

Big Fat Liar on Campus

By Mike Adams

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Last semester, one of my students told me that he was down on America. In fact, he said that he was ashamed to be an American. He didn't keep me guessing as to the reason for his shame and depression. He immediately disclosed that he had seen "Bowling for Columbine," on one of the two occasions the Women's Center sponsored its showing last year.

It is bad enough that the Women's Center uses its budget as an excuse to campaign against conservative public policies, even when the policies have little to do with the women's movement. But in the case of promoting **Michael Moore**, it is worse because the information Moore proffers is usually irrelevant and often completely inaccurate.

The thesis of "Bowling for Columbine" is sometimes difficult to ascertain because Moore frequently contradicts himself in the movie. Nonetheless, I think that he is trying, above all else, to assert the following:

- The United States has more crime than other countries (like Canada).
- The United States has more guns than other countries (like Canada).
- Therefore, guns cause crime and, of course, more gun control is necessary.

I have encountered similar simplistic thinking from the right in my eleven years as a college professor. For example, some students have made the following argument, usually in my introductory criminal justice course:

- Saudi Arabia has less crime than the United States.
- Saudi Arabia uses harsher punishment than the United States (including public executions and amputation of hands for thieves).
- Therefore, we should have public executions and amputate the hands of thieves in the United States. (I won't even mention the penalty for adultery. Talk about a harsh penal system!).

When confronted with such arguments from my most punitive students, I usually begin by challenging the assertion that we can readily ascertain the difference in crime rates between various nations. National crime statistics are simply too flawed to do that with any level of precision.

For example, in the United States, only about 35 to 40 percent of the victims of crime bother to contact the police in the first place. When they do, the police (usually local) are not required to report the crime to the federal government, although the feds ask them to do so in the form of the FBI Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). And the UCR totally exclude federal crimes from their data set. And so on, and so on.

The end result is that the government has some ability to assess changes in crime rates from year to year in the United States because these flaws tend to be equally present from year to year (roughly). But they have little ability to compare crime rates between nations, because the statistics of other nations are even less accurate than ours.

But even if we were able to say with precision that the United States had two times, or five times, or

ten times as much crime as Saudi Arabia, how could we conclude that the system of punishment is the “cause” of the lower crime rate? Could it instead have something to do with climate? Or could it have something to do with culture? Or could it be something else we haven’t considered?

And speaking of causality, I know that the murder rate goes up in the summer. I also know that ice cream sales go up in the summer. But only a simpleton would assert that ice cream “causes” murder.

But, of course, Michael Moore is just such a simpleton. And, not to be disrespectful, but simplemindedness is to be occasionally expected of a college dropout. When we choose people to teach our students, through lectures or films or books, we should give some consideration to their educational qualifications.

So my request to the Women’s Center is also very simple. In the name of intellectual honesty (and diversity), let us critique the reasoning of gun control advocates with the same diligence that we use when critiquing those we consider to advocate extreme methods of punishment.

And let me be a Lott Moore (pun intended) specific. In the name of intellectual diversity, I am asking the Women’s Center to invite John Lott to speak at UNC-Wilmington.

John Lott has taught at the University of Chicago and Yale University and has authored what is perhaps the best critique of gun control ever written, “**More Guns, Less Crime.**” Some of my colleagues disagree with his recommendations for public policy but are completely unable to specify any flaws in his research or in his logic. In fact, one of them once told me that he was very disturbed by data indicating that right-to-carry permits seemed to be reducing the amount of crime in jurisdictions that had made them available.

And that is where we find ourselves too often in academia. We support policies that feel good and reject policies that contradict our feelings, even when they actually save lives. Clearly, the time has come for the academy to promote the public interest, not a given political agenda that is in line with certain feelings.

Recently, the second murder of a UNC-Wilmington student occurred in the span of a single month. There has been plenty of talk about the fact that the killer had a gun. There has been little talk about the fact that the victim did not.

Before the next unarmed student loses her life, let’s have a real debate on gun control. Let’s do it in the name of diversity.