

LETTERS *from Santa Fe*

St. John's College, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Winter 1992



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POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

by John Agresto

President, St. John's College

Santa Fe, New Mexico

"**L**earning is Good" is not only the motto of the college John Belushi attended in *Animal House*, it is also the simple and universal belief of virtually every American. If there is anything in which we have confidence and from which we all expect great things, it's education.

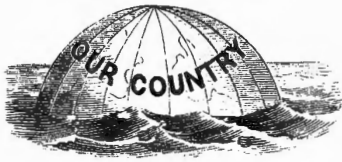
Nonetheless, every now and then there comes along something so disturbing, so stupid, that almost everyone is led to ask if higher education has not simply lost its marbles. Consider the view that education is not instructive, or informative, or liberating, but "political." Consider the notion that higher education really entails not free inquiry but the repression of some ideas and the imposition of others. Consider the position that says that certain words of ordinary speech -- take "freshmen," for instance -- are insensitive, offensive, or otherwise incorrect and should be stifled.

The last example is both trivial and telling at the same time. One of my daughters is now applying to college and a number of the questionnaires ask if she will be entering as a transfer student or as a "frosch." (I guess even colleges know that "freshpersons" would be unspeakably barbaric -- or is there a hint of a forbidden gender preference even in there?) When Political Correctness -- PC -- means that even ordinary, useful words are now to be banned, think of how incorrect *ideas* now fare on college campuses.

So, this issue of *Letters* is about the underpinnings and manifestations of PC at college today. If "all education is political," if what students do when they go to college is become exposed to the "advanced" political views of an academic class of tenured radicals intent on making converts rather than on enlightenment, then education is in deep trouble. If professors now aim (in my friend Edwin Delattre's phrase) not to liberate students' minds but to possess them, then liberal education has rotted from the inside out, and we all have reason to be furious.

Some of the articles and essays I've included in this issue of *Letters* review the incidents, the "highlights," if you will, of PC madness. In my opinion, the situation is both better and worse than they portray. Better because political correctness is not in any way a universal phenomenon in higher education. The instances of imposed speech codes, of students being sent for sensitivity re-education, of professors being shut up or disinvited from speaking their incorrect views are extensive, but finite. Anyone can name scores of good colleges where nothing like this occurs. Federal courts have stood by the principle of free inquiry even when universities have buckled. And even at the worst universities there are still students and teachers who remain unintimidated.

But in some ways the situation is worse, because political correctness is not a matter of adding up incidents, but a change in the nature and meaning of what education is. It



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A newsletter on higher education.

Published quarterly at St. John's College, Santa Fe.

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hasn't yet been accepted by the public, but it is now, in large measure, the intellectual norm in higher education that the very meaning of education is not what we thought it to be even as recently as ten years ago. For example, we had no trouble ten years ago talking about Great Books. Nevertheless, I've watched articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* go from speaking about Great Books, to "great" books, to "the so-called 'great books.'"

We had no trouble ten years ago believing that all of education should introduce students to the principles, the highlights, the works and discoveries of this their civilization. Now that's viewed as political and ethnocentric. And because it's viewed as "political," we're told that there's no way we can object to the use of the classroom as a propaganda pulpit since, after all, education has always been "political."

Finally, education seems to have dismissed as fiction the notion that people can go from opinion to knowledge and, concomitantly, that true knowledge is universal. Everywhere we see repeatedly trotted out the three main food groups of the academic mind: race, gender and class. So those categories we once thought to be accidental are now believed by many to be simply determinative. If this were true, it would mean that liberal education isn't possible.

The good news is that the views of the politically correct propagandists rest on false, perhaps even mindless, presuppositions. If (and it's a major *if*) these propositions can be rebutted freely on campus, things will get better. It is the attempt *not* to have them debated freely by the proponents of political correctness that leads them to call their opponents everything from right-wing to racist, sexist, and homophobic.

Interestingly enough, it is the humanities part of higher education (where political correctness has far more of a following than in science or engineering) that has been losing so many students. Predict-

ably, the response of the PC crowd is, no doubt for the first time in the academic lives of the vast majority of them, to make their courses *required*. So, after ridiculing the "canon" of old texts they institute a new canon -- a canon of courses on allowed opinion.

How can we know if PC thinking is prevalent on a college or university campus. Well, you can observe a lot just by looking, as Yogi Berra probably said. Look at college catalogues. Before you look for speech codes, look at what's required curricularly. If, rather than a year of foreign language, they require a course in Understanding Diversity, you've got a place where PC probably lives and prospers. If, rather than courses in the history of science or in philosophy they demand you take a course that falls under a "recognition and affirmation of difference," you've found another one. If, rather than a course in mathematics, they require some time spent with one of the sub-fields of the growing area of oppression studies, you've hit a PC jackpot.

What can be done? Plenty. If the prestigious liberal arts college your son or daughter was thinking about attending gives evidence that awareness, correctness, and sensitivity are how they interpret their missions, encourage a look elsewhere. If the English Department seems to think that all great literature is the product of the author's time and place, or power relationships, or the result of hidden but now exposable prejudices and biases, suggest courses in mathematics or geology. If the college thinks there's something wrong with teaching about the principles and works of this civilization-- that the study of Western Civilization has to be redirected or diluted--then suggest a major in medicine or business. And if someone you know is interested in a place where civility is expected but where there is no such thing as a view that cannot be examined or an idea that cannot be argued, ask me for one of our catalogues. ■

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AND BEYOND

Taken From Remarks by
Lynne V. Cheney

*Chairman, National Endowment
for the Humanities*

Through the ages, history, literature, and philosophy have been sources of immense satisfaction. But the humanities, particularly in Western civilization, have also been contentious; and that has certainly been the case in recent years. Today I want to talk about some of the reasons for this contentiousness, focusing particularly on "political correctness," or "p.c.," as it's sometimes called.

