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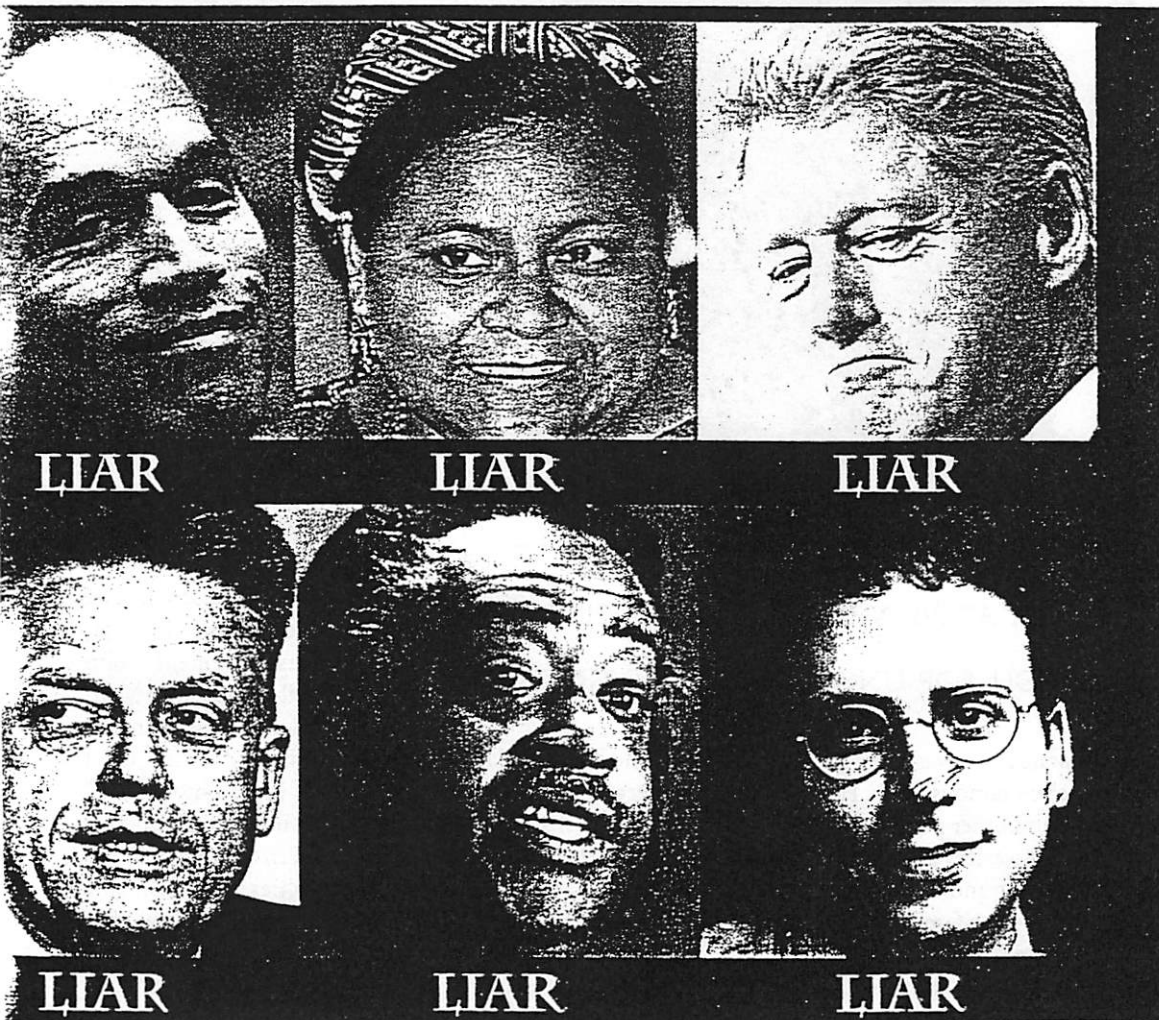
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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE TRUTH?



