

Exposure killed the politically correct

This last year saw the nationwide explosion of the political correctness movement, with the University playing a starring role in the drama. Last fall, before p.c. claimed the front cover of *Time* and *Newsweek*, this budding controversy was the subject of many campus lectures.

Before this time, everybody was trying to get a handle on another new buzzword on campuses across the country — multiculturalism — and particularly its manifestation in the controversial packet for a freshman composition class, English 306. In those early days before any serious discussion could begin, the participants had to convince themselves that they weren't these insidious right-wing conspirators as portrayed by the politically correct.

One speech given by one of the few brave professors opposing the movement consisted of little more than a defensive plea. He said that simply having reservations about the E306 material didn't mean their views were a couple of steps shy of fascism. After all, if the head of the English Department himself describes those opposing E306 as right-wingers, there's got to be some truth to the charge, right?

Since then, professors no longer need be so defensive. They now have a loaded word of their own to describe the unpleasant tactic of the radical left labeling their views as racist, homophobic, etc: political correctness. Political and religious commentator Richard Neuhaus has these optimistic words regarding the light being shed on the p.c. phenomenon, "The good news is that more people are paying attention to the bad news." He adds, "In the past year there has been an encouragingly widespread discussion of the role played by p.c. opinion on American campuses." Public opinion appears to have turned against the politically correct via exposure.

The real conflict, though, appears to have subsided. Those who at first wrote sober editorials, like John Leo of *U.S. News and World Report*, now feel confident enough to write light-hearted pieces making fun of the movement. Last week, for example, Leo suggested translat-



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ing traditional words into acceptable p.c. sensitive language. The new verbal order would tell us that if the past is divided into history and herstory, the study of humanity should be called his'n'herstory.

Leo also suggests that some oppressive, insensitive movie titles could also use some revising: "Old Yeller — Senior Animal Companion of Color, *Three Blind Mice — A Triad of Visually Impaired, Wall-Dwelling Protectors* or *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs — One of the Monoculturally Oppressed Womyn Confronts the Vertically Challenged.*"

Multiculturalist rhetoric with its contrived, vacuous adjectives give critics ammunition to attack another of its tenets: the belief that absolutes don't exist and any value claim is simply an expression of a particular culture's arbitrary priorities.

With this in mind, we could imagine creative relativists bringing more movie titles into the p.c. fold: *The Ten Commandments — Israelocentric Ethical Preferences* or *Holocaust — Naziocentric Ethical Preferences.*

But before we allow the morass of articles on the p.c. movement to lie forgotten at the bottom of news magazines that we can't bring ourselves to throw away, we should remember that the multiculturalism and p.c. conflict is part of the larger debate on racism, which is far from fading.

The multiculturalists have lost this skirmish. Once a term that the left used to describe socially conscious policies, politically correct is now a pejorative. No amount of John Leo-style sensitivity rewording will change the negative connotations it implies. Politically charged administrators and faculty, who only last year openly voiced their indignation at white males

and Western Civilization on campus rallies, now shy away from the press.

This new reticence is a direct result of the rest of society actually reading what they're saying and not liking it. Also, books like Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* have chronicled the chilling effects of p.c. in action so as to preclude any claim that multiculturalism is an inherently good thing.

But the loss can be attributed to the zealotry, not necessarily to the principles behind the misguided enthusiasm. Likewise, many were sympathetic to the values of Falwell's Moral Majority of the '70s though they were uncomfortable with the politicized pastor's methods. In other words, the right shouldn't rub it in that the left was, in effect, "caught" at being overzealous.

Healthy debate can resume if both sides change their posture. (But the left should make the first conciliatory move, since, in playground terms, they started it.) So the question of the hour is: after their apparent defeat, what is the left going to do to take the debate the necessary step further? One can only hope it won't be more of the same foolish tactic that earned the p.c. label in the first place.

Last fall before the p.c. avalanche, a philosophy professor wrote a guest column that, though devoid of argument, did succeed in portraying opposition to the E306 course as a well-orchestrated fascist conspiracy. In this paranoid diatribe he made enough adjectives out of the name "McCarthy" to do any multicultural revisionist proud. They could just as easily continue with this lazy form of "argument" by portraying defeat as the result of an *even bigger* conspiracy, which the corporate media joined.

But wouldn't it be nice if the multiculturalists responded to the legitimate charges of their opponents without a single reference to their class, skin color, gender, sexual orientation. Don't hold your breath.

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