Political correctness typically involves faculty members trying to impose their views on others, and the results can be funny--particularly when the forces of political correctness try to identify ever new forms of offense. At a recent conference at Yale, for example, a distinguished professor of literature suggested that limiting the humanities to the study of humankind was a form of "speciesism." Speciesists, I have learned, are people who refer to their dogs and cats as "pets"--a term much too condescending to be politically correct. Or the speciesist is the person who talks about "wild" animals, when the proper description is "free roaming."

Smith College did its part to add to the English language when it recently warned the incoming class to beware not only of classism and ethnocentrism, but also of "lookism," a form of oppression that involves putting too much stock in personal appearance.

I thought I'd begin by telling a story. It begins in the spring of 1990 when the English Department at the University of Texas at Austin decided to revise its freshman composition program. Henceforth English 306, the required composition course taken by some 3000 freshmen, would focus on race and gender; and all classes would use the same text, an anthology called *Racism and Sexism*.

This book--the central required text for every section of freshman English--begins by defining racism as something only white people can be guilty of, and it tells students that sexism is unique to men. It goes on to portray the United States as a society so profoundly racist and sexist as to make a mockery of all our notions of liberty and justice. There are no comparisons with other cultures offered, no context to show how American ideals and practices actually stand up against those of the rest of the world--or the rest of history. The overwhelming impression that this textbook leaves is that every injustice of race or gender that human beings ever visited upon one another happened first and worst in this

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country. And the only way we can redeem ourselves, the textbook tells us, is to change fundamentally the way we produce and distribute wealth. Abandon capitalism, in other words.

Now, one might well think that the decision to focus English 306 on *Racism and Sexism* would cause some debate. For one thing, English 306 is a course intended to teach students how to write. Will they be better writers when they have stopped referring to poor people and instead speak of the "economically exploited," as one essay in the book instructs them to do?

Some people in the English Department did object to the plans to revise course 306, but they had little effect, until finally, Alan Gribben, a noted scholar of American literature, decided to go public. He sent letters to newspapers around the state, and citizens began to express their opinions about the English 306 revision. Fifty-six faculty members from across the university signed a "Statement of Academic Concern." The revised course was revised again so that English 306 would include a broader array of subjects, a diversity of viewpoints, and extensive instruction on how to analyze, argue, and write.

But Alan Gribben was unable to take much pleasure in this victory. He found himself vilified at campus rallies. He was the victim of hate mail, rumors, and anonymous late-night phone calls denouncing him as racist. Most members of the English Department stopped speaking to him, and they certainly didn't send graduate students his way or put him on departmental committees. Finally, in the spring of this year, he announced his intention to leave Texas, where he had been for seventeen years, and move to Montgomery, Alabama, where he will teach at a branch of Auburn University. "If I continued to live here," he told a newspaper in Texas, "I'd have to live under siege."

Several aspects of this story make it an almost classic example of what is happening on many campuses today. There is, first of all, the idea underlying the English

306 reform that it is perfectly all right--even desirable--to use the classroom and the curriculum for political purpose. This would once have been regarded as unethical. It was once thought that teachers who used the classroom to advance a political agenda were betraying their professional responsibilities. But on many campuses now faculty members have taken the political transformation of their students as a mission. They believe deeply in the radical critique offered by books like *Racism and Sexism* and see themselves furthering the cause of social justice by using the classroom and the curriculum to advance their views, and they go about their mission openly--indeed, proudly. "I teach in the Ivy League," a Princeton professor recently told the *New York Times*, "in order to have direct access to the minds of the children of the ruling classes."

There are people, myself among them, who object to making teaching and learning into the handmaidens of politics. There ought to be an attempt to get at the complex truth of our experience rather than imposing a single-minded, political interpretation on it. Yes, there has been oppression, but the history of Western civilization in the United States is also marked by the discovery and blossoming of remarkable concepts: individual rights, democracy, the rule of law. In 1989, before Tiananmen Square, the distinguished Chinese dissident Fang Li Zhi put it this way: "What we are calling for is extremely basic," he said, "namely, freedom of speech, press, assembly and travel. Concepts of human rights and democracy." He went on, "The founding principles of the U.S. government are a legacy [of the West] to the world."

I think of it as my great good fortune that I have opportunities to speak for the freedoms we enjoy. It is not only my right but my pleasure to dissent from university officials who decide, as officials at the University of Maryland did during the Persian Gulf War, that students cannot display the American flag. It might offend

someone, they said; and they relented only after students called in the media. It is not only my right but my pleasure to dissent from university officials who decide, as administrators at Rice University in Texas did, that students could not tie yellow ribbons to trees in the main academic quadrangle.

But I also recognize that I am able to express myself so freely because I am neither part of a university nor do I long for a university career. The views I hold represent dissent from the orthodoxy that reigns on our campuses, and such dissent is not very well tolerated there. That's the most significant part of Alan Gribben's story. He disagreed, and he was driven from the university.