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NUMBER 1

UNTRUTH IN ACADEME

DAVID STOLL, an assistant professor at Middlebury College, doesn't seem like the kind of person who would be unsympathetic to Rigoberta Menchu. Menchu's autobiographical account of the civil war in Guatemala earned her adulation from the political Left, status as an international icon of the "peace and social justice" movement, and eventually the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize. Her book is a staple on campus reading lists, and a reported 15,000 mostly adulatory theses have so far been written about her life story. Meanwhile, Stoll is an anthropologist at a liberal arts college and a self-described "social democrat" skeptical of capitalism. As a graduate student at Stanford he focused on human rights violations by the Guatemalan government. Today, though, Stoll is being assailed as a racist and enemy of the people by Menchu and her allies on U.S. campuses—all because he had the temerity to tell the truth.

Stoll's book, *Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*—which he describes as a "left-wing critique of political correctness"—catalogs a devastating list of exaggerations and fabrications in Menchu's famous book. Her "life story" told the tale of how her family and other poor Indian peasants fought to maintain their land against wealthy landowners of European descent. In reality, this supposed grand struggle between haves and have-nots turns out to have been a family dispute between Menchu's land-rich father and his own (Indian) in-laws. It also turns out that a brother she said she saw starve to death is alive

Kenneth Lee, who writes regularly for The American Enterprise, has also written for The New Republic and Liberty.



ACADEMICS BECAME OUTRAGED—
NOT AT MENCHU FOR LYING, BUT AT
STOLL FOR UNCOVERING THE TRUTH.

and well-off today in Guatemala. And Menchu's claim that she had never received any formal education and could not read or write Spanish until adulthood is bunk, too. She, in fact, attended two private boarding schools.

When these bombshell revelations became public, academics became outraged—not at Menchu, but at Stoll for uncovering the truth. "Whether her book is true or not, I don't care. We should teach our students about the brutality of the Guatemalan army and the U.S. financing of it," fumed Wellesley College professor Marjorie Agosin to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. "I think Rigoberta Menchu has been used by the Right to negate the very important space that multiculturalism is providing in academia." Joanne Rappaport, president of the Society for Latin American Anthropology, told the *Chronicle* Stoll's book is "an attempt to discredit one of the only spokespersons of Guatemala's indigenous movement." John Peeler of Bucknell downplayed Menchu's lies: "The Latin American tra-

dition of the testimonial has never been bound by the strict rules of veracity that we take for granted in autobiography." Most professors insisted they would continue using Menchu's books in their classrooms. And the Nobel Prize Committee defended Menchu, saying "All autobiographies embellish to a greater or lesser extent."

This embarrassing episode is only the latest instance of epidemic lying in the ivory tower. From Afrocentric claims of Cleopatra's being black to phony feminist statistics on rape, anorexia, and discriminatory treatment of girls, academia has in recent years been beset by revelations of fraudulent facts and

BY KENNETH LEE

ONE CAN NO LONGER ASSUME THAT SIMPLY EXPOSING A FALSEHOOD WILL GET IT OUT OF CIRCULATION.

spurious studies. Even more worrying, many professors have decided to turn a deaf ear when these lies have been exposed. That university instructors—who profess to devote their lives to the uncovering of truth and the promotion of critical thinking—tolerate and even promote these untruths is evidence that, as former '60s radical David Horowitz puts it, “the American university is at its lowest intellectual ebb in history.”

ROGER KIMBALL, managing editor at *The New Criterion* and author of *Tenured Radicals*, places the blame at the feet of so-called postmodern ideology. “This ultimately traces back to the popularity of deconstructionists like Michel Foucault,” he explains. “Foucault believed that there is no such thing as objective truth—there are only power relations. And what we for convenience call ‘truth’ is really just the expression of a particular political relationship.”

If political power is the most important element in society, then being untruthful is not terribly wrong if it helps “your” side gain power. This postmodern playing with facts has thoroughly infected feminist arguments about the oppression of women. On most college campuses, professors repeat the mantra, “one in four girls is a victim of rape or attempted rape.” Yet as Christina Hoff Sommers has shown, this claim is deeply flawed. In the survey from which it is derived, 73 percent of the girls counted as rape victims said that they were not *aware* at the time that they had been raped. A similar untruth much bruited about on campus is the “fact” that 150,000 women die of anorexia every year. Actually, official statistics show that 150,000 women suffer from the disease but only about 100 women die each year from it.

