Case Study:
Political Correctness and Speech Codes

The essays by Ethan Bronner, John Leo, Steven Doloff, and Diane Ravitch we have included in the following Case Study attempt to inform you about political correctness and speech codes issues that are swirling about you in your classrooms, in your dorm rooms, and in newspapers and newsmagazines you read while having your breakfast. We provide you with the resources necessary to understand what political correctness and speech codes are, the serious reasons for how and why they came about on our college campuses, the good that they have brought about, and the extremes to which their meanings have been stretched. We can neither unthinkingly embrace nor humorously dismiss movements that seek to increase sensitivity to the larger problems of prejudice and discrimination in our society. As critical-thinking citizens, we need to know as much as we can about these concerns and to be able to articulate in both speech and writing what we think so that we can be responsible in influencing the direction we take in the future.

Writing to Discover: *Reflect on what you know about political correctness and speech codes. Speculate on what might have given rise to them. Do you have any firsthand stories about attempts to censor speech or modify people's language and behavior? How effective have these attempts been? Have you changed the way you think and speak as a result of your growing awareness of the power of speech? How so?*

Big Brother Is Listening

Ethan Bronner

Ethan Bronner was born in New York City in 1954. A graduate of Wesleyan University and Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, he has been the national education correspondent for the New York Times *since the summer of 1997. He writes about trends in both higher education and grades K–12. Before joining the* Times, *Bronner wrote for the* Boston Globe *for twelve years. While serving as the* Globe*'s legal affairs and Supreme Court correspondent in Washington D.C., he authored* Battle for Justice: How the Bork Nomination Shook America *(1989).*

In the following selection, which first appeared in the Education Life supplement to the New York Times *on April 4, 1999, Bronner*

revisits the speech codes that U.S. colleges and universities put into place more than a decade ago in an effort to create a more sensitive climate. Critics of such codes label them the worst form of political correctness, whereas supporters are fearful of a future without them.

The issue that gray February day was one of delicate balance: how to assure the freedom to discourse on Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, as one participant put it, but not to use the word "Jew" as a verb, to lecture on sexuality but not to refer to female students as "babes."

The debate — over a faculty speech code — filled the pale blue faculty senate room in Bascom Hall with passion. It was the latest round in a dispute that began on the lakeside campus of the University of Wisconsin nearly two years ago but had been simmering, in some fashion, for generations. A plaque on the building's entrance celebrates freedom of inquiry — the "fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found" — installed after the 1894 exoneration of an economics professor accused of teaching socialism and other "dangerous ideas."

The question on the floor — and it is being mulled on hundreds of campuses across the country, from the University of California to Bowdoin College in Maine — was how to promote such "fearless sifting" while still creating a welcoming environment for groups that have historically felt slighted at American universities. For while robust intellectual inquiry is a self-stated goal of every university, so too is creating a diverse and tolerant nation.

Student and faculty codes punish, sometimes through suspension, expulsion, or firing, words or deeds that create an environment perceived as hostile. Backers say codes insure that minorities and other vulnerable groups will not be mistreated.

"There is a cost to freedom of speech and it is borne unfairly by certain members of the community," asserted Stanlie M. James, a professor of Afro-American and women's studies. "The harm is immeasurable." 5

Opponents see codes as the worst form of politically correct paternalism.

"We don't want Big Brother stepping in and telling us what to think," said Jason Shepard, a student member of the committee examining the Wisconsin faculty code. "They assume that all minority students, all members of the same group, have the same response to speech. That's ridiculous."

Alan Charles Kors, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and Harvey A. Silverglate, a Boston lawyer, sought to document the effect of the codes and similar programs in their 1998 book *The Shadow University*. The university today, they complained, "hands students a moral agenda upon arrival, subjects them to mandatory political re-education, sends them to sensitivity training, submerges their individuality in official group identity, intrudes upon private conscience, treats them with scandalous inequality and, when it chooses, suspends or expels them."

Between 1987 and 1992, about a third of the nation's colleges and universities enacted codes of conduct that covered offensive speech, said Jon Gould, a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on codes.

Typical was the code passed in 1987 at the University of Pennsylvania that forbade "any behavior, verbal or physical, that stigmatizes or victimizes individuals on the basis of race, ethnic or national origin . . . and that has the purpose or effect of interfering with an individual's academic or work performance; and/or creates an intimidating or offensive academic, living, or work environment." 10

Most famously, the code was applied against a white Penn student named Eden Jacobowitz in 1993, when he called a group of noisy black sorority sisters outside his window "water buffalo." The university's judicial inquiry officer charged him with racial harassment. An Israeli-born Jew, Mr. Jacobowitz insisted the term — from the Hebrew *behema,* slang for a rude person but literally water buffalo — has no racial overtones. After a highly publicized hearing before an administrative board, charges were dropped. Later, the code was abandoned.

While some codes have been struck down by Federal courts as patently illegal or amended after coming under attack in the media or by students, many colleges and universities still have them, though they are rarely invoked.

That, in fact, was the situation with the faculty code at Wisconsin until last year, when First Amendment advocates decided it was time for it to be abolished. This was partly because the code, which had never led to a disciplinary act, had still been the basis of several investigations of faculty members. Its existence, opponents argued, chilled discourse. The Wisconsin student speech code had been struck down by a Federal court in 1991. Now it was the faculty's turn. But efforts to kill the code proved more complex than imagined.

The February debate began with the usual legal disquisitions from the podium — how to interpret the First Amendment in conjunction with Federal harassment regulations — but shifted course when Amelia Rideau from Montclair, New Jersey, rose to speak.

Ms. Rideau, a 20-year-old junior, recounted how in a recent Chaucer class her professor described a character as "niggardly." Ms. Rideau, a vice president of the Wisconsin Black Student Union, did not know the word, which means stingy and has no racial origins. She was unaware of the controversy in Washington the previous week over the firing (and ultimate rehiring) of a white mayoral aide for using the same word. The only black in the class of fifty, Ms. Rideau said she approached the professor afterward and told him of her feelings. 15

Ms. Rideau thought the teacher had understood and agreed not to use the word again. But at the next class the professor brought in an article about the Washington flap and began a discussion about it.