About the time Gribben was resigning, I received in the mail a copy of the minutes of a University of Texas English department faculty meeting. The person who sent them to me was appalled at talk that had gone on in the meeting of "flushing out" other opponents of the revised English 306 syllabus. This student recognized the signs of the new McCarthyism, and he was afraid of becoming himself a victim of it. "Please let me remain anonymous," he wrote. "If it came out that I had written to you--or to someone else similarly disreputable--I wouldn't be [here] for long."

The new McCarthyism--like the old--often works its way by name-calling. People aren't labeled "communist" now, but "racist." Harvard professor Stephen Thernstrom found himself denounced that way. His offenses included using the word *Oriental* to describe the religion of 19th-century Asian immigrants and assigning students to read an article that questioned affirmative action. New York University professor Carol Iannone found herself called racist for writing an article in which she said that certain literary prizes have been awarded on the basis of race rather than literary merit. She was not the first to make such an assertion. Two of the five judges on the National Book Award fic-

tion panel had said the same thing. Nevertheless, Carol Iannone was said to be racist.

Sexual harassment is a phrase that has been similarly misused. In the politically correct world of the post-modern campus, it can, apparently, mean almost anything. At the University of Minnesota not long ago six members of the Scandinavian Studies Department were charged with sexual harassment by a group of graduate students. The complaint provided a long list of the professorial activities that had led to the charge: not greeting a student in a friendly enough manner, for example. Not teaching in a sensitive enough way. Not having read a certain novel. The charges against the professors were finally dropped, but not until the faculty members had incurred considerable expense and suffered deep, personal pain. One professor reported that it cost him \$2,000 to have a lawyer draft a response to the complaint. Another confessed that he wept when the charges were finally dropped.

On crucial issues, faculty members are silent. Perhaps apathy plays some part, but concern for reputation, concern of professional well-being--these, I suspect, play a role as well. The University of California at Berkeley has adopted an ethnic studies requirement to go into effect this fall. Now, this requirement was a major step for the university. There are no other required courses, and so instituting one represents a sharp break with practice. But on this crucial matter, only one-fifth of the eligible faculty members voted. The measure passed narrowly and it seems reasonable to suspect that among the 1,500 or so faculty members who didn't vote were some who had doubts.

What is the purpose of the ethnic studies requirement? Is it a response to political pressure? Are curricular requirements now to be set by interest groups who lobby for them? If, on the other hand, the aim is educational, then aren't there other courses that should be required? Perhaps a course in American history, one that would stress





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the democratic values we share and thus provide balance to the ethnic studies approach, which emphasizes differences that set us apart. Perhaps a course in world history that would prepare students for the decades ahead in which people of all countries and continents are going to be increasingly interdependent. Shouldn't a foreign language be required? If the goal is really to understand people different from ourselves, isn't foreign language study the most effective route? Surely among the 80 percent of faculty who didn't vote were some who had such questions, but the atmosphere on our campuses today doesn't encourage questions. And expressing doubts can be costly.

This is true not only of large universities, but of some smaller institutions too. Professor Christina Sommers of Clark University has been interviewing faculty and students across the country, and she has particularly striking interviews from Wooster College in Wooster, Ohio. At Wooster, the textbook *Racism and Sexism*--the textbook that the University of Texas finally rejected--is required reading for all freshmen. Or freshpersons, I should say. The term freshman is forbidden at Wooster. If you use it, one student warned professor Sommers, you could be taken before the Judiciary Board.

Another student described the seminar required of all first-year students. "Difference, Power, and Discrimination," it is called, with the subtitle "Perspectives on Race, Gender, Class, and Culture." According to the student, the seminar resembled "a reeducation camp" more than a "university program." "Now we know," he said, "that when we read the Declaration of Independence that it's not about equality and inalienable rights--but it is a sexist document written by white male elites."

Faculty, who are evaluated on their "gender sensitivity," said they are afraid to speak out. According to one, to do so would be "suicidal." Another said, "I am getting old and tired and I do not want to get fired. Until there is an atmosphere of

tolerance, I do not want to go on the record." Promised anonymity, he noted, "What you have here, on the one hand, are a lot of students and faculty who are very skeptical, but they are afraid to voice their reservations."

The point of opposing political correctness is not to silence those who advance it, but to open their views to challenge and debate. This often happens when p.c. enters the larger world, but it will not happen on our campuses, I fear, unless those of us who live in the larger world help it to happen.

When it is time for us to help our children choose a college, we should ask hard questions about which campuses not only allow but encourage a diversity of opinion. When it comes time for us to make contributions as alumni, we should ask how well the college we attended is doing at making sure all sides are heard. Those who serve on boards of trustees should encourage discussion of free speech itself. Does political correctness reign on this campus?

The *New York Times* reported on its front page about a group, mostly English professors, who are uniting to prove that political correctness is nothing more than the product of overheated conservative imaginations. But they are going to have a very hard time maintaining that view. There are too many examples of p.c. at work, powerful examples like that of Alan Gribben. And there are people from across the political spectrum--not just conservatives but liberals as well--coming together now to defend free speech on our campuses.

The stakes are high. The issue here is whether the rising generation of Americans will come to understand what free inquiry is--and how it can sometimes be hard--and how it is always necessary if truth and justice are to have a chance. ■

THE POLITICAL SEDUCTION OF THE UNIVERSITY

Taken from - *Campus - America's Student Newspaper*

by **Debra Cermele**

SENIOR - THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

There is no such thing as "great" literature.

