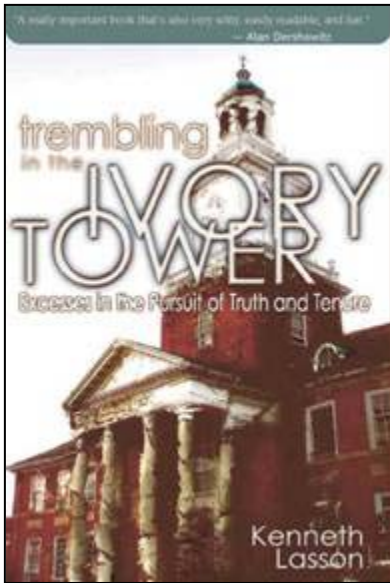


**Kenneth Lasson's Appearance on the "Ron Smith Show,"**  
**WBAL-AM (Baltimore), Tuesday, Nov. 25, 2003**



**Smith:** You know how I like to talk about Absurdiststand. What leads the way in Absurdiststand are our finest colleges and universities, firmly in the grip of political correctness and utter nonsense, which is basically what this book is about, by University of Baltimore Law professor Kenneth Lasson – L-A-S-S-O-N is how you spell it. His book is called “Trembling in the Ivory Tower: Excesses in the Pursuit of Truth and Tenure.” He is joining us on the phone. Professor Lasson, how ya doing?

**Lasson:** Fine, thank you.

**Smith:** Good. You know, there was a time, a few years ago, when, in my naiveté, I thought that political correctness had sort of peaked. It was so nonsensical that it had to recede. And yet I was utterly wrong.

**Lasson:** I think there is an ebb and flow and, in a way, we might be in the ebb phase right now, but there is an awful lot of political correctness rampant in the colleges and universities around us, and most people, including those inside, just don't realize it.

**Smith:** You've had a dumbing down of courses, even at the most elite universities. Let's start with how they've just eviscerated English Lit at so many schools.

**Lasson:** Amazing to me is the simple fact that English literature majors at many major universities, as well as some small colleges and universities, no longer have to take a course in Shakespeare, Milton, or Chaucer, because those writers are considered by the politically correct powers-that-be to represent a western culture, dominated as it is by the

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teachings of the “dreaded species” known as Dead White European Males. I can't believe that somebody at Harvard or Georgetown who wants to major in English does not have to take a course in Shakespeare if he or she doesn't want to.

**Smith:** No, instead, they can take all sorts of things, as you point out – the 50 courses in homosexual studies at Yale, queer theory, lesbian and trans-gender cinema, and weekly screenings of gay movies. For this, people are paying \$30,000 and more a year, so their kids can go and be miseducated in this way, and I think there is no question that it's miseducation. It's bizarre to me. There's one other thing. When you look at the genesis of universities, as learning for learning's sake, it is western civilization that created them in

the first place. And now their very creation has come to despise the civilization that gave it birth. It's really weird. It's sharper than a serpent's tooth.

**Lasson:** The people who consider themselves to be in control – and they are in control in many areas of the curriculum and choice of faculty in modern universities – feel that what they, as faculty members, choose as curriculum are the correct courses, and the people they choose are the correct people. At Stanford, they have a course on the history of Afro hair. It seems clear to me – and not necessarily them -- that you have to start and stick with the basics before you go experimenting with new courses to satisfy particular agendas.

**Smith:** Interestingly, ladies and gentlemen, Professor Lasson is not some conservative because, first of all, it'd be hard for him to be a tenured professor of law anywhere as a conservative. You are an avowed liberal – a political liberal. So what got you going on this, in what would be viewed askance by, shall we say, a good many of your political brethren?

**Lasson:** I like to consider myself a liberal in temperament, and I was, or at least have been, a liberal in things political. But I also like to consider myself dominated by common sense. I'm sure that people in the Academy who force upon us these politically correct agendas think that they exercising common sense, too. But it seems to me that there are so many absurd things that go on now in the spirit of the academic exercise. I like to think that not only am I speaking for common sense, but things should be weighed. Americans have the freedom – thank goodness – still to judge and to condemn what they think is absurd.

**Smith:** Not if you're a student at a university.

**Lasson:** There has been a chilling effect at universities by virtue of political correctness and, for example, by virtue of professors – I guess I have a quote or three in my book about it – who talk about holocaust denial. The fact that the holocaust deniers have an equal footing in many places by virtue of their academic voice, I find outrageous.

