

Brodkey's 'diversity' only one-sided

In a wonderful critique of the Third World and the super powers, Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka illustrates the cruelty and pettiness of some African dictators who attempt to glorify their nations by having an oversized sculpture of themselves placed at the entrance of the United Nations Assembly. They then brutalize those who don't support their cause or admire their statue. One might suggest Soyinka anticipated the restructuring of E306 when he wrote *Play of Giants*.

To save E306 "Writing about Difference," Linda Brodkey, chairwoman of Lower-Division English, has waged a campaign transcending dishonesty. In a two-part *Daily Texan* series on E306, Brodkey and John Slatin said they wanted to develop the means for students to "resist indoctrination" by having them analyze arguments from various perspectives. The trouble is such diversity does not exist in the new syllabus.

Let's consider Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege and Male Privilege" to be read during Week 3. Freshmen will learn about the "unconscious" and "invisible" overprivileged status whites and men maintain. The author then makes a "crude" 46-point list about her privileged status as a white person and concludes rhetorically that it is an open question whether white people like herself will use their "arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base." This isn't a freshman primer for writing skills, but a polemic demanding power redistribution, having no bearing in an English class. Save such pitches for the West Mall.

McIntosh's piece accompanies a letter, dated June of 1989, from Wellesley's Center for Research on Women that posits men as "patriarchal" and Caucasians as "white supremacists" when they accept "unearned public and private power they are given."

If we were to extend such definitions to protected minorities, would women and African-Americans become matriarchs and black supremacists when they receive preferential treatment? Such irresponsible use of explosive terminology won't give students proper models for defining terms and establishing arguments.

The readings have a feeling of urgency and experimentation, as if they were the results of newly developed campaign practices. This poses a couple of problems, because not only do we have political advocacy, but the worst kind: hasty and ill-considered.

In the letter with "White Privilege and Male Privilege," the writer relates the positive feed-



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back she received, and how she was pleased to hear that others of the unempowered were making their own lists. Some of Brodkey's own sentiments reflect this as well.

In a letter dated April 15, 1990, to the Lower Division English Policy Committee, Brodkey writes that the need for the revision "is underscored by recent events on campus, though I would hope that we do not require overt acts of racism to justify a course in which students would read and write about civil rights, civil rights laws, and civil rights cases."

She frets that "students labor under the illusion" that the laws have "effectively muted even the possibility of discrimination." Yes, and in fact the law will even justify discrimination for business necessity. Freshmen will not read court opinions defending such reasons, nor will they be plagued with that regressive Bakke decision on affirmative action.

Defending the controversial Paula Rothenberg text *Racism and Sexism* (which has since been dropped), Brodkey comes closer to revealing her true intent. She wrote that she was not compelled by arguments that other books would provide "a wider and more challenging range of opinions" than the Rothenberg text.

"That's true but moot," she admits. "I didn't suggest this text as an example of all possible positions one might take (which is impossible), but as a way to focus students and teachers on work that has been done on 'difference' by people who work on and/or live with inequity."

Never mind diversity of opinion and all of that hokum; we'll have the sentiments of only the malcontents in the field.

Brodkey stuck to her guns. One committee member had proposed another list of eight different anthologies that cover and balance current issues. Brodkey and her cabinet torpedoed the alternatives as well as three other proposals, giving a nice veneer of consensus for abuse

by faculty and student insurgents.

The committee was fully aware that the original text was unbalanced, because when one member expressed misgivings about the lack of diversity and the potential abuse of such required texts, the reply was given that such pluralism would come about in classroom discussion.

Such guarantees prove specious when one considers the incredibly biased nature of the readings. To dissent effectively, students would have to be incredibly brave; no one would want to risk being labeled a racist or misogynist. Moreover, one would have to do outside research to support such arguments.

Brodkey's adherents also believed the Supreme Court opinions would balance the arguments. This is just as erroneous, because the court opinions corroborate Brodkey's thesis. Appellants petitioning on grounds of discriminations receive redress, even in the case of *Chambers v. Omaha Girls Club*, where the defendant argued on grounds of business necessity.

But even if the opinions diametrically opposed the essays, the opinions laden with cross references, colorless prose and some technical language with extended definitions wouldn't convey the same intensity as opinions from the field. If Brodkey were serious about diversity, she'd have legal and expository writings from other such partisans.

The syllabus also includes Sweatt vs. Painter, which accompanies another essay called "The Spurs of Texas Are Upon You" providing more commentary on how the University's first black student made his way into the UT School of Law. The syllabus contains some other cases — all relating to civil rights, and thoughtfully paired with contextual essays.

Like Soyinka's autocrat, Brodkey is imposing her own image to glorify the efforts of marginal factions. Fortunately, Brodkey didn't have the savvy to commission worthy artists, using good media.

Students will not learn highly stylized persuasion from reading Supreme Court opinions; nor will they learn about other genres such as descriptive, informative and reflective essays by reading and writing only combative argumentation. The result won't be a thoughtfully sculpted terra cotta, but only artless mudslinging.

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