Or so Professor Lennard Davis instructed the class at the beginning of his University of Pennsylvania "British Novel" course last spring. "Harlequin Romances," Professor Davis said, "are part of the same continuum as the novels we are going to be reading." Although none of the students voiced disagreement, he proceeded to spend the entire semester saving them from the "oppression of [the] imperialized discourse" to which they had supposedly been exposed. His own book *Resisting Novels* clearly underlines what he teaches his class: "We can no longer smugly think of the novel as the culmination of the human spirit."

Instead of analyzing the quality of the English classics as works of art, the class investigated the ways gender, class and sexuality influenced political power within these novels. Rather than being a critical and comparative examination of the ideas that shaped Western thinking, Professor Davis's lectures were sessions for him to preach politics and sociology to a captive audience. For example, Joseph Conrad's Kurtz and Marlowe, Professor Davis insisted, were involved in a homoerotic relationship. Frankenstein's monster, whatever Mary Shelley may herself have believed, represented her "repressed female sexuality."

Whenever students tried to raise issues more relevant to the study of English literature as *literature*, they were dismissed with indifference. Professor Davis was eager, however, to engage students in class discussions on such topics as a *Daily Pennsylvanian* columnist's ramblings on classroom behavior of women and the fact that the film *Glory* was produced and directed by white males.

Unfortunately, this example is not atypical of what many college students are experiencing at most of the nation's universities, particularly in humanities departments. Nowadays, the prevailing wisdom dictates that the purpose of a professor is not to enhance the critical ability and knowledge of the next generation, but to transform society in revolutionary ways. And what better way is there to accomplish this than by subtly charging humanities discussions with ideas that are, at root, political? Many humanities courses are lectures that affirm, as fact, dubious ideas that are in reality at the center of debate not only within the humanities, but within the natural and social sciences. An overview of questions that tries to be fair to all sides is simply not presented in these classes, and many students are therefore unaware that essential debates even exist. Why else would no one dispute Professor Davis's contention that "views of gender are socially constructed in such a way that we think they are natural?" Indeed, there was no reason to dispute such a "fact." They had heard it many times before in many other classrooms.

The desire to jettison the study of Western culture or at least to depreciate its importance is also trendy. The study of the history of Western ideas is now regarded as nothing more than the "hegemonic culture" seeking to regenerate itself, to the exclusion of "marginalized" groups. (This "hegemony" is comprised of white European males, now often handily referred to as "whitemales.") According to a column by Richard

WHO ARE MARX AND FREUD,
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EUROPEAN MALES?

Bernstein entitled "Academia's Liberals Defend Their Carnival of Canons Against Bloom's 'Killer B's,'" the new scholars hold that the ultimate purpose of literature is to reflect the sociological perspective of the author: "[These] scholars particularly scorn the idea that certain great works of literature have absolute value or represent some eternal truth. Just about everything, they argue, is an expression of race, class, or gender."

A sprinkling of Marx and Gramsci completes the justification for the politicization of the academy, the establishment of a new curriculum dictated mainly by political concerns. If culture exists only to maintain an unjust balance between classes, races, and genders, then the "marginalized" must rise up and eradicate the oppression they experience from the study of "whitemale" culture. Thus, the academy must toss out what the new proponents call the "narrow, outdated interpretation of the humanities and of culture itself" and welcome with open arms the writings of all of those who claim to have been marginalized by "whitemales." (This practice has been graced by the politically correct with the euphemism "multiculturalism.") Since literary quality is no longer relevant, it is sufficient, indeed required, for texts to reflect the extent to which the writer has been oppressed by the dominant culture.

These new ideologues are actually displaying a profound hypocrisy in three important ways. In the first place, those who have dedicated their academic careers to destroying the "canon" have themselves become canonical. The fact that students now speak in the jargon of post-Modernist, neo-Marxist, or feminist critical theory reveals that a new orthodoxy has merely replaced the old.

In addition, if they really were advocates, as they maintain, of a relativistic view of culture, they would not be seeking to deprecate the study of Western culture. For a relativist, nothing has any more objective value than anything else; it thus

should not matter which culture American students are studying. Yet these scholars seek to dissuade students from examining the classics. That is, they are imposing value judgements while denying that value judgements can be made.

Third, by summarily dismissing Western ideas as the political rationalizations of "Dead White European Males" (DWEM's, as they are now affectionately called), the scholars are perpetrating the worst kind of hypocrisy: they are simultaneously making use of specifically that which they seek to reject. That is, the interest in studying other cultures is a specifically *Western* idea. Historically, almost all other world cultures have proven to be singularly closed and xenophobic. The ideas of seeking to find value in other ways of life--which these scholars maintain is unique to their own philosophy--emerged only through the evolution of Western civilization.

Moreover, ideas such as feminism and post-Modern criticism, which the scholars like to pretend are so new, come directly from those very same "DWEMs" who are vilified by the new Establishment. Who are Marx and Freud, Foucault and Derrida, if not dead, white, European males? Even those feminists who hail Simone de Beauvoir know that Sartre was her main influence. However, these scholars conveniently ignore the essential importance of Western ideas to their very own ideologies.

There is no disputing the wisdom of acquiring a knowledge of other cultures. Before it is possible to determine the universals of human nature, it is necessary to examine as broad a spectrum of perspectives as is possible. However, it is of little value merely to study isolated

examples of other cultures in a vacuum while neglecting the history of ideas that formed one's own culture. The student then has nothing with which to compare new values, ideas, and achievements. For an American, what would studying the *I Ching* mean without an understanding of Western ideas?