“And if you speak out against the politically correct paradigm, you can find yourself suspended from school, expelled from the school, or punished in various other ways by student and faculty committees. It's really an intellectual gulag.”

you speak out against the politically correct paradigm, you can find yourself suspended from school, expelled from the school, or punished in various other ways by student and faculty committees. It's really an intellectual gulag.

**Smith:** But to be conservative politically is to depart from the plantation mentality present on the vast majority of colleges and universities in this country, with a scant handful of exceptions. And if

**Lasson:** That's right. And as much as I still fancy myself a liberal, I certainly feel a certain resonance about what some conservatives are saying now on many talk shows, on radio and TV – Sean Hannity, and Gordon Liddy, and your show. It seems to me that

there's a lot of common sense there, and the old-fashioned liberalism with which I grew up seems to be in short supply.

**Smith:** Whenever anybody gets power – whether liberal, conservative, communist, fascist, or anything – they tend to stifle dissent. And, of course, the fact is that higher education is in the grip of those who are decidedly liberal, in the modern sense of that word, describing one's political beliefs. And since they have the power, they do what comes naturally to those who have it – shut up those who oppose them. Ken, hang on for just a second. Ladies and gentlemen,

“And, of course, the fact is that higher education is in the grip of those who are decidedly liberal, in the modern sense of that word, describing one's political beliefs. And since they have the power, they do what comes naturally to those who have it – shut up those who oppose them.”

we have, on our webpage, links that provide you two different ways to purchase Professor Lasson's book, which reads very well. It's funny, too. Man, a law professor with a sense of humor. It's called “Trembling in the Ivory Tower: Excesses in the Pursuit of Truth and Tenure.”

### [Commercial Break]

**Smith:** Back we are with University of Baltimore Law professor Kenneth Lasson. His book “Trembling in the Ivory Tower: Excesses in the Pursuit of Truth and Tenure.” Professor Lasson, a political liberal, finds that there's kind of an illiberal rule in higher education in this country, and in so many instances he lays it out, chapter and verse, in this book, which is published by a local publisher, Bancroft Press. Here's Professor Lasson again. You wanted to comment on my comment about liberals being in charge and stifling dissent.

**Lasson:** Yes. I guess I still like to consider myself a proud, card-carrying member of the ACLU, but some of the people down there think I'm really a closet conservative. However, I would take slight issue with your characterization of those in control of the Academy as liberal. I think the ones we really have to worry about are the radicals, and many of them are radical feminists. I guess the leading radical feminist law professor in the country is Catherine MacKinnon, who would have us believe that there are few, if any, reasonably happy marriages. She says, for example, that marriage equals prostitution. And that many, if not most women ...

**Smith:** And sexual intercourse equals rape.

**Lasson:** And, she says, most women are abused in childhood, but never realize it. I'm not making this up. All you have to do is read her book, “Feminism Unmodified.”

**Smith:** It's well-documented. We have talked about that before. You are absolutely correct.

**Lasson:** I have two specific examples of the radical feminists in the university and what they do. They would have us understand that the traditional nuclear family in the U.S. is

the principal focal point of oppression. And they'll often cite favorably a 1992 report by the American Association of University Women, entitled "How Schools Shortchange Girls." What they're likely to ignore is a 1998 study, also by a woman professor, who provided empirical data that women more than hold their own in the academic arena. They receive higher grades than men in every subject in high school. They attend graduate and professional schools in greater numbers than men. In fact, they cope better with the challenges presented by a university education.

**Smith:** In fact, Ken, it has been put forth that actually education, from elementary school on, is in reality biased towards girls and against boys. And you can make a much stronger case in that regard than the feminists did in arguing the other way. For crying out loud, the majority of people entering Yale Law School now are women.

"These guidelines required all students to agree in advance of taking the course that racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism are all institutionalized forms of oppression, that they exist, and that we're all systematically taught misinformation by males. If you didn't agree with those guidelines, then you were prohibited from voicing alternative opinions in class."

**Lasson:** And that's the trend across the country. When I went to law school, there were only a handful of women in my graduating class. Now, across the country, they're over 50 percent of the law school populations. Look at this one other example I have for you. There's a Women's Studies pro-

fessor at the University of South Carolina who required all of her seminar students to follow what she described as "Guidelines for Classroom Discussion" as a condition of class participation. These guidelines required all students to agree in advance of taking the course that racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism are all institutionalized forms of oppression, that they exist, and that we're all systematically taught misinformation by males. If you didn't agree with those guidelines, then you were prohibited from voicing alternative opinions in class. I think that is just outrageous.