When figures like these are traced back to their sources and refuted, professors often fall back on the defense that while their specific numbers may not be wholly accurate, they nevertheless represent the “larger truth” that society mistreats women. Stoll’s exposé of Rigoberta Menchu elicited this very reaction among academics. Professor Agosin of Wellesley justified the lies this way: “Even if she didn’t watch her little brother being murdered, the military did murder people in Guatemala.” Professor Allen Carey-Webb of Western Michigan University similarly stressed the importance of seeing the ‘larger truth’: “We have a higher standard of truth for poor people like Rigoberta Menchu. If we find a flaw in her, it doesn’t mean her whole argument goes down the drain.”

Other academics showed more concern for protecting Menchu’s political cause than for the realities of the case. Harvard professor Kay B. Warren told the *Chronicle*: “What I worry about is that this controversy may be used to undermine the findings of the truth commission and deflect attention away from attempts to reform the army.”

David Horowitz scoffs at the notion of a larger truth justifying lies. “This is the Tawana Brawley defense—when she was lying, she was really telling the truth,” he says, referring to the young black woman who falsely claimed to have been raped by some white men in upstate New York, and who continued to enjoy activist support even after her falsehoods were exposed. Adds

Roger Kimball, “This is what George Orwell once referred to as newspeak. Once you go down that road, where do you stop?”

Professor Alan Kors of the University of Pennsylvania finds these rationalizations disturbing. “If the academic world tolerates lies and misrepresentations because it likes the broader message, then we are truly in difficult times. That the American academic world would embrace the lies knowing that they are lies is appalling,” he says. Menchu’s book “is not presented as a work of fiction but as a work of non-fiction. We should ask for truth in advertising.” How many workers outside of academic fields could get away with claiming that facts are not as important as “larger truths,” asks Kors?

IN SOME CASES, intellectuals’ cavalier attitude toward the truth can be attributed as much to laziness, greed, or self-aggrandizement as to bias. Swiss newspapers and then “60 Minutes” recently revealed that one of the most famous books about surviving the Holocaust—Binjamin Wilkomirski’s *Fragments*—is actually a hoax by a compulsive liar who was neither sent to Majdanek and then Auschwitz as a child, nor even born a Jew or Russian, as he claimed. Translated into more than a dozen languages, the book was described by Britain’s *Manchester Guardian* as “one of the great works of the Holocaust.” The *New York Times* raved about its melding of “a poetic vision with the magic of a child’s innocence.” Asked how the literary world could have been so gravely duped, one expert concluded, “the editors and the reviewers and the prize juries [are] terribly ignorant.” Because an elegiac story of victimization has so much appeal to contemporary intellectuals, skepticism seems to have been suspended.

“Doing real historical work and ascertaining what has happened requires a lot of patient scholarly work,” explains Roger Kimball. In cases like Wilkomirski’s and Menchu’s where there is a convenient political moral to the story, it is tempting to dispense with this hard work. Lots of partisans prefer to simply believe convenient fables rather than test them. “If you have a magic ideological formula that allows you to reduce any historical phenomenon to the same scenario of oppression or whatever, then it’s much easier to proceed,” says Kimball.

These sorts of mistakes and falsehoods are encouraged by the single-mindedness of the modern college faculty. In the cases of both willful untruths and untruths of sloppiness “the problem is the political homogeneity of the professoriate,” says Dinesh D’Souza, author of *Illiberal Education*. D’Souza tells *TAE* such embarrassments could be avoided if university faculty better represented national opinion. “If you had ideological diversity, then you would have prejudices cutting all ways and you would have a natural corrective. You’d have all of them attacking each other whenever they strayed from reality.”

DAVID HOROWITZ argues that the recent campus plagues of untruth are “a secondary symptom of the larger problem, which is the infiltration and subsequent domination of the academy by the Left.” For “the Left can only exist in this

Lies from a Campus Icon

WHAT IS IT WITH PROGRESSIVES? Why do they feel the need to lie so relentlessly about who they are? Recently it was feminist icon Betty Friedan's turn to be revealed as a fibber.

In his new biography, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*, Smith College professor Daniel Horowitz (no relation) establishes beyond doubt that the woman who has always presented herself as a typical suburban housewife until she began work on her groundbreaking book was in fact nothing of the kind. In fact, under her maiden name, Betty Goldstein, she was an activist and professional propagandist for the Communist Left for over a decade before the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* launched the modern women's movement.