"He used the word 'niggardly' over and over, five or six times," she said. "I ran out of the class in tears. It was as if he was saying to me, 'Your opinion has no value.'"

When her speech ended to vigorous applause from minority students in the Madison audience, most members of the faculty senate — historians, geneticists, and philosophers in worn sweaters and hiking shoes — sat in silence. There was no doubting the depth of Ms. Rideau's pain. But there was no way any code could be enacted that would bar a professor from using the word "niggardly." And that put the faculty in a quandary.

"Her talk created a sense that there are things here that students of color want that we can't deliver," David Ward, the university chancellor, asserted later.

Two percent of the student body at the University of Wisconsin, one of the nation's premier research institutions, is black. How to increase that representation is very much a concern of administrators. 20

"In the early 70s, institutions like ours made promises to recruit minority groups, and by the late 1980s it was clear many had failed," said Roger W. Howard, the associate dean of students. "There built up a very significant level of frustration. We had said we wanted to be a different place, a more welcoming place. Yet we kept getting told that this was not a comfortable place for minorities. So we asked ourselves, 'What else can we do?' And that is partly where the speech codes came from."

After much debate in early March, the faculty senate decided, by a vote of 71 to 62, to narrow its speech code but not quite abolish it. Starting with the pledge that the university is "unswervingly committed to freedom of speech," the new language says that "all expression germane to the instructional setting — including but not limited to information, the presentation or advocacy of ideas, assignment of course materials, and teaching techniques — is protected from disciplinary action." This means that even if students are offended, professors cannot be punished if they prove the words were relevant to the lesson.

Wisconsin is not alone in its concerns or its solution. Attracting and retaining minority students is a top goal of every major university in the face of the growing legal and political threat to race-conscious admissions. In fact, the movement to end the codes is often allied with efforts to end those admissions policies. But just as often, the movement is spearheaded by people who believe universities have trampled on sacred free-speech grounds.

Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, is reviewing its student and faculty speech code to support free expression more vigorously. At Southern Utah University, a computer-use policy, which bars downloading material that is "racially offensive, threatening, harassing, or otherwise objectionable," has also come under attack and university review.

Yet, despite some people's belief that colleges today are Stalinist outposts where the slightest misstep into apparent intolerance is punished by the political correctness police force (also known as deans of student affairs), campuses report few bias-related incidents. While there are occurrences involving hate e-mails or posters with racial slurs and intimidation of homosexuals, university officials say campuses are not plagued with the problems of a decade ago, when the codes were drafted. 25

For both faculty and students, it was a difficult time of transition from a mostly homogeneous society to a more mixed culture. Before the 1980s, campuses were mostly white-guy clubs: homosexuality was less accepted, campus culture less accommodating of minority concerns, and far fewer women were found on faculties and in professional schools.

As colleges diversified, speech codes for students and faculty were seen as one buffer. Brown University ejected a student for yelling racial and religious epithets outside the dormitories one night; Sarah Lawrence College brought disciplinary action against a student using an antigay slur and engaging in "inappropriate laughter" seen as mocking a gay student.

The University of Connecticut banned "exhibiting, distributing, posting, or advertising publicly offensive, indecent, or abusive matter" after a 1987 incident in which eight Asian American students were spat on and taunted by six white students. Paradoxically, it was another Asian American, Nina Wu, a junior, who challenged the protective policy by hanging a poster listing groups she disliked, including "homos," on her dormitory door. After throwing Ms. Wu out of university housing, the university reinstated her under a judge's order and withdrew the restrictions.

In the mid-80s, when the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was still heavily male (today it is nearly half female), a group of women students complained to the provost about sexual harassment on campus. The provost, John Deutch, asked one of his deputies, Samuel Jay Keyser, to devise a policy against sexual harassment.

Among the rules written by Mr. Keyser's committee was the banning 30
of any sexually explicit film on campus without a film board's approval. The board, a mix of faculty, students, and administrative staff members, was called the Ad Hoc Pornography Screening Committee, and it adopted guidelines that included an insistence that the film "reflect believable reality or normalcy in the relationships and sexuality displayed" and that the film "not unfairly reflect the viewpoint and sexual feelings of men and/or women."

The code was challenged by Adam Dershowitz, a student (and nephew of Alan Dershowitz, the Harvard law professor), who projected the movie *Deep Throat* on the wall of an M.I.T. dormitory common room on registration day, 1987. He was prosecuted by the university under the code, but the charges were dismissed by a faculty-student committee, which found that the film rules were "an excessive restraint

on freedom of expression at M.I.T." The code was quietly abandoned several years later.

Conservatives, horrified by what they saw as social engineering, soon joined forces with liberals who were worried about free speech to condemn all such codes. Critics said vigorous, sometimes hurtful debate was the point of a university. As Jonathan Rauch wrote in his 1993 book *Kindly Inquisitors*, "If you insist on an unhostile or nonoffensive environment, then you belong in a monastery, not a university."

Mr. Shepard, the University of Wisconsin student, said such codes do more harm than good by offering false comfort. The better way, he says, is for vulnerable groups to face the discomfort straight on: "Pursuit of knowledge requires us to ask the tough questions," Mr. Shepard, who is gay, said. "And when we do so, people feel uneasy. There is no way around that."

Today, Mr. Keyser, who is retired, agrees. "The codes were a mistake. They were a response to a significant group in our community that was unhappy. But you can't solve the problem with a code. It was an easy solution that didn't work."

That view is not universal. Apart from black, gay, and Hispanic student groups who say that they suffer from humiliation, a number of women faculty members at Madison recalled the uneasy life before codes. Theresa Duello, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Wisconsin's medical school, said that when she joined her department in 1982, she was told by the chairman that he could not believe he had to introduce a woman who was taller than he and thought he would ask her to begin by discussing her first date. 35

Carin A. Clauss, a law professor who campaigned to keep the code, said she was especially sensitive to the need for regulations supporting minority groups and women because she went to law school when women made up fewer than one percent of the class.