**Smith:** Of course it is. It's incredible. It's stifling. It's anti-intellectual. It's ridiculous. And these people who impose this kind of rules, and the speech codes – that's a speech code for a class, I guess – these are people protected by tenure and cosseted in the bosom of the very society they're busily trying to deconstruct and destroy.

**Lasson:** Speech codes are especially nefarious. Not one speech code across the country has been found constitutional. There have only been a handful of codes that have been tested in the courts – maybe a half-dozen or so – but in fact the speech codes that haven't been tested are promulgated around the country and are acted upon. They really do cause trembling in the ivory tower. Some of these codes are nefarious. Some of them are just plain stupid. This one at the University of Connecticut prohibits "inappropriate laughter."

**Smith:** Yes.

**Lasson:** If you can believe that.

**Smith:** Who's to be the judge of that, by the way? It's whoever brings the complaint.

**Lasson:** It's totally subjective.

**Smith:** Whoever complains. If I complain that someone has laughed inappropriately at me because of the hat I had on, I am the initial judge of inappropriate laughter.

**Lasson:** Of course.

**Smith:** Actually, I take it back. I'm a white guy. I would be ignored. But just pretend that I'm a person of color or even better, a woman of color. That would really be a double-header. And if I'm offended, then I'm offended, and the person who offended me is guilty, by God. That's it.

**Lasson:** There are speech codes all over the place. These things are cropping up all the time.

**Smith:** They're sprouting up like mushrooms.

**Lasson:** They really are. And that, I guess, proves your point that political correctness does run rampant in universities and colleges.

**Smith:** We've got to take a break. Kenneth Lasson, professor at the University of Baltimore Law School, is our guest. "Trembling in the Ivory Tower: Excesses in the Pursuit of Truth and Tenure." You can join us at 410-467-WBAL, if you wish.



Kenneth Lasson on *Hardball*

### [Commercial Break]

**Smith:** Back we are with Kenneth Lasson, author of the new book "Trembling in the Ivory Tower." The more I contemplate this subject, the crazier it makes me. It's absolutely incredible. Now, you've been teaching for a long time, right?

**Lasson:** I've been teaching the University of Baltimore Law School for about 25 years.

**Smith:** How has this indoctrination affected the quality of the people who pass the LSAT's, get into law school, and come into your class? Has the quality of the students maintained itself? I don't want to get you into trouble with your current batch of students, but this indoctrination has had to have had some effect.

**Lasson:** It has had some effect, although I like to think that the people around here are sensitive enough to considerations of the First Amendment.

**Smith:** Right, but they went to four years of undergraduate school somewhere before they came to you.

**Lasson:** They did, and I'm sorry to say that not only at the University of Baltimore but most law schools around the country, law students are not exposed to the First Amendment. "Civil Liberties," or "The First Amendment" are elective courses. We have over 900 students. I only get about 50 a year in my "Civil Liberties" seminar. Just to give you an example, a few years ago, at the University of Baltimore, there was a politically incorrect cartoon published in the student newspaper. I could see how it might be offensive. I can describe it. It was a cartoon of a woman on a baker's table being powdered, and the caption underneath said, "In the United States, a woman is battered every fourteen seconds." Now you can say that that's sophomoric humor.

**Smith:** It's actually pretty funny.

**Lasson:** I think there was some chuckling, but there was an almost immediate and severe reaction by the women on campus, who not only called for the student cartoonist's censure, but called for his expulsion from school. There was a huge rally on our plaza outside our law school building within hours, where a lot of comments were made. The law school faculty, thank goodness, said we can't do anything, nor necessarily should we do anything, about this student. We can't expel him because of our freedom of speech and the idea of academic freedom. Students don't know what academic freedom means.

"Students don't know what academic freedom means."

**Smith:** Hey, what about the bottom line? Talk about common sense. How about the bottom line that such a cartoon is no big deal? It didn't bruise anybody. It didn't take away anybody's freedom. And humor, by the way, is in the eye or ear of the beholder.

**Lasson:** If you're offended by a cartoon like that, you speak out against it. You write a letter to the editor. Do something constructive.

**Smith:** Cartoons are meant to offend.

**Lasson:** Of course they are.

**Smith:** They're meant to offend somebody – to offend somebody on one side or the other of a political argument. That's what they're for.