Before abandoning the study of Western culture, academics should consider that by rejecting the study of works that universalize the human experience, they deny that there is a fundamental basis from which different cultures can build a mutual understanding of circumstantial differences. In fact, by denying any common ground, they perpetuate the notion that individuals of different races, sexes, ethnicities, sexual preference, etc. have not only superficial diversity but built-in differences that preclude any concept of a human experience. What is this but thinly disguised racism and sexism?

The ultimate purpose of a university should be to engage students in a dialogue of ideas, with the aim of understanding the truth about and problems of the human condition. If today's students are exposed only to the new trend in academia, the only ideas they will

absorb is that they themselves are either victims or perpetrators of oppression. Instead of gaining a knowledge of human nature, they will only come to "understand" the separatist doctrine that ethnic minorities and genders have irrevocably incompatible mentalities. They will come to "realize" that only people with the same genitals and melanin concentrations can understand each other. The new Establishment has declared that its goal is to change society. Unfortunately, it may do just that. ■



ON DEPOLITICIZING THE UNIVERSITY

by **Robert Weissberg**

Perhaps only the politically masochistic would want to hear for the hundredth time all the stories of imposed speech codes, required courses on racism, and the bizarre Newspeak world of "equal opportunity" employment. Only administrators seem compelled to deny that the Left has successfully invaded and colonized university life. Disagreements presently concern only such questions as "how much?" and "what are the consequences?"

Opposition to politicization seems as self-evidently correct and defensible as the programs of the politically correct are wrongheaded. Undoing the politicization has thus become the rallying cry in the battle against the tenured radicals, the deconstruction workers, and the pandering administrators.

Opposition to the "politicization of the university" is an appealing call to arms. It permits us "reach out" and be diverse. Nearly everyone from the religious right to the Marxist left is susceptible to the plea that the university should not be an incarnation of the communist-run agitprop schools of the 1930s. Like wartime stories of atrocities, tales of introductory English courses celebrating the virtues of feminist environmental lesbianism are good for enlistments.

The Limits of Anti-Politicization

As a political slogan, the battle against the politicization of university life clearly has the tactical and psychological virtues of comfortable legitimacy. Easy politics. Unfortunately, it will not prove very serviceable during the battle. It may even be a delusional disorder.

First, it puts us on difficult-to-defend grounds, a situation reminiscent of when priests preached that the purpose of sex was procreation, not recreation. Deep down, it is not convincing. We have all confronted the leftish charge that all education (and all everything, for that matter) is at core political. From a practical perspective, we must accept that there is enough truth in this claim that to maintain the polar opposite puts one in an untenable position. When the Left returns our fire with the charge of hypocrisy they

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will score points and we honestly cannot wiggle out of it.

If we define politics in the broadest possible way, even the natural sciences such as physics and chemistry have lurking within them a conception of the world constructed on some obscure politically derived premise of order and causation. In my own field of political science I cannot imagine teaching an antiseptically politically clean course despite every precaution. A disagreeable outsider will surely detect a bias in the readings, a tendency to give some perspectives greater class time, and other manifestations of propagating a political faith. Political preaching can be minimized, we can warn students, we can bring in visitors to add balance, but it is foolish to believe that it could be eliminated altogether. It is a situation akin to food purity--we cannot eliminate food impurities so we set minimum acceptable standards for mouse droppings and insect parts.



How Is the Battle To Be Fought?

The real battle is about substance, not the desirability of political neutrality. Race-based admission is wrong not because it allows group conflict to intrude into the sheltered world of ideas; it is wrong because it debases the idea of individuality and the principle of merit. Teaching freshmen that all literature is oppression is not a political crime, it is a crime against clear thinking and the purpose of education. Compulsory sensitivity training is wrong not because it permits only one portion of the political spectrum access to students; it is wrong because it smacks of totalitarian thought control. Rampant multiculturalism is wonderful only if one is a fan of ethnocentrism and domestic violence.

To be blunt, opposition to the PC-Left must stop hiding behind the polite and high-sounding call for depoliticizing the university. There must be a willingness to defend positions on substance. If some-

thing is bad historical analysis, it should be called bad historical analysis, not the intrusion of trendy leftist politics into historical analysis (though it may be that, too). There should be no shame and embarrassment in saying that some things are right and others wrong. When Western civilization is attacked by delusional wannabe third-worlders, it is pointless to demand an end to the politicization of the curriculum--one must be willing to say that it is a better form of civilization. Reluctance to defend in public what should be defended is to ultimately lose the war. We must not become like those highly assimilated German Jews who refused to defend themselves because "it might cause trouble."

This coming out of the closet will focus the battle. Rather than fight unproductive though psychologically safe skirmishes over side issues, the core evils will be addressed. Affirmative action will be opposed because it violates principles, not because it brings politics to the university. Deconstructionism is not wrong because it interjects politics into literature, it is wrong because it rests on nonsensical assumptions and yields gibberish, not insight. Until this occurs, combating the PC-Left will resemble little more than disjointed civilian resistance to a well-organized occupying army--perhaps some sabotage, a little sniping and non-cooperation, but nothing that amounts to more than a nuisance. ■

*Robert Weissberg and I were at Cornell together over 20 years ago. We lost track of each other until last year, when **Letters** appeared in his mailbox. This article is taken from a longer piece sent to me just before we went to press. If anyone cares to write Bob (Department of Political Science, University of Illinois, Urbana - Champaign, Urbana Illinois 61801-3696), a large packet of essays will no doubt follow - J.A.*

WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE ?