Professor Clauss's main opponent in Madison was Donald Downs, a political scientist who has come full circle. His first foray into the free-expression issue was in 1978, when he wrote a book on American Nazis seeking to march in Skokie, Illinois, home to many Holocaust survivors.

"I really identified with how the survivors felt," Professor Downs recalled. "I argued that targeted racial vilification as a form of assaultive speech crosses the First Amendment line. I hadn't thought hard enough about the special place of free speech in a public forum."

Today, he says, he would favor permitting the Nazis to march in Skokie just as he favors doing away with all speech codes because they sacrifice something too significant. He draws parallels with Prohibition. He also sees an analogy with affirmative action, saying that, like codes, it gives rights to one group by taking rights away from another, something he opposes.

This is a central point made by Professor Kors and Mr. Silverglate in their book *The Shadow University.* 40

They see the codes as part of a larger liberal orthodoxy imposed by the 60s generation that has taken over college faculties and administrations, especially the offices of student affairs, which promote sensitivity and diversity training during freshman orientation, for dormitory advisers and in classrooms.

They say the main victims of this orthodoxy are those who are not part of it, like Christians who consider homosexuality and abortion unacceptable and find themselves unable to express themselves on campuses.

There are others who say that while they oppose the codes now, they served a role when they were enacted. "There is no question that the codes did, to some unmeasurable extent, influence and help create more appropriate attitudes toward race and gender and sexual orientation," Professor Downs said. "But this was at the cost of instilling fear of intellectual honesty."

Richard Delgado, a law professor at the University of Colorado and an early advocate of codes, says that social scientists increasingly favor what is called the confrontation theory, which holds that the best way to dampen racism is through clear rules that punish offenders because the rules' very existence leads people to conform to their principles. He says this has largely replaced the social-contact theory, which asserts that racism is best overcome by placing people of different creeds in constant contact with one another, and that through such contact they will see the error of racist attitudes.

Despite the codes, despite the changes campuses have made in recent 45
years, the vulnerability felt by minorities remains raw.

Michael S. McPherson, the president of Macalester College in St. Paul, says that in October 1997, a black student found racist slurs written on the note board she had hung outside her dormitory room. The culprit was never found but students held a vigil and public meetings. Even though there has been no similar event on the campus since, black students still tell Mr. McPherson how the incident upset them.

It is that gnawing sense of vulnerability that has made the idea of removing the codes unpalatable to the people they were set up to protect. They recognize the shaky legal ground on which they sit — no student speech code that has been challenged in court has survived — and worry that the codes will be abused if left on the books. But they fear the signal such a change would send to minority groups.

"As we have become more integrated, I have a sense that the sorts of incidents we had ten years ago we don't really have today," observed Professor Clauss of Wisconsin. "Now, women make up 47 percent of our law school and things are certainly easier. But we are getting Hmong and Muslim students. I am never sure that minority interests are adequately protected. There was a Muslim student in the health program here who raised religious objections to massage therapy and wanted accommodations to respect his belief. Whether we take those things seriously depends on sensitizing people. Who knows what minority will arrive tomorrow?"

EXAMINING THE ISSUE CRITICALLY

1. Did you ever attend a school or work for a company that had an official speech code, dress code, or some other code governing behavior? In your opinion, what is the purpose of such codes? Do you think they should be strictly enforced or eliminated? Does your opinion about them change depending on the code in question?
2. How do you feel about the use of the word *niggardly*? Is it a legitimate word that can be used in the classroom, or is it a word that can cause such emotional distress despite its actual meaning that it should be avoided altogether?
3. The major issue that Bronner discusses is how colleges and universities and indeed the population at large can chart a course between the protection of the First Amendment right to free speech and the protection of minorities from being mistreated and made to feel unwelcome on college and university campuses. Do you think that there are, or should be, some overriding principles that are applicable in this situation, or do you think that each case that arises will have to be decided on a case-by-case basis? If there are principles that we should not violate, what are they? If such principles are adhered to and people get hurt as a result, what responsibility do college administrators bear?

Who Said PC Is Passé?

JOHN LEO

Dubbed the "cult columnist of the intelligentia" by Vanity Fair, *John Leo writes a weekly column on the state of our culture that appears in* U.S. News & World Report *and in over 140 newspapers across the country. He has been a reporter for the* New York Times, *covering intellectual trends and religion, and a senior writer for* Time *magazine, specializing in behavior and the social sciences. Leo has many books to his credit including* How the Russians Invented Baseball and Other Essays of Enlightenment *(1989), a book of humor;* Two Steps Ahead of the Thought Police *(1994), a collection of his* U.S. News & World Report *columns; and* Incorrect Thoughts: Notes on Our Wayward Culture *(2000).*

In the following essay, which first appeared in U.S. News & World Report *on May 12, 1997, Leo questions the usefulness of political correctness. Never one to duck an issue, Leo asks his readers to think about a series of humorous — if not always enlightened — examples.*

Like death and taxes, political correctness is always with us. But at least it's funnier than the other two permanent burdens. Some PC items in the news:

Thank God for magazines like this

Anyone who says, "God bless you," after you sneeze is trying to deprive you of your constitutional rights, according to *Free Inquiry*, a secular humanist magazine. Also on the magazine's list of "people or situations aimed at taking away your liberties and rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution" were such stark offenses as: (1) asking anyone, "Did you have a merry Christmas?" (2) inviting folks to a wedding that includes a religious ceremony, and (3) saying grace at a dinner party in your own home.

Mandatory sensitivity

The PC language rumor of the year is that the word "squaw" may come from a French corruption of the Iroquois slang word for "vagina." In Minnesota, students grew alarmed and complained to the Legislature. So the state passed a law ordering its counties to banish the word "squaw" from the names of all lakes, rivers, or other geographical features. One county responded to the order by officially changing the names of Squaw Creek and Squaw Bay to Politically Correct Creek and Politically Correct

Bay. No dice. The state overrode the new names as insensitive. Now it's time for Minnesota to finish the job by banning genital slurs from ice cream cartons — the word "vanilla" also comes from a word for vagina.