**Lasson:** The First Amendment is designed to protect offensive speech. That's what the Founding Fathers had in mind.

"The First Amendment is designed to protect offensive speech. That's what the Founding Fathers had in mind."

**Smith:** Of course, but that's gone by the boards, for the most part. But, the whole way that language has been muddied, and the extent to which clear language has been exiled from classrooms and university discussions – everything seems to be obfuscation, deconstruction, and obscurantism. You can't make any sense out of most academic articles any more. I think you'd agree.

**Lasson:** That's for sure. I wrote an article that appeared in the *Harvard Law Review*, which of course is the oldest, and ostensibly among the best, law review in the country. That piece got me into a little bit of trouble with people who were upset that Harvard would actually publish this article. It was, in fact, an attack against law review scholarship, which, for the most part, is too long, and very hard to understand. So it's the content and the style of the articles. I found one article that had well over 4,000 footnotes. Can you imagine that? Four thousand footnotes for a single article?

**Smith:** Like some person is going to go poring through those.

**Lasson:** I came across some articles written by radical feminists that are completely unintelligible. When I took a little informal poll, I found that even the few feminists we have on the faculty – and we don't have any radicals – couldn't understand the articles themselves.

[Commercial Break]

**Smith:** The Ron Smith Radio Show here, rolling along towards six o'clock. We're talking with law professor and author Kenneth Lasson from the University of Baltimore. His book is "Trembling in the Ivory Tower." Interestingly, Ken, we have a caller who wants to ask really the bottom-line question on this, and so we'll do that right now. Here is Dennis. Dennis, you're on with Kenneth Lasson.

**Dennis:** Hi there, Kenneth. How are you today?

**Lasson:** Fine, thank you.

**Dennis:** I've got a large family – seven children – and two sons who are in college right now. One is at the University of Cincinnati, and the other is at a Christian college outside of Atlanta. The differences are appalling. The one at Cincinnati, I just can't believe some of the things he tells me about when he comes home. My question is, how can we stop this, as citizens? This is going to affect all of us down the road. What can we do about it now to help make some of the necessary changes?

"There's an enormous amount of waste in higher education, which, of course, contributes to ever increasing costs not just for families and students but also for governments and taxpayers."

**Lasson:** Excellent question. The first step towards correcting the problem is being aware of it. This caller is obviously aware. There are many parents who aren't aware of what's going on, and students themselves sometimes aren't aware of the chilling effect that these speech codes have on them. There's an enormous

amount of waste in higher education, which, of course, contributes to ever increasing costs not just for families and students but also for governments and taxpayers. I like to think that if common sense reigned, we would not have so many weird courses made out of so little substance.

**Smith:** But common sense doesn't reign. There's no sense that it's taking over the helm.

**Lasson:** Let me tell you this, Ron: At Hood College in Frederick, MD, a rule defines harassment as "any intentionally disrespectful behavior towards others." You mean to say that common sense would allow that to stand? Of course we want respect towards others. But we can't legislate it.

**Smith:** Sure they can. They do.

**Lasson:** We cannot enforce these rules. We can say there should be respect extended toward others, but any time these things are challenged in court, they always lose.

**Smith:** Let's face it: when they talk about enforcing civility, it's strictly a one-way street. What they basically want is for white guys to grovel and to be humble in the face of : a) people of color; or b) women. I should reverse that. That's what the civility is all about. They don't insist on any civility towards white guys. I guarantee you.

**Lasson:** Bucknell College recognizes a so-called "right to feel comfortable." How do you go about enforcing something like that?

**Smith:** What the hell is that? There's no right to feel comfortable. Being uncomfortable is a part of living. If you want to be comfortable, die. Go into the grave. Then you'll be comfortable.

"There's no right to feel comfortable. If you want to be comfortable, die. Then you'll be comfortable."

**Lasson:** It's the state of human beings. I like to feel comfortable all the time, too. As a matter of fact, I like to go out of my way to be civil towards others. And I don't like to insult anyone, or knowingly offend anyone. But, if it happens, then it happens. And it seems to me that you cannot enforce a rule against it. But you're right, I guess. Just by virtue of the fact that these codes exist, they are enforced.

**Smith:** Look, a few years ago, I had a conversation with a professor at the University of South Carolina, which you just mentioned. He is a political conservative – an old Southerner. He said something I'll never forget. He said that the plight of the conservative professor is almost exactly akin to the plight of the homosexual professor in the 1950s. That is, you have to stay in the closet. You associate with other like-minded professors, but you certainly don't let anyone else know about your opinions, which you don't openly state. That's a sad state of affairs.