Professor Horowitz documents that Friedan was, from her college days until her mid-thirties, a Stalinist Marxist, a political intimate of leaders of American Communists, and for a time even the lover of a young Communist physicist working on atomic bomb projects with J. Robert Oppenheimer. Her famous description of America's suburban family household as "a comfortable concentration camp" therefore had more to do with her Marxist hatred for America than with any of her actual experience as a housewife or mother. (Her husband, Carl, also a leftist, once complained that his wife "was in the world during the whole marriage," had a full-time maid, and "seldom was a wife and a mother.")

It is fascinating that Friedan not only felt the need to lie about her real views and life experience then, but still feels the need to lie about them now. Although her new biographer is himself a sympathetic leftist, Friedan refused to cooperate and began to malign him once she realized he was going to tell the truth about her life as Betty Goldstein.

This reminded me of a C-SPAN "Booknotes" program on which Brian Lamb asked historian Eric Foner about his father, Jack. Foner claimed that Jack Foner was a man "with a social conscience" who made his living through public lectures and who, along with his brothers Phil and Moe, was persecuted during the McCarthy era. When Lamb asked Foner why they were persecuted, Foner responded that his father had supported the loyalist side in the Spanish Civil



War. But no one was actually persecuted for siding with the Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War. The Foner brothers were actually fairly famous Communists, one a Communist party labor historian and another a Communist party union organizer and leader. It is a fact that, on orders from Moscow, Communist-controlled unions in the CIO opposed the Marshall Plan's effort to rebuild Western Europe. The Marshall Plan, it should be recalled, was in part designed to prevent Stalin's empire from absorbing Western Europe as it had its satellites in the east. That's why socialists like Walter Reuther purged the reds from the CIO and also why Communists like Foner's uncle came under FBI scrutiny—i.e., why they were "persecuted" in the McCarthy era.

That Communists, like the Foners and Betty Friedan, lied at the time was understandable. They had something to hide. But why are they and their children lying to this day?

The reason is this: The truth is too embarrassing. Imagine what it would be like for Betty Friedan as a Jew to admit that she opposed America's entry into the war against Hitler because her Party told her that it was just an inter-imperialist fracas? Imagine what it would be like for America's premier feminist to acknowledge that well into her thirties she thought Stalin was the Father of the Peoples, and that the United States was an evil empire, and that her interest in women's liberation was just a subtext of her real desire to create a Soviet America. No, those kinds of revelations don't help a person who is concerned about her public image.

Which is why it probably has seemed better just to lie about this all these years. The problem, however, is that lying can't be contained. It begets other lies, and eventually becomes a whole way of life.

The example of Betty Friedan should be a wake-up call to the rest of us to insist that people be candid about their politics and about calling things by their right names.

—This is adapted from David Horowitz's
Salon column of January 18, 1999.

country in an atmosphere where it can control the conversation, and the university is the perfect place because it's not a democratic institution—it's a feudal institution. Once you are in a position of authority, you rule by fiat."

Horowitz draws from his own experiences as a socialist radical to argue that "leftism is a crypto-religion. It is at odds with social facts, and has been for 200 years." But that doesn't

matter because "to the Left, the alternative [to their worldview] is unthinkable. They are inside a community of faith and to leave it would mean leaving every friend you had, and joining the people you thought were evil. It would drain your life of all its meaning. So the Left has deep blinders" that keep it from accepting controverting evidence of all sorts.

Horowitz suggests that today's lying epidemics and radi-

IF COLLEGE FACULTIES HAD IDEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY, THERE WOULD BE A NATURAL CORRECTIVE.

cal discounting of the idea of truth may have been inevitable as the intellectual foundations of socialism crumbled during the twentieth century. "As it became apparent that everything that progressives had put their hearts into was a monster lie, the move became obvious. Deconstruct the truth and say there is no truth. That's when they became relativists." Professor Kors agrees: "With the failure of socialism to achieve what the intellectual Left believed it would, radicals were faced with two choices: Change their views in the face of the data, or deny the importance of data and reality. They have chosen the latter in alarming numbers."

Kors sees another alarming trend: "A growing number of 'in' fields are being defined by large presuppositions" based on quasi-Marxist oppression theories. So "if your presuppositions do not fit with these, then you have no scholarly status," he warns. "Instead of debate and competition of ideas, a larger number of fields are inhibiting or forbidding debate except among competing theories of oppression."