Once we accept the idea that higher education entails opening rather than closing minds, we are still confronted with what, if any, the appropriate limits of speech and action might be. These two essays, with different answers, are the best I could find on the topic. - J.A.

UNIVERSITIES

MUST DEFEND

FREE SPEECH

by **Benno C. Schmidt Jr.**

The most serious problems of freedom of expression in the U. S. today exist on our campuses. Freedom of thought is in danger from well-intentioned but misguided efforts to give values of community and harmony a higher place than freedom. The assumption seems to be that the purpose of education is to induce "correct" opinion rather than to search for wisdom and to liberate the mind.

On many campuses, perhaps most, there is little resistance to growing pressure to suppress and to punish, rather than to answer, speech that offends notions of civility and community. These campuses are heedless of the oldest lesson in the history of freedom, which is that offensive, erroneous and obnoxious speech is the price of liberty. Values of civility, mutual respect and harmony are rightly prized within the university. But these values must be fostered by teaching and by example, and defended by expression. When the goals of harmony collide with freedom of expression, freedom must be the paramount obligation of an academic community.

Much expression that is free may deserve our contempt. We may well be moved to exercise our own freedom to counter it or to ignore it. But universities cannot censor or suppress speech, no matter how obnoxious in content, without violating their justification for existence. Liberal education presupposes that a liberated mind will strive for the courage and composure to face ideas that are fraught with evil, and to answer them. To stifle expression because it is obnoxious, erroneous, embarrassing, not instrumental to some political or ideological end is--quite apart from the invasion of the rights of others--a disastrous reflection on the idea of the university. It is to elevate fear over the capacity for a liberated and humane mind.

Acts of Suppression

The freedom of speakers on our campuses goes to the heart of academic freedom. However bizarre, off-beat, or outrageous a speaker may be, however compelling the concerns of protesters, the right to speak is as fundamental an issue of principle as any

Mr. Schmidt is president of Yale.

This article is adapted from a longer speech delivered at New York's 92nd Street Y.

*The Wall Street Journal,
Monday, May 6, 1991*



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This is why I believed so strongly that essential principles of academic freedom were violated at Yale, though not by Yale, earlier this year when protesters, for the most part not from Yale, shouted down Health and Human Services Secretary Louis Sullivan and effectively prevented him from making himself heard to a group that had invited him to speak.

A more vexing question of freedom of expression concerns the actual use of university authority to suppress freedom. This is the most serious example of confusion and failure of principle in university governance today. It reminds us how frequently in history threats to free expression have come not from tyranny but from well-meaning persons of little understanding.

There is no more important line drawn in our entire corpus of First Amendment law than the line between threats and fighting words--which may be appropriately punished--and offensive speech generally. For if concerns about dangers of violence are permitted to balloon into justification for punishing any expression that offends, a vague and unpredictable engine of suppression is loosed. Free expression is lost. Any statement that might give offense is at risk.

Yet in many universities this is the critical line that has been blurred or abandoned in the effort to create a civil, inoffensive community. Some of the nation's finest universities have empowered groups of faculty and students with roving commissions to punish offensive speech.

At the University of Michigan, before judicial intervention, persons were subject to discipline for any statement that "stigmatizes or victimizes ... on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, creed, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, handicap, or Vietnam-era veteran status ... that creates an intimidating, hostile, or demeaning environment for educational pursuits." A pamphlet that listed examples of proscribed speech in-

cluded "a male student makes remarks in class like 'women just aren't as good in this field as men.' " Another: "Your student organization sponsors a comedian who slurs Hispanics." So along with utterly boundless options of offensiveness, we have guilt by association. A federal judge threw this out.

The University of Wisconsin promulgated a prohibition of "racist or discriminatory comments ... that intentionally demean the race, sex, religion [etc.] of any person or persons ... and create a hostile or demeaning environment for education." Its disciplinary code indicates that "jokes that have the purpose of making the educational environment hostile" are an example of the sort of thing that is barred.

The University of Pennsylvania prohibits any comments that "stigmatize or victimize individuals on the basis of race [etc.] and that create an ... offensive academic, living, or work environment." The University of Connecticut had prohibitions on speech that included "conduct causing alarm by making personal slurs." The ban extended to "inappropriately directed laughter, inconsiderate jokes ... and conspicuous exclusions [of others] from conversation." This too was narrowed after a judicial challenge.

In the recent Brown case that has received such widespread attention, press accounts might justify the view that the student who was punished had directly and intentionally threatened other individuals with violence. This can surely be punished. The problem is that the Brown rule under which discipline was imposed forbids students from subjecting "another person, group, or class of persons to inappropriate, abusive, threatening, or demeaning action based on race, [etc.]."

Under this wide-open formulation, a group of students, faculty and administrators can decide after the fact when speech should be treated as "inappropriate action." Thus, although the facts of the particular case may well have been within the very narrow prohibition of threats that

free-speech theory and practice have long accepted as legitimate, the rule that authorized this discipline seems vastly wider, indeed almost boundless.

The chilling effects on speech of the vagueness and open-ended nature of many universities' prohibitions of offensive speech are compounded by the fact that these codes are typically enforced by faculty and students who commonly assert that vague notions of community are more important to the academy than freedom of thought and expression. Such a view is disastrous to the independence and creativity of the academic mission.

