788, and which, like it or not, we continue to benefit from. Unsurprisingly, research undertaken for *Australian History's Last Stand* found that in the 147 subject descriptions, no single subject mentioned either 'liberalism/liberal', 'agriculture' or 'free trade', while 'democracy' and 'capitalism' featured just once each.

The obsession with identity politics also means that students will never discover the rich tapestry of characters who have made incalculable contributions to the development and success of this nation, and who have been cast aside in favour of the collectivist narrative struggles between different groups. It is simply astounding that not one single prime minister, either Labor or Liberal, is mentioned in any of the 147 subjects. Tellingly however, Pauline Hanson, who is alive and kicking, features rather a lot.

A degree in Australian history looks like three years in a re-education camp, where any natural



interest which might have existed at the beginning will be well and truly extinguished by the end. Identity politics renders Australia's history uninspiringly, mind-numbingly dull. What student really wants to sit through class after class, semester after semester, being indoctrinated by political activists masquerading as historians? Where is the inspiration if every subject you choose is taught using the same tedious predictable template? And the university administrators wonder why students are leaving the humanities in droves.

What a degree in Australian history does not look like is a comprehensive, instructive exploration of all facets of Australia's history which will produce highly knowledgeable, well-rounded graduates. As Cicero remarked, 'To know nothing of what happened before you were born is to remain forever a child.' It is not only failing to elevate the students, but it is ultimately infantilising them by stunting their intellectual growth.

In his monograph *Why Western Civilisation is Our Future*, Cambridge historian Professor Robert Tombs muses with characteristic perspicacity that 'ignorance of history makes democratic national conversation at best impoverished, at worst impossible.' There is little doubt that our history departments are in the business of churning out graduates who, having majored in identity politics, sorry, Australian history, land jobs in the civil service, the government, in journalism and in politics. And every year when Australia Day comes around, it is these individuals, full of moral righteousness, who are imposing their skewed version of Australia's past on the rest of the population, whether the population wants it or not. It is this vocal, virtue-signalling minority which makes proper, intelligent national conversations nigh impossible.

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