The Education of Little Tree is a salient example of how ideology can blind academics to the truth. Billed as a factual memoir of a Native American orphan who grew up to confront immense racism and other obstacles, the book's pro-environmental message and multicultural flavor won plaudits from academics. Rennard Strickland of Southern Illinois University, for example, praised the work as "one of those rare books like *Huck Finn* that each new generation needs to discover."

Yet it turned out the story was a terrible hoax. The real author, as uncovered in the *New York Times* in 1991, was Asa Carter, a notorious racist who had penned George Wallace's infamous "Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!" speech and in fact considered Wallace to be too liberal. According to his fellow-segregationist brother, Doug Carter, Asa wrote *Little Tree* as a form of "creative writing." The University of New Mexico Press, which published the book, however, stood by the lies. A spokesman told the *Los Angeles Times*, "The question we have to ask is: Was the book that was beautiful and superb yesterday now horrible and awful? The book hasn't changed." Although Doug Carter has said that his brother maintained his racist beliefs to his deathbed, Lawrence Clayton, a dean at Hardin-Simmons University, flatly refused to accept that a racist wrote the book as a hoax. "Carter created a fictitious life for himself and lived it. In years here, he became Little Tree. I think he just turned his back on his earlier life," said Clayton. Professor Strickland insisted Asa Carter's real identity is "a matter that doesn't concern or disturb me very much. The book seems to me to ring very true."

ANOTHER EXAMPLE of academic refusal to discard a convenient text even after its factual basis has been undermined is the case of Mike Davis. A former member of the Communist party, Davis is a recent recipient of a MacArthur Foundation "genius" award, and has taught at UCLA and the Southern California Institute of Architecture. He gained fame for his

dystopian, Marxist analysis of Los Angeles, *City of Quartz*. In it, he paints a picture of a Los Angeles power elite trying to zone away the minority poor, a city where whites have sheltered themselves in fortress-like business buildings downtown and in gated communities outside the city. The book is taught in college planning and urban design courses everywhere and was recently selected by some academics as "one of the top 100 journalism pieces of the twentieth century" (ahead of works like Edward R. Murrow's report on the liberation of Buchenwald).

Unlike many academics, Davis doesn't hide his political agenda at all. "The thing you have to understand about these books is I'm a socialist. This book has an utterly radical political agenda, no holds barred," he told the *New York Times*. Tendentiousness is the least of his problems, though; the greater flaw in his scholarship is that much of what he says just isn't true. His errors, ranging from the trivial to the egregious, have recently been shown to be plentiful. For instance, he explains how Los Angeles businessman Howard Ahmanson was "despised for his Jewishness" by the power elite, which is odd, given that Ahmanson is an evangelical Christian. He describes how the city elite removed pedestrian sidewalks and erected giant steel building doors in downtown L.A. in hopes of keeping poor racial minorities away. Trouble is, those ominous steel doors turn out not to exist, while those allegedly missing sidewalks do exist. Davis exaggerates wildly to suit his political needs. He claims that there are 2,000 gated communities in Los Angeles; in reality, there are only 100.

An environmentalist ally of Davis recently described in the left-leaning *L.A. Weekly* how "I was amazed to discover he'd fabricated an entire interview with me: We were standing together at the Fremont Gate entrance to Elysian Park, a place I'd never been, and I showed him a 'dog-eared 1890s topographical map prepared for City Engineer J. H. Dockweler,' a document that I'd never heard of.... Though we'd never actually talked, the words he put in my mouth made me sound like I knew a lot more about the Los Angeles River than I actually did."

"Whenever he needs a 'fact' to bolster some preformulated hypothesis, rather than going to all the messy bother of actually hunting down and picking them, he simply grows his own, and then assigns whatever moderately plausible footnote happens to be lying around," warns Brady Westwater, who first discovered many of Davis's fabrications and then exposed them on his Web site.

