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The Assault on Truth-Seeking

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There are many assaults on reason in the academy. (And we write about them frequently on the Pope Center website at popecenter.org.)

- There is the assault on objective study of capitalism, with blatantly Marxist courses infiltrating geography, “cultural studies” sectors, even English literature.
- There is the assault on military history, as if studying the strategies of war is itself militaristic and not suited to a peace-loving university.
- There is the assault on the study of race relations in the United States, with writers such as Shelby Steele and Thomas Sowell excluded from the curriculum and historical figures such as Booker T. Washington dismissed from serious attention.
- There is the assault on English literature. I had the unpleasant experience of listening to a silly academic paper comparing Jane Austen’s writing with the Marquis de Sade’s – with the claim that Austen’s was more revolutionary. And a paper on *Samson Agonistes* denounced Milton for disparaging “female-ness.”

The Pope Center, which I head, is concerned about all these assaults. We are particularly concerned about undergraduate education and the loss of a core curriculum.

But today I want to discuss an extremely fundamental assault on reason, the assault on science.

My chief example is global warming, now commonly known as climate change – to cover more contingencies.

What we are seeing is a misuse of science for political ends. It turns out that universities are well set up for that.

As you all know, global warming has been the intellectual craze of our time, the academic fad. It is not limited to academia, of course – and it is not entirely a

fad – but it got its start in the federally funded laboratories of major universities. It came to broad public attention in 1988, James Hansen, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, proposed to a congressional committee that global warming had arrived. (I think it was a budget hearing.)

My chief text for today is an article on the *Eco-World* site by Richard Lindzen, a prominent climate scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1989, as the debate over global warming was just heating up (forgive the pun), *Science* magazine devoted an article to Lindzen.

“One reason for Lindzen's prominence among the greenhouse skeptics is his credentials,” wrote Richard Kerr. “Educated at Harvard, Sloan Professor of Meteorology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and member of the National Academy of Sciences, Lindzen has made major contributions to the theory of how the atmosphere behaves.

“No other U.S. skeptic has such scientific stature.”

Back then, Lindzen couldn't be ignored because he was so prominent in the field of climatology. Over time, however, the science establishment has managed to give Lindzen's work less attention. For example, a leading journal did not allow him and his colleagues to criticize his work in a timely fashion (in the same issue as the criticism). And a famous scientific society rejected a paper, saying that it would publish something by him if he found a coauthor who took a different position than he did.

Yes, science in the academy is “vulnerable to corruption,” says Lindzen. That corruption occurs because of the vast rewards available if and only if catastrophic climate change continues to fuel scientific research.

Most people may not realize that since 1998, there has been no trend in world temperatures, neither up nor down, in spite of population growth, greater resource use, and lots of carbon dioxide production. True, 1998, was the warmest year on record, and we are still in a warm period, but world temperatures are no higher than when today's college seniors began middle school. The likelihood of the catastrophic effects that gave Al Gore a Nobel Peace Prize is weak.

So, let's look at this corruption. What does it consist of? For one thing, Lindzen says, the science establishment gives priority to computer modeling of presumed climate forces and then tweaks the models, trying to make them conform to actual observations.

At the same time, an effort is constantly made to find and “correct” flaws in the empirical observations to make *them* conform to the simulations. Although science rightly seeks to make corrections, these are almost always in a single direction – toward conformity. That is data corruption.

The Inter-Governmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), which is considered “the word” on the state of the climate, is clearly political. Its key document, “Summary for Policymakers,” issued periodically, is written by a committee composed mostly of representatives of governments and advocacy groups. Few scientists have a role in crafting that paper, which is all that most policy-makers read. Entire scientific societies have shifted their positions from objectivity to support of the prevailing views.

The vulnerability to corruption comes about because federal funds support laboratories, most of them staffed by university scientists. For example, the Goddard Institute for Space Studies is based at Columbia University but it is part of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). If the fear of global warming declines, the gravy train could dry up for Goddard and for the professors working there at Columbia.

Lindzen offers page after page of examples illustrating the distortion of scientific inquiry. For example, in 1999, Michael Mann of Pennsylvania State University and others revised the historical temperature record to eliminate the existence of a warm period during the Medieval era.

The Mann et al. paper, which relied mostly on tree-ring records, featured a “hockey-stick” graph showing flat temperatures for hundreds of years followed by a dramatic increase more recently, conveying the message that recent warming is unprecedented. Even though subsequent papers have challenged the findings, but the “hockey-stick” appears in the most recent IPCC report.