Comfortable with censorship

Fans of political correctness remember the fuss over *Naked Maja,* the classic Goya painting accused of harassing a sensitive college instructor at Penn State in 1991. The painting had been hanging there quietly in a classroom for ten years before it started harassing the teacher. Now *Gwen,* a painting hanging in a Tennessee city hall, has been accused of harassing a female municipal employee and creating a hostile environment.

The problem is that part of one nipple is visible in the painting, a work by artist Maxine Henderson. The city attorney said he "felt more comfortable" siding with the Civil Rights Act's Title VII sexual harassment protections than with First Amendment protections, so the painting was removed. Henderson sued and won a judgment ($1), but the painting stayed down. Museums beware: The triumphant harassee explained that she finds Greek statues offensive and degrading too.

No white writers, please; we're students

California State University–Monterey Bay is the newest and most multicultural school in the California system. Nothing much is being taught there on America's cultural and historic roots, but faculty members say the students already know that stuff from high school. The college does, however, have a "vibrant" requirement, which means that students must "demonstrate knowledge of holistic health and wellness theory, concepts, and content."

Literature students must "compare and contrast the literatures of at least three different cultural groups, two of which are non-Eurocentric." The Eurocentric part might be a bit difficult since a recent visitor to the university bookstore found no literature by white authors. But Qun Wang, a literature instructor, hastened to note that one "Jewish American" writer was being read (Bernard Malamud) as well as Emily Dickinson, who, although white, presumably made the cut as a female. Wang noted in a letter that he supports the arguments of others that "we should not deify Shakespeare." The guiding spirit and paid adviser of the new college is Eurocentrically pigmented Leon Panetta, former White House chief of staff.

How about adding "vegetarians"?

Identity politics group of the year: At last, men who (1) live in Baltimore, (2) are gay, (3) are into S&M, and (4) suffer hearing loss have a group of their own: the Baltimore Leather Association of the Deaf.

Wimpy anti-president sought

Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, took out a newspaper ad in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* saying it needed a new college president "who is prepared to lead us through a process that questions the necessity of a president in the first place." Personally, we think it's a stupid, pointless job, so consider us hired.

So that's it!

Penn State art student Christine Enedy produced a campus sculpture of the Virgin Mary emerging from a bloody vagina. Turmoil followed. Asked what she had in mind, exactly, she explained that the bloody Mary demonstrated her view of women's oppression in the church and elsewhere. 10

Yes, size matters

The Reverend John Papworth, Anglican priest in North London, England, said it is morally justifiable to steal from large supermarkets because these stores are putting smaller ones out of business.

Disney's pro-woman pirates

The pirates at the Pirates of the Caribbean ride in Disneyland are no longer chasing women around in wild abandon, as they have for thirty years. Instead, they are becoming sensitive New Age guys, showing the kind of respect for women that real pirates probably felt deep inside but were afraid to express. Columnist Clarence Page thinks Disney can go further. He thinks that David Crockett should no longer kill a bear at Disneyland — he should gently subdue the magnificent mammal and put it in a petting zoo.

Warning: This item may cause discomfort

Oberlin College's B&D/SM club, devoted to bondage, discipline, sadism, and masochism, generated quite a controversy on campus. Not the B&D/SM itself, of course, but the fact that the club held a campus "slave auction" that offended members of Abusua, the black student union. The S&Mers, in turn, were offended by criticism from people who don't know and respect their culture.

This comes from a year-in-retrospect article in the *Oberlin Review* exploring a year's worth of hurt feelings among campus race and sex groups. Four groups were offended by not being invited to a dinner at the college president's house. It was a mailing-list mistake, but the hurt feelings were all aired at the dinner, and all parties agreed that nobody should be marginalized.

A poster using the words "tribal sex" hurt the feelings of the Third World Co-op, and talks were held "to discuss how to be more sensitive in the future." Some women were "made to feel uncomfortable" by pictures in a campus art journal depicting women in submissive positions, but as the *Review* summed up positively, "Efforts were made by residents to rebuild the community through discussions and house meetings." 15

Heterophobia — a city's secret shame

A straight couple was thrown out of a gay bar in San Francisco for violating the bar's rules against heterosexual kissing. Morgan Gorrono, manager of the bar, The Café, said he doesn't really mind heterosexual behavior among his customers as long as they don't openly flaunt it. Besides, he said, the two straight kissers were drunk.

Why not just make the slaves white?

A six-part British miniseries due in 1998, *Sacred Hunger,* is based on the prize-winning novel by Barry Unsworth about the African slave trade, including the African slave barons who captured other blacks and sold them to white merchants. An American company offered to help finance the series and show it on U.S. television on one condition — none of the slave traders could be black. No deal. The British producer, Sir Peter Hall, declined to reveal the name of the American company but complained about the "puritanical Stalinism" of political correctness.

New war against Asian Americans

When the student senate at Tufts University cut $600 from the budget of the Chinese Culture Club, a club spokesman said the cut wasn't "face-to-face racism" but reflected "institutional bias." And since some of the missing funds were intended to pay for containers of Chinese food on Chinese New Year's, the spokesman said the budget cut "questioned the authenticity of takeout food as part of our culture."

Peter Leibert, an art professor at Connecticut College, creates works that play on the word "wok," such as "Board Wok" and "Wok on the Wild Side." But trouble arose when a New London museum displayed Leibert's "Two Dogs on a Wok," which consisted of two tiny clay dogs in a stoneware wok. An art critic suggested that the work was an ethnic slur implying that Chinese Americans like to eat dogs. The secretary of the state's Asian American League quickly agreed. Leibert calls the league's interpretation "nutso."