A sad footnote to this erosion is the complacency with which many who ought to know better are responding, or failing to respond. An editorial in the *New York Times* took the position that because Brown is a private university, and therefore not bound by the First Amendment, it need not treat free expression as a paramount value and should therefore balance the needs of freedom and the needs of civility on campus.

This is profoundly wrong. A university ought to be more devoted to freedom than the larger society, which has other goals that compete with the search for truth. This search is the paramount end of the university, its reason for existence. Moreover, universities have a special capacity to answer obnoxious speech. The communal character of the university, the fact that it is replete with opportunities for expression, the capacity of students, faculty, deans and presidents to answer forcefully and promptly, all present manifold opportunities to counter offensive expression. The current wave of suppression is largely directed at expression that is said to demean racial minorities, women, gays and lesbians, religious groups, persons with disabilities, and other groups that tend to be victimized by ugly stereotypes. Racism and other such prejudices are antithetical to the academic mission of the university, because the search for truth requires that each individual in the uni-

versity be judged on the basis of his or her individual academic merits. But it does not follow that the university should suppress any speech that can plausibly be thought to be racist. A university ought to be the last place where people are inhibited by fear of punishment from expressing ignorance or even hate, so long as others are left free to answer.

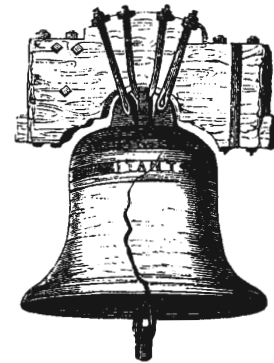
I have often heard the argument lately that uninhibited freedom of speech was somehow more appropriate in the days when our universities were more homogeneous, while today's far greater racial, religious and cultural diversity call for controls in the interest of harmony and community. That so many people of good will would make such an argument shows how far we have drifted from our confidence in and commitment to freedom. I can only imagine what Madison or Holmes would have thought of this inversion of the theory of free expression. It is precisely societies that are diverse, pluralistic, and contentious that most urgently need freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

Not the Answer

The courts have begun to see bits of the problem that surface occasionally in legislation, and by and large have reacted with justified bewilderment. But the last place universities should look for protection of freedom is the courts. Private universities are in most cases not covered by the First Amendment because their actions are not those of the state. And judges will properly tend to approach issues of freedom within universities with much deference based on long traditions of academic autonomy.

Nor does the answer to these problems lie in federal legislation. Rep. Henry Hyde, with the support of the ACLU, has proposed a statute that would subject private colleges and universities that receive federal funds to the strictures of the First Amendment. This is well-intentioned but

very dangerous. The political process is too prone to agitation about various sorts of speech to be a wise and stable source of enduring principle. If freedom of thought on campus is to be protected, the universities themselves must summon up the clarity of purpose to defend the principles of liberty on which the academic mission must rest. ■



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SAY THE RIGHT THING ... OR ELSE

by

**Judith Martin and
Gunther Stent**

*The New York Times,
Wednesday, March 20, 1991*

Can the university, with its special trust of protecting free speech, be hampered by the restrictions of civility? What kind of a frill is etiquette, anyway, for those in the noble pursuit of truth?

These questions are raised whenever a loose-tongued student turns publicly nasty. When Brown University recently expelled such a student, many argued that all restrictions of free speech are intolerable in the university. Brown's president, Vartan Gregorian, agreed with that premise and neatly reclassified the offensive speech as behavior.

But the premise is wrong.

The special trust of a university is not to foster unlimited speech: It is to foster unlimited inquiry. And totally free speech inhibits rather than enhances the free exchange of ideas.

The law cannot restrict such speech without violating our constitutional rights. But etiquette, the extra-legal regulative system that seeks to avert conflict before it becomes serious enough to call in the law, can and does. You may have a legal right to call your mother a slut, but you won't if you know what's good for you.

Nor could you convince many people that the controversy that such remarks are likely to provoke will lead to advances in knowledge.

The university needs to enforce rules banning speech that interferes with the free exchange of ideas. It must protect the discussion of offensive topics but not the use of offensive manners. It must enable people freely to attack ideas but not one another.

Education is impossible without the order that prevents intimidation and mayhem. When children first enter school, they must be taught to sit still, refrain from taunting their classmates, show respect for their teacher and wait their turn to talk, or they will never be able to learn.

To those who find it horrifying that the university should allow a lesser degree of free speech than the law permits, it might be pointed out that the law itself restricts free speech in its pursuit of judicial truth. Try saying some of the things in a courtroom that the law will protect your right to say in a barroom.

Jurisprudence uses etiquette in courtroom procedure, not only to restrict speech but to impose standards of dress, comportment and forms of address--matters over which universities have long since abandoned authority.

Legislators and diplomats also know the value of keeping speech within the bounds of civility. The parliamentary etiquette book, "Robert's Rules of Order," proscribes "disorderly words" and forbids speakers "to arraign the motives of a member" during strongly worded debate. "It is not the man, but the measure, that is the subject of debate," decrees its section on "Decorum."

The rougher the conflict, the more manners are needed. Only when insults, harassment, disrespect and obscenity are banned can people engage in truly substantive argument.

Of course it is also a personal insult to call someone a racist or sexist. Incivility is no more acceptable in defense than in attack.

Rebuttal, however, is a staple of open debate. Members of the university community should always have the opportunity to attack ideas--but not to attack people. The university should be obliged to provide a forum for anyone who wants to argue for or against an idea, provided the argument is made in good faith and a polite manner.