Has this revelation of fraud brought Davis ignominy in academic circles? Quite the opposite. The State University of New York at Stony Brook wooed him for months and recently hired him to become a professor in the history department. Gary Marker, chairman of the department, defends Davis's appointment. The school had heard of Davis's inaccuracies and fabrications before it hired him, Marker told *TAE*, but "those claims [of falsehoods] were made by real estate agents and journalists" while "all the academic commentary was complimentary." He adds, "If serious academics in his field raise the same concerns, then I'd be worried, but the journalistic criticisms I've seen don't keep me particularly concerned, just aware." And

there you have the denouement of academic lies: Untruth doesn't matter as long as other academics don't fault you. Since so many of Davis's colleagues share his ideological prejudices and have a similarly slippery regard for truth, most won't complain about his scholarship any time soon. Thus do cloistered academics ignore evidence from outside the university, allowing lies to thrive within our ivory towers.

IT ISN'T JUST THAT truth-tellers get ignored within the academic world while fact-benders win "genius" awards and professorships. What's more worrisome is that those who blow the whistle on academics engaging in exaggerations and fabrications are often punished for their trouble.

When Stoll first began writing his book on Rigoberta Menchu, many of his colleagues discouraged him from pursuing the evidence because it challenged an icon of the Left. "I faced a lot of disapproval," admits Stoll. He also had difficulties finding a publisher for his meticulously researched book. And although Stoll goes out of his way to treat Menchu sympathetically, and refrains from calling her a liar, many academics have questioned his motives and miscast him as a conservative. "I'm questioning left-wing symbols not to help the Right but to help the Left to deal with issues it has to deal with," splutters an exasperated Stoll. "Attractive symbols like Rigoberta Menchu had

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their use but they could end up covering over problems."

Other researchers have toiled for years under academia's distaste for inconvenient truths. Take Dr. Judith Reisman. For nearly 20 years, she has questioned the truthfulness of much of the data in Alfred C. Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, the book which launched the sexual revolution by providing seemingly scientific rationalizations for promiscuity, child sexuality, homosexuality, and many forms of sexual experimentation. "Kinsey's scientific data wasn't flawed. It was fraudulent," says Reisman. "Kinsey wanted to change our sex attitudes and laws; so he created the data that he wanted. He also threw out three-quarters of the answers he didn't want to use. He picked who he wanted [as study subjects], and he lied about who he interviewed." Reisman notes that five-sixths of Kinsey's research subjects were aberrant males. Many were prisoners, 1,400 were sex offenders, and another 200 were male prostitutes.

Not surprisingly, Kinsey got the unconventional results he wanted. For example, he popularized the notion that 10 to 37 percent of the male population is gay. A recent and more reliable University of Chicago study disputes Kinsey's findings and suggests a more accurate figure is something like 3 or 4 percent. Others of Kinsey's findings are just plain bizarre: He argued that children are sexual beings who can enjoy orgasms even as infants.

Reisman's exposures of Kinsey's fraud, however, was almost completely ignored in academe. The professoriate wanted nothing to do with work that cast a shadow on a hero of sexual liberation. "I gave my first paper on Kinsey, called 'Child Sexuality or Sexual Abuse: A Possible Consideration of Ethics Violation,' in 1981 in Jerusalem, and I called for an investigation into Kinsey's research methods," explains Reisman. "I assumed that my colleagues were going to say, 'Oh my! We must investigate this!' I thought they'd be really upset. They were—but upset with me, not Kinsey." She recalls one colleague who approached her after she presented her paper. He didn't inquire about Kinsey's dubious research methods but instead complained to her that she was "going to set back sex education 20 years." Reisman now says, "I learned the hard way that most of them liked what Kinsey said and loved to promote his claims."

Today, however, after nearly two decades of lonely argument, Reisman is being vindicated. James H. Jones, a former member of the scientific board of advisers of Kinsey's institute, has recently written a devastating book on Kinsey confirming the fraudulent basis of many of the sexologist's claims. Yet even now many academics continue to cling to Kinsey's falsehoods, and to ignore Reisman's findings, even as Kinsey's credibility has been fatally damaged in the wider world.

Dinesh D'Souza believes it will often take an outside critic to purge the academic scene of a favored untruth or half-truth. The backlash against political correctness in the 1980s and early '90s, he notes, mostly originated off campus. And today, D'Souza believes, "a watchdog function exposing academic lies" is needed.

But as the troubling cases of Kinsey, Rigoberta Menchu, Mike Davis, and others demonstrate, one can no longer assume that simply exposing a falsehood will be enough to get it out of circulation. That is something the academic class will have to be forcefully shamed into.

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