

# 'Dictatorship of Virtue' rehashes old multicultural platforms

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The endlessly narcissistic denizens of the University have a bottomless appetite for movies and books about themselves. How else to explain *Slacker* and its laughable spinoff book? So UT students will probably turn immediately to Chapter 9 of Richard Bernstein's *Dictatorship of Virtue* in the manner of junior high brats seeking out the dirty parts of an Erik Van Lustbader novel (or of social work professors digesting *The Bell Curve*).

In his most recent work, Bernstein, the national cultural correspondent for *The New York Times*, chronicles the history and anatomy of (ho-hum) leftist political indoctrination under the guise of "multiculturalism" in higher education.

Chapter 9, *The Battle of Texas*, is an engaging discussion of the fracas surrounding the UT English Department's attempt to pirate English 306, a freshman composition course the department had previously shown precious little interest in. For those blissfully ignorant of that sorry story, the short version is that the English Department proposed to restructure the course in a

ham-handed attempt at using it for political indoctrination. Cries were heard, protests were staged, rhetorical melee ensued, and the attempt was defeated after the English Department came to be regarded nationally as an embarrassment and as an academic liability. One professor left the University over the incident, and many in the English Department maintain that the Division of Rhetoric and Composition was created to divide and punish the English Department.

There is a certain joy in seeing our own professors as the guys in the black hats (through Bernstein is kid-glove gentle on his adversaries), but many will certainly bristle at the nearly heroic treatment of the English Department's Lone Republican John Ruskiewicz (who dropped jaws by appearing as a guest on Rush Limbaugh's radio show), the clownish Alan Gribben, and the much-despised English Department whipping boy and former *Texan* editor Geoff Henley. One of the funniest parts for the UT reader is when Henley (who, it should be noted in the interest of full disclosure, is an associate of the author) describes the English Department: "Oh yeah, they're very diverse. They've got Marxists, deconstructionists, five varieties of feminists, new

## DICTATORSHIP OF VIRTUE

Author: Richard Bernstein

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historicists, ethnic studies, and Third World studies types — very diverse!"

Bernstein, too, is hard on the English Department, chastising English professors for their "clunky, trite, pedantic" prose and for producing a document which, inexplicably, "does not actually mean what the forty professors of English apparently want to say." The rest of the book is an interesting if slightly underdeveloped study of similar stories at other universities, and discusses developments in business and in the media.

The book seems rather pointedly directed at a non-academic audience, as if Bernstein has abandoned college students and the professorate to minister to the vast, literate middle class, the same people who might buy Robert Bork's *The Tempting of America* or Dan Quayle's memoirs.

But that is not an excuse for students and academics to ignore this book. Bernstein's uncommon sense in dealing with multicultural issues is commendable and should be of interest to those on both sides of the issue. For instance, in reference to a curriculum purporting to enhance sensitivity to Asians, he writes:

"I know from my own experience that the very concept 'Asian' encompasses such enormous diversity as to be meaningless. Are we talking about an Indonesian who might well be Muslim and speak a dialect of Malay? A Mongolian who would also be Muslim and who lives in a goatskin yurt on the grasslands, or a Hmong tribesman who practices animism and is a member of a group persecuted and despised by the ethnic majority of his own county (the lowland Lao believe the Montagnard Hmong to be only slightly more civilized than the neighborhood monkeys, so little do they value diversity)?"

This book should be of interest to the UT community

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— Richard Bernstein, author

in the same way that polls are of interest to politicians. Bernstein holds the mirror of public opinion up to the academy, and the reflection is not very pretty. Bernstein perfectly captures the freakishness, the bureaucratic cowardice and the intellectual emptiness which plague this and other state-sponsored universities.

The Daily Texan thanks the University Co-Op for the use of *Dictatorship of Virtue*.

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