**Lasson:** I agree, but ...

**Smith:** If homosexuals can come out of the closet, conservatives ought to be able to come out of the closet.

**Lasson:** Of course. But I'd like to believe that tenure means something in that regard, and if you have tenure, you are protected. Now, I feel that I can say pretty much whatever I want ...

**Smith:** You're protected, but you can be totally ostracized, which is the point.

**Lasson:** Yes, that can happen. When I wrote an article condemning radical feminists, I asked some of my colleagues if that would have a negative effect on me. And they said, "Only if you want to be hired elsewhere."

**Smith:** That's right. You're late in your career, so it doesn't matter. It's like a dying man can tell the truth.

**Lasson:** I want to say that I love Baltimore.

**Smith:** That's good. It loves you, too. I say that because ... why not?

**Lasson:** I'm a native. I have an excuse.

**Smith:** You say that a healthy sense of humor would be helpful in dealing with this oppression, this intellectual oppression. You didn't say intellectual oppression, but I did. But the problem is, very few of these people have any sense of humor on this at all, as far as I can discern.

**Lasson:** You may be right, but I find it very amusing, if not hilarious, that the *Oxford English Dictionary* now permits as alternatives to the spelling of "women" the words "wimmin" or "wymmin" – anything to avoid embodying the word "man."

**Smith:** You see, the great thing about militant feminists – and it's always struck me as particularly ironic, and kinda juicy in that way – is that the essence of their very strange kind of conclusions and dogma is that we are equal to men, but we are better than men. How can you be both equal and better? But they are, you see. You say that, for the most part, men, especially male academics – and I'm quoting from page 111 of your book – "must stop trembling at the feet of radical feminists and overcome the apathy or chauvinism or chivalry or whatever it is that causes them to avoid confronting big sisters' effrontery to the intellect. They should meet illogical arguments with the voice of reason." But I don't have time to confront all of these arguments.

**Lasson:** I wholeheartedly agree with what I wrote. It was pretty well stated. I must say that feminists come in different colors and breeds. I don't have much of a quarrel with feminists who want equal pay for equal work – the conservative feminists. But it's the radical feminists I take on. Also, it's interesting to me that people of different philosophies – let's say you, Ron, and me – don't agree on the issue of gun control. I'm in favor of it. You're not.

**Smith:** That's simply because you haven't rigorously examined your attitude.

**Lasson:** I wrote a long law review article on gun control recently, though no one will ever read it. But, get this: The University of Massachusetts at Amherst recently hired a design firm for thousands of dollars to help create a new mascot to replace the Minuteman. Why?

“The University of Massachusetts at Amherst recently hired a design firm for thousands of dollars to help create a new mascot to replace the Minuteman. Why? The Minuteman was holding a weapon.”

**Smith:** I know why. The Minuteman has a gun.

**Lasson:** Yes, the Minuteman was holding a weapon. Doing away with the mascot for that reason I find absurd. I might be in favor of gun control, but that’s absolutely absurd. I also find it funny.

**Smith:** Here we are in the age of the mass destruction of civilian populations by militaries. We’ve had jetliners hijacked and flown into our buildings. We’ve dropped 15,000 pound daisy cutters on human beings in retaliation. World War II killed between 50 and 55 million people. We live in a time of wholesale violence, and these idiot academicians think that they can change things by proscribing a historical reference to violence? It just drives you out of your mind.

**Lasson:** How about the excesses, which I consider to be trivial, in nicknaming university athletic teams? I do try to pepper my serious message in the book with some humor. The University of Alaska, for example, in paying homage to various endangered species, has as the new name of its sports teams “the Humpback Whales.”

**Smith:** The disabled didn’t like that, did they?

**Lasson:** Probably not.

**Smith:** “How dare you call yourself humpbacks?”

**Lasson:** My favorite is the mascot at the University of California at Santa Cruz, whose sports names are now called “The Banana Slugs.” Can you imagine the cheerleaders cheering those teams on?

**Smith:** “Go slugs.” You have some wonderful examples of what we referred to earlier – these inane speech codes. Kenneth Lasson our guest. His book is “Trembling in the Ivory Tower,” published by Bancroft Press. Go to [www.wbal.com](http://www.wbal.com), click on my name, scroll down, and see how you can get this book, which, by the way, is kinda funny. Ken Lasson has a good sense of humor. He doesn’t just talk the game. He writes it as well. Thank you, Ken Lasson.

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