This standard of academic etiquette must be required not only in the classroom and lecture hall but wherever the community of scholars gathers--residence halls, dining commons, recreational facilities. Invective, whether spoken or conveyed through posters or graffiti, in the classroom or in the community, is detrimental to rational debate, to which universities are dedicated. ■

ATTACK IDEAS, NOT PEOPLE

Judith Martin writes the Miss Manners syndicated column. Gunther Stent is chairman of the department of molecular and cell biology at the University of California at Berkeley.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

The creation of an Institute for the Study of Eastern Classics on the Santa Fe campus

St. John's College has been awarded a grant of \$207,320 from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation. The grant will be used in the creation of an Institute for the Study of Eastern Classics on the Santa Fe campus. The institute will offer a one-year, graduate level, non-credit, certificate program in the classic texts of Eastern civilization.

In addition to studying the major works of China and India, students also will receive a full year of language studies in Chinese or Sanskrit. The institute will be staffed by St. John's tutors.

We have always taken Great Books seriously at St. John's, and this institute is a way for us to take seriously the classic texts, the literature and the philosophy of the East.

Inquiries should be directed to:
James Carey, Director
Institute for the Study of Eastern Classics,
St. John's College
1160 Camino Cruz Blanca
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501-4599

Phone: (505) 988-4361

We are very grateful to the W. H. Brady
Foundation for underwriting this issue of
LETTERS from Santa Fe

St. John's College Receives 3.1 Million Dollar Trust

St. John's College recently received the largest single gift in its history.

Mara and Charles Robinson of Santa Fe, New Mexico have established a trust that has resulted in a 3.1 million dollar gift to St. John's.

The Robinsons have been actively involved with St. John's College since 1982 when Mrs. Robinson enrolled in the Graduate Institute on the Santa Fe campus. She graduated in 1983 with a master's degree in liberal education. Between 1984 and 1990 Mrs. Robinson served on the St. John's College Board of Visitors and Governors and has since continued her participation in various aspects of the college.

"My experience as a student in St. John's College and as a member of its Board of Visitors and Governors has made my respect for St. John's grow through the years. My husband and I believe strongly in the program and ideals of St. John's and our support expresses our confidence in its leadership as well as its goals. We hope that future students will profit from its educational program and enjoy as stimulating an intellectual experience as I have throughout my studies at St. John's."

This gift is equal to approximately 10% of the total current St. John's endowment. Needless to say, we are not only grateful, we are overwhelmed by the Robinson's generosity. - J.A.



St. John's College Summer Seminars for Adults 1992

This summer St. John's College offers six, week-long seminars and one workshop in Landscape Drawing. Participants may enroll in one seminar each week for 1, 2, or 3 weeks. Each seminar is limited to 18 participants.

Week One - July 19th - 25th

Dante - Purgatory

or

Novels of the Southwest

Willa Cather - *Death Comes to the Archbishop*

Rudy Anaya - *Bless Me Ultima*

Scott Momaday - *The Ancient Child*

Week Two - July 26th - August 1st

De Tocqueville - Democracy in America

or

Opera

Mozart - *Don Giovanni*

Strauss - *Der Rosenkavalier*

Week Three - August 2nd - 8th

**Shakespeare - Merchant of Venice,
As You Like It, Twelfth Night**

or

Dostoevski - The Devils

or

Landscape Drawing - Workshop

For information write: St. John's College
Summer Seminars - C, 1160 Camino Cruz Blanca
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501-4599

Faculty Position - Kenyon College

Kenyon College has a course of study called the Integrated Program in Humane Studies (IPHS). It is a multi-year, team-taught course based on the classic texts of European and other world cultures. They are now looking for a program director whose duties would include teaching, curriculum development, administration, and leadership of an ongoing faculty seminar. A doctorate, teaching excellence and scholarly achievement are prerequisites. A cover letter, vita, examples of scholarly work and three letters of reference should be directed to Academic Dean's Office, Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, 43022, by February 28, 1992.

PROFILE

Founded:

Established in 1696 in Annapolis, Maryland, as King William's School and chartered in 1784 as St. John's College. Great Books Program adopted 1937. Second campus in Santa Fe opened in 1964.

Curriculum:

An integrated, four-year, arts and science program based on reading and discussing, in loosely chronological order, the Great Books of Western civilization. The program requires four years of foreign language, four years of mathematics, three years of laboratory science, and one year of music.

Approach:

Tutorials, laboratories, and seminars requiring intense participation replace more traditional lectures. Classes are very small. Student/faculty ratio is 8:1. St. John's is independent and non-sectarian.

Degree Granted:

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts.

Student Body:

Enrollment is limited to about 400 students on each campus. Current freshman class made up of 55% men and 45% women, from 30 states and several foreign countries. Fifty-seven percent receive financial aid. Students may transfer between the Santa Fe and Annapolis campuses.

Alumni Careers:

Education - 21%, Business - 20%, Law - 10%, Visual and Performing Arts - 9%, Medicine - 7%, Science and Engineering - 7%, Computer Science - 6%, Writing and Publishing - 5%.

Graduate Institute:

The Graduate Institute in Liberal Education is an interdisciplinary master's degree program based on the same principles as the undergraduate program. Offered on both campuses year-round. Readers of the Newsletter may be especially interested in applying for our summer session. For more information please contact Nancy Buchenauer, Director of the Graduate Institute, (505) 982-3691 ext. 249.

LETTERS from Santa Fe

St. John's College

1160 Camino Cruz Blanca

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