And if you follow these matters, you know that very recently, after enormous effort by a retired mathematician in Toronto, the source of the tree-ring data has been revealed and the evidence is strong – although so far not confirmed by a peer-reviewed publication – that the tree-ring data were simply cherry-picked from a much larger data set for trees in Siberia. This throws enormous doubt on the hockey stick picture, but we will see how the establishment considers it.

The hockey stick is just one example. In 2001, Lindzen and two colleagues published a paper in the *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* suggesting a strong cooling effect from clouds, which they called the “iris effect.” Shortly after it was published, the journal published a paper challenging the existence of this effect. Okay – under the usual procedure, the editor would have allowed

Lindzen and his colleagues to rebut the criticism in the same issue of the publication. But they were not allowed to do so. Their defense was published months later, when it would not have the same impact.

In 2007, Lindzen showed that independent data from satellites and weather balloons did not support the computer-model prediction that the greatest warming should occur in the upper troposphere (a layer of the Earth's atmosphere). Rather than explore possible reasons why the difference occurred, two papers emerged after doing some work on the data. One revised the satellite data to bring them closer to the predictions; another paper simply rejected the temperature data, proffering highly uncertain temperature estimates based on wind data.

There's more. But because time is short let me mention Patrick Michaels' experience.

In the preface to a book written with Robert C. Balling, Jr., *Climate of Extremes*, Pat Michaels explains why he resigned from the University of Virginia, where he served as the state's climatologist. Virginia's governor, backed by the university's provost, told him that he could not identify himself as the state climatologist when talking about global warming. That's because he didn't go along with the company line.

Michaels also reports that Oregon's state climatologist resigned when he was told to stop saying things that undermined the state's greenhouse-gas policies. Delaware's state climatologist is not allowed to speak about global warming. And the assistant state climatologist in Washington state was fired for providing *snowfall* information to journalists and others. It undermined the global warming thesis. Political interference – and no defense by the university. The universities would rather not have these critics around because such critics might endanger the university's lucrative grants.

I'd like to shift gears for a moment. This kind of scientific craze in academia is not really unique.

Many of you know of Michael Crichton, the brilliant novelist, author of techno-thrillers such as *Jurassic Park*, and for those old enough to remember, the wonderful *Great Train Robbery*, and other books. Crichton died in 2008 of cancer. One of his last novels was *State of Fear*, an implausible story about environmentalists who attempt to create a tsunami to falsely confirm fears of global warming. My guess is that it wasn't quite as popular as some of his others (although it still made the *New York Times* best-seller list) and I don't think

anyone plans to make a movie of it. But he understood the issues surrounding the corruption of science.

At the end of *State of Fear*, he writes an appendix on a different but in many ways parallel topic – the alarm over the dilution of the gene pool that led to the intellectual triumph of eugenics.

Like global warming, eugenics was a theoretical topic – the study of how to improve the gene pool – that became a political program. Although people don't much discuss it today, it was espoused by such notables as Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Supreme Court justices Oliver Wendell Holmes and Louis Brandeis. The Carnegie Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation (that was before the onslaught of federal funds) supported research into eugenics, and such research occurred at Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, and Johns Hopkins.

Intellectuals such as H. G. Wells and Margaret Sanger promoted the prevention of procreation by inferior people – vaguely defined as degenerates and weaklings – through isolation in asylums or through sterilization. Twenty-nine states allowed involuntary sterilization.

Crichton writes: "I am not arguing that global warming is the same as eugenics, but the similarities are not superficial. And I do claim that open and frank discussion of the data, and of the issues, is being suppressed. Leading scientific journals have taken strong editorial positions on the side of global warming, which I argue they have no business doing."

Crichton observes that the leading critics of the global warming apocalypse – the skeptics – tend to be retired professors. "These individuals are no longer seeking grants, and no longer have to face colleagues whose grant applications and career advancement may be jeopardized by their criticisms."

To conclude, I must point out that global warming is not the only area in which scientific solidarity, academic elitism, and federal funding are corrupting science. E. C. Pasour, formerly with the N. C. State has written a beautiful discussion of the constraints on agricultural economists who write about agricultural policy. "Thus, social and economic pressures from college officials and funding agencies may make agricultural policy economists 'pull their punches' in criticizing restrictions on competition in agricultural production and marketing," he writes (E.C. Pasour, "Agricultural Economists and the State," *Econ Journal Watch* 1 [April 2004]: 112).

In North Carolina, the head of a university center on transportation was replaced because he would not go along with the popular concept that state and federal funds should be devoted to mass transit in the Charlotte area.

There's a lot to be worried about. When funding, popularity, self-interest, and taxpayer money all go together, the result isn't pretty, and that's the picture at many if not most of our universities.