Hiring the PC way

Alvaro Cardona applied for a $12.43-per-hour job at UCLA tutoring needy students in English. He is a Latino honor student at the university and an experienced tutor, but he didn't get the job. During his job interview, tutoring and English never came up. Instead, he was grilled on whether he supports affirmative action (yes) and whether he sees lots of "institutional racism" on campus (no). 20

Cardona says the interview was to test his ideological commitment to politically correct race and gender "sensitivity." The supervisor said, no, Cardona was rejected because he would have been the kind of person who stressed learning, which is only 50 percent of the job. The missing 50 percent, she said, was validating the feelings of students.

EXAMINING THE ISSUE CRITICALLY

1. One response that a reader could have to Leo's list of political correctness excesses is that there are people who are unduly sensitive to certain events, words, works of art, and so forth, and that they ought to be more tolerant. The same could be said for those in positions of authority who respond positively to every charge from people who claim to have been offended or affronted in some way — that they, too, should be more tolerant. What should you do, however, if you feel affronted or if you are in a position of authority and someone comes to you with a problem? Is there some way to determine the line between frivolous issues and those of true significance that need remedying? Is there some set of procedures that you should follow in measuring the serious of problems?
2. What is the role of language in issues of political correctness? Is it always central to the political correctness issues that Leo reports? Is communication always central to the issues he raises?
3. Are reports of the excesses of those interested in promoting political correctness important for us to know? Do such reports of those excesses distort or give important insights into what's actually happening with respect to the rights of all individuals in our society?
4. If you have been involved in incidents of political correctness, either as someone who believes he or she has been victimized, or as someone who had to adjudicate a controversy, what have you learned? Has your involvement strengthened your commitment for or against political correctness?

Racism and the Risks of Ethnic Humor

STEVEN DOLOFF

Steven Doloff is a professor of English and humanities at Pratt Institute in New York City. He was born in New York City and received his B.A. from the State University of New York at Stony Brook and his Ph.D. from the City University of New York Graduate Center. His academic work has been published in Shakespeare Quarterly, James Joyce Quarterly, Keats-Shelley Review, Review of English Studies, *and the* Huntington Library Quarterly. *His writing on culture and education has appeared in the* New York Times, *the* Washington Post, *the* Boston Globe, *and the* Philadelphia Inquirer. *Doloff's cartoons have run in the* Chronicle of Higher Education *and* American Book Review. *He writes, "An essential mystery of language is its ability to convey and conceal meaning, simultaneously. That this can be true regardless of a speaker/writer's intentions just adds to the puzzle. Humor, because it often relies on language's ambivalent possibilities, may demonstrate better than other forms of discourse this slippery function of semantics."*

In the following selection, Doloff ponders what we are really finding funny when we use ethnic humor or respond to it in a supportive manner. This article first appeared in the Winter 1998–1999 issue of Free Inquiry.

Howard Stern, the wildly popular radio talk-show host, in commenting a while back on a local news story about a race-related murder of an African American teenager, mentioned that a rumored motive for the crime was that the victim had been suspected of dating an ex-girlfriend of one of his white assailants. Stern turned this into a story about how the girlfriend of a high school buddy of his was seduced by a black man with gold teeth. He then called his friend on the air, and they both laughed about his buddy's embarrassment at the time. No further mention was made of the murdered teenager.

As an entertainer, Stern was of course in no way obliged to seriously comment on the crime. He used it merely to introduce a comic anecdote of teenage sexual insecurity. But a significant irony here, given the anti-black crime as lead-in, was that Stern's anecdote ended with sympathetic laughter commiserating with his white friend's romantic loss to a stereotypically oversexed black man. Indeed, Stern, and apparently other radio talk-show personalities today, routinely make use of such exaggerated and derisive stereotypes of African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Arabs, homosexuals, and other minorities, all ostensibly for purposes of "harmless" fun.

It would seem that the times they are still a changin'. Not all that long ago, when the civil rights movement was in early bloom, public

ethnic and racial humor in many places went through a period of heightened disapprobation. This attitude, whether affected or genuine, bespoke the belief that verbal respect between races was a part of the solution to the mass of problems the movement was confronting. It was not hip to sound like a bigot, even in jest. I can remember a time when the telling of a racial joke in a room of young people would make disapproving heads turn either towards or away from the teller. This of course did not mean that there were no prejudicial feelings. There always were, just as there are now, plenty. But the times were such that open prejudice in the form of satiric stereotyping was considered, hypocritically or not, socially bad form. It was assumed by many, perhaps naively, that, if people got into the habit of at least speaking civilly of other groups, their attitudes and actions might eventually follow.

Unfortunately, the fundamental conditions conducive to racial and ethnic friction have not even superficially changed. There still exists a large, disadvantaged economic underclass of African Americans and other minorities whom many middle- and lower-class whites perceive as welfare freeloaders and criminals. And there still exists a predominantly white middle and upper class whom minorities perceive as systematically excluding and oppressing them in a thousand both obvious and subtle ways. These persistent perceptions seem to have eroded some of that temporarily heightened resistance to public racial and minority humor.

But if verbalized prejudice in the entertainment field is now somehow more acceptable again, it has returned in a peculiarly tricky form. Its rationale, offered only condescendingly and infrequently by its professional practitioners, is that we are all so socially evolved and sophisticated these days that we can enjoy some laughs at one another's expense without meaning or taking offense. Moreover, it's argued, derisive racial and ethnic stereotypes can also be used in self-referential and self-mocking ways so as to actually ridicule and devitalize the misperceptions that have created them. That sounds fine. But I don't think so. 5

The continuing incidence of prejudice-based violence around the country indicates that we are simply not all that evolved and sophisticated. I suspect that there are a lot of people out there, many of them young, who relate to racial and ethnic humor in the old-fashioned way — as a method of indirectly venting hostility and encoding prejudices more succinctly in their minds. When they laugh at a racial joke, they are not laughing because a nasty old stereotype is being deconstructed, but because the stereotype involved affirms or coincidences with their own ill-formed antagonistic feelings and fears of other races. Hearing such stereotypes being legitimized by casual use in the media makes many people simply more comfortable with them. What's more, there are kids out there who are learning their initial racial attitudes and vocabularies from such humor.

Satiric humor has always been and still is an artistic scalpel with which shrewd social critics have been able to skewer harmfully repressed and unhealthy beliefs. But ridicule and even laughter itself are not innately righteous or morally enlightening activities. We would do well to consider more seriously what it is that we find so funny.

EXAMINING THE ISSUE CRITICALLY

1. How do you respond when you hear a joke based on racial or ethnic stereotypes? Do you feel uncomfortable telling or hearing such jokes? Do you think some are too sensitive about such jokes? Are you afraid to speak out if you hear jokes and racially based stories? Should you remind the joke teller that what he or she is doing is not in anyone's best interest? Are you engaging in a politically correct activity if you make someone account for such joke telling?
2. Doloff writes that there is a difference between the satiric barb and prejudicial joke. What is satire? How does it work? Why does he say that satire is acceptable, but there is no place for ridicule or laughter, which themselves "are not innately righteous or morally enlightening activities"(7)?
3. It has been observed that all humor, with the exception of slapstick or physical humor, is essentially linguistic in nature. Reflecting on that statement, can you give some examples of jokes or anecdotes that rely on a sensitivity to language or subtle manipulations of language to create humor? What is the linguistic connection that makes the joke funny?

The Language Police

DIANE RAVITCH

Diane Ravitch is a distinguished educator who has been influential in both the private and public sectors. She is currently Research Professor of Education at New York University and holds the Brown Chair of Education at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. Ravitch received her B.A. from Wellesley College and her Ph.D. in history from Columbia University. A prolific author, she has published, among others, the following books: The American Reader: Words That Moved a Nation *(1993);* New Schools for a New Century: The Redesign of Urban Education *(edited with Joseph Viteritti; 1997);* Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms *(2000);* Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2002 *(2002); and* The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn *(2003).*

In the following article, taken from the Summer 2003 issue of the American Educator *and drawn from her book* The Language Police, *Ravitch describes the kinds of censorship, from both the political left and political right, that have had such a powerful impact on the education of young people in America.*

The word *censorship* refers to the deliberate removal of language, ideas, and books from the classroom or library because they are deemed offensive or controversial. The definition gets fuzzier, however, when making a distinction between censorship and selection. Selection is not censorship. Teachers have a responsibility to choose readings for their students based on their professional judgment of what students are likely to understand and what they need to learn. (It is also important to remember that people have a First Amendment right to complain about textbooks and library books they don't like.)

Censorship occurs when school officials or publishers (acting in anticipation of the legal requirements of certain states) delete words, ideas, and topics from textbooks and tests for no reason other than their fear of controversy. Censorship may take place before publication, as it does when publishers utilize guidelines that mandate the exclusion of certain language and topics, and it may happen after publication, as when parents and community members pressure school officials to remove certain books from school libraries or classrooms. Some people believe that censorship occurs only when government officials impose it, but publishers censor their products in order to secure government contracts. So the result is the same.

Censors on the political right aim to restore an idealized vision of the past, an Arcadia of happy family life, in which the family was intact,

comprising a father, a mother, two or more children, and went to church every Sunday. Father was in charge, and Mother took care of the children. Father worked; Mother shopped and prepared the meals. Everyone sat around the dinner table at night. It was a happy, untroubled setting into which social problems seldom intruded. Pressure groups on the right believe that what children read in school should present this vision of the past to children and that showing it might make it so. They believe strongly in the power of the word, and they believe that children will model their behavior on whatever they read. If they read stories about disobedient children, they will be disobedient; if they read stories that conflict with their parents' religious values, they might abandon their religion. Critics on the right urge that whatever children read should model appropriate moral behavior.

Censors from the political left believe in an idealized vision of the future, a utopia in which egalitarianism prevails in all social relations. In this vision, there is no dominant group, no dominant father, no dominant race, and no dominant gender. In this world, youth is not an advantage, and disability is not a disadvantage. There is no hierarchy of better or worse; all nations and all cultures are of equal accomplishment and value. All individuals and groups share equally in the roles, rewards, and activities of society. In this world to be, everyone has high self-esteem, eats healthy foods, exercises, and enjoys being different. Pressure groups on the left feel as strongly about the power of the word as those on the right. They expect that children will be shaped by what they read and will model their behavior on what they read. They want children to read only descriptions of the world as they think it should be in order to help bring this new world into being.

For censors on both the right and the left, reading is a means of role modeling and behavior modification. Neither wants children and adolescents to encounter books, textbooks, or videos that challenge their vision of what was or what might be, or that depict a reality contrary to that vision. 5

I. CENSORSHIP FROM THE RIGHT

In the 1980s, after a century of attacks on textbooks — animated by a search for anti-confederate or pro-communist sentiment, or any acknowledgement of evolution — right-wing censors launched an impassioned crusade against immoral books and textbooks and shifted their focus to religious and moral issues. Groups such as the Reverend Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, the Reverend Donald Wildmon's American Family Association, Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family, the Reverend Pat Robertson's National Legal Foundation, and Beverly La-Haye's Concerned Women for America,

along with Mel and Norma Gabler's Educational Research Analysts in Texas, pressured local school districts and state boards of education to remove books that they considered objectionable.

The New Right attacked textbooks for teaching secular humanism, which they defined as a New Age religion that ignored biblical teachings and shunned moral absolutes. If it was right to exclude the Christian religion from the public schools, they argued, then secular humanism should be excluded too. If it was acceptable to teach secular humanism, they said, then Christian teaching should have equal time. The textbooks, said the critics, failed to distinguish between right and wrong, and thus taught the "situation ethics" of "secular humanism." They disapproved of portrayals of abortion, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, homosexuality, suicide, drug use, foul language, or other behavior that conflicted with their religious values. The right-wing critics also opposed stories that showed dissension within the family; such stories, they believed, would teach children to be disobedient and would damage families. They also insisted that textbooks must be patriotic and teach a positive view of the nation and its history.

The teaching of evolution was extensively litigated in the 1980s. The scientific community weighed in strongly on the side of evolution as the only scientifically grounded theory for teaching about biological origins. Fundamentalist Christians, however, insisted that public schools should give equal time to teaching the biblical version of creation. Several southern legislatures passed laws requiring "balanced treatment" of evolution and creationism, but such laws were consistently found to be unconstitutional by federal courts that held that evolution is science, and creationism is religion. In 1987, the United States Supreme Court ruled 7-2 against Louisiana's "balanced treatment" law. Yet fundamentalist insistence on "creation science" or "intelligent design" continued unabated. When states debated the adoption of science textbooks or science standards, critics demanded that competing theories should get equal time. In 2000, Republican primary voters in Kansas defeated two state school board members who had voted to remove evolution from the state's science standards.

The religious right mounted numerous challenges to textbooks in the 1980s. The most important was the case of *Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education* in Tennessee. In 1983, fundamentalist Christian parents in Hawkins County objected to the elementary school textbooks that were required reading in their schools. The readers were published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston (now owned by Harcourt). The parents complained that the textbooks promoted secular humanism, satanism, witchcraft, fantasy, magic, the occult, disobedience, dishonesty, feminism, evolution, telepathy, one-world government, and New Age religion. They also asserted that some of the stories in the readers belittled the government, the military, free enterprise, and Christianity. At first, the

parents wanted the textbooks removed from the local public schools. Eventually, however, they sought only that their own children be allowed to read alternate books that did not demean their religious views.

The parents received legal support from the Concerned Women for America. The school board was backed by the liberal People for the American Way. The battle turned into an epic left-right political showdown: One side claimed that the case was about censorship, and the other side argued that it was about freedom of religion. 10

For five years the case garnered national headlines as it wound its way up and down the federal court system. In 1987, the parents lost in federal appeals court, and in 1988, the U.S. Supreme Court decided not to review the appellate court decision. The judges decided that "mere exposure" to ideas different from those of the parents' religious faith did not violate the First Amendment's guarantee of free exercise of religion.

Defenders of the Holt Basic Readers celebrated their legal victory, but it was a hollow one. In *Battleground*, a comprehensive account of the case, author Stephen Bates noted that the Holt readers were "once the most popular reading series in the nation," but were brought to "the verge of extinction" by the controversy associated with the court case. If publishers learned a lesson from the saga of the Holt reading series, it was the importance of avoiding controversy by censoring themselves in advance and including nothing that might attract bad publicity or litigation. The 1986 revision of the series, designed to replace the 1983 edition that was on trial in Tennessee, omitted some of the passages that fundamentalist parents objected to. The Holt readers won the legal battle but were commercially ruined. This was not a price that any textbook publisher would willingly pay.

A third major area for litigation in the 1980s involved efforts to ban books, both those that were assigned in class and those that were available in the school library. The first major test came not in the South, but in the Island Trees Union Free School District in New York. There, the local board directed school officials to remove ten books from their libraries because of their profanity and explicit sexual content, including Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer,* Richard Wright's *Black Boy,* Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*. The courts traditionally deferred to school officials when it came to curriculum and other policy-making, but in this instance the students who objected to the school officials' decision won by a narrow one-vote margin. In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the students had a "right to receive information." The decision was far from conclusive, however, as the justices wrote seven opinions, none of which had majority support.

Many book-banning incidents were never challenged in the courts. In the 1970s and 1980s, school officials in different sections of the country

removed certain books from school libraries or from classroom use, including J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *1984*, MacKinley Kantor's *Andersonville*, and Gordon Parks's *Learning Tree*. In most cases, parents criticized the books' treatment of profanity, sex, religion, race, or violence.

The battle of the books shifted to Florida in the late 1980s. In Columbia County, a parent (who was a fundamentalist minister) complained to the local school board about a state-approved textbook used in an elective course for high school students. The parent objected to the book because it included Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" and Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*. The school board banned the book and its decision was upheld in federal district court and in an appellate court. In Bay County, a parent complained about Robert Cormier's *I Am the Cheese*, a work of adolescent fiction that contains some mild profanity and not especially explicit sexual scenes. The school superintendent suppressed not only that book, but required teachers to write a rationale for every book they intended to assign unless it was on the state-approved list. The superintendent then proscribed a long list of literary classics that he deemed controversial, including several of Shakespeare's plays, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*, and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. Parents, teachers, and students sued the local school board and the superintendent to prevent the book-banning, and a federal district judge ruled that it was acceptable to remove books because of vulgar language but not because of disagreement with the ideas in them. The litigation soon became moot, however, when the superintendent retired, and all of the books were restored in that particular district. 15

During the 1980s and 1990s, and after, there were numerous challenges to books by parents and organized groups. Many were directed against adolescent fiction, as authors of this genre became increasingly explicit about sexuality and more likely to utilize language and imagery that some adults considered inappropriate for children. The thirty "most frequently attacked" books from 1965 to the early 1980s included some that offended adults from different ends of the political spectrum. Some were assigned in class; others were in the school library. The list included such books as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, *Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, and *Go Ask Alice* by anonymous.

By 2000, the American Library Association's list of the "most attacked" books had changed considerably. Most of the classics had fallen away. At the beginning of the new millennium, the most challenged books were of the Harry Potter series, assailed because of their references to the occult, satanism, violence, and religion, as well as Potter's dysfunctional family. Most of the other works that drew fire were written specifically

for adolescents. Some of these books were taught in classes; others were available in libraries.

The most heated controversy over textbooks in the early 1990s involved a K–6 reading series called Impressions, which was published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. The Impressions series consisted of grade-by-grade anthologies with a cumulative total of more than 800 reading selections from authors such as C. S. Lewis, Lewis Carroll, the Brothers Grimm, Rudyard Kipling, Martin Luther King Jr., and Laura Ingalls Wilder. Its purpose was to replace the old-fashioned "Dick and Jane"-style reader with literary anthologies of high interest for children.

The texts may have been altogether too interesting because they captured the avid attention of conservative family groups across the country. Before they became infamous among right-wing groups, the books were purchased by more than 1,500 elementary schools in 34 states. A small proportion of the series' literary selections, some of them drawn from classic fairy tales, described magic, fantasy, goblins, monsters, and witches.

Right-wing Christian groups, including Focus on the Family, Citizens for Excellence in Education, and the Traditional Values Coalition, organized against the Impressions series. The controversy became especially fierce in the early 1990s in California. The state-approved textbooks came under fire in half of California's school districts. Large numbers of parents turned out for school board meetings to demand the removal of the readers they claimed were terrifying their children. One district glued together some pages in the books to satisfy critics. Some districts dropped the series. Critics objected to stories about death, violence, and the supernatural. They charged that the series was promoting a New Age religion of paganism, the occult, and witchcraft. In one district, angry parents initiated a recall campaign against two local school board members who supported the books (the board members narrowly survived the recall vote). In another district, an evangelical Christian family filed a lawsuit charging that the district — by using the Impressions textbooks — violated the Constitution by promoting a religion of "neo-paganism" that relied on magic, trances, a veneration for nature and animal life, and a belief in the supernatural. In 1994, a federal appeals court ruled that the textbook series did not violate the Constitution.

Public ridicule helped to squelch some of the ardor of those who wanted to censor books. Editorial writers across California uniformly opposed efforts to remove the Impressions series from the public schools, providing important encouragement for public officials who were defending the books. The editorial writers read the books and saw that they contained good literature. Most reckoned that children do not live in a hermetically sealed environment. Children, they recognized, see plenty of conflict and violence on television and in real life as well. They confront,

sooner or later, the reality of death and loss. Most know the experience of losing a family member, a pet, a friend. Over the generations, fairy tales have served as a vehicle for children to deal with difficult situations and emotions. Even the Bible, the most revered of sacred documents in Western culture, is replete with stories of violence, betrayal, family dissension, and despicable behavior.

One cannot blame parents for wanting to protect their children's innocence from the excesses of popular culture. However, book censorship far exceeds reasonableness; usually, censors seek not just freedom from someone else's views, but the power to impose their views on others. Parents whose religious beliefs cause them to shun fantasy, magic, fairy tales, and ghost stories will have obvious difficulties adjusting to parts of the literature curriculum in public schools today. They would have had equal difficulty adjusting to the literary anthologies in American public schools 100 years ago, which customarily included myths and legends, stories about disobedient children, even tales of magical transformation. It may be impossible for a fundamentalist Christian (or Orthodox Jew or fundamentalist Muslim) to feel comfortable in a public institution that is committed to tolerance and respect among all creeds and promotion of none. This conflict cannot be avoided. Much of what is most imaginative in our culture draws upon themes that will prove objectionable to fundamentalist parents of every religion. Schools may offer alternative readings to children of fundamentalist parents, but they cannot provide readings of a sectarian nature, nor should the schools censor or ban books at the insistence of any religious or political group.

Even though the religious right has consistently lost court battles, its criticisms have not been wasted on educational publishers. The Impressions series, for all its literary excellence, was not republished and quietly vanished.

Fear of the pressures that sank the Impressions series has made publishers gun-shy about any stories that might anger fundamentalists. Textbook publishers are understandably wary about doing anything that would unleash hostile charges and countercharges and cause a public blow-up over their product.

Publishers of educational materials do not want controversy (general publishers, of course, love controversy because it sells books in a competitive marketplace). Even if a publisher wins in court, its books are stigmatized as "controversial." Even if a textbook is adopted by a district or state over protests, it will lose in other districts that want to avoid similar battles. It is a far, far better thing to have no protests at all. Publishers know that a full-fledged attack, like the one waged against Impressions, means death to their product. And the best recipe for survival in a marketplace dominated by the political decisions of a handful of state boards is to delete whatever might offend anyone. 25

II. CENSORSHIP FROM THE LEFT

The left-wing groups that have been most active in campaigns to change textbooks are militantly feminist and militantly liberal. These groups hope to bring about an equitable society by purging certain language and images from textbooks.

Lee Burress, a leader of anticensorship activities for many years in the National Council of Teachers of English, describes in *The Battle of the Books* how feminists and liberals became censors as they sought to "raise consciousness" and to eliminate "offensive" stories and books. Joan DelFattore, in *What Johnny Shouldn't Read*, writes that political correctness, taken to its extreme, "denotes a form of intellectual terrorism in which people who express ideas that are offensive to any group other than white males of European heritage may be punished, *regardless of the accuracy or relevance of what they say*" (italics in the original). The censors from the left and right, she says, compel writers, editors, and public officials to suppress honest questions and to alter facts "solely to shape opinion." Once a society begins limiting freedom of expression to some points of view, then "all that remains is a trial of strength" to see whose sensibilities will prevail.

While the censors on the right have concentrated most of their ire on general books, the censors on the left have been most successful in criticizing textbooks. Although left-wing censors have occasionally targeted books too, they have achieved their greatest influence by shaping the bias guidelines of the educational publishing industry. Educational publishers have willingly acquiesced even to the most farfetched demands for language censorship, so long as the campaign's stated goal is "fairness." Only a George Orwell could fully appreciate how honorable words like *fairness* and *diversity* have been deployed to impose censorship and uniformity on everyday language.

The organization that led the left-wing censorship campaign was the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC). Founded in 1966 in New York City, CIBC was active over the next quarter-century as the best-known critic of racism and sexism in children's books and textbooks. Directing its critiques not as much to the general public as to the publishing industry and educators, CIBC issued publications and conducted seminars for librarians and teachers to raise their consciousness about racism and sexism.

CIBC ceased its organizational life in 1990; its most enduring legacy proved to be its guidelines, which explained how to identify racism, sexism, and ageism, as well as a variety of other isms. They were the original template for the detailed bias guidelines that are now pervasive in the education publishing industry and that ban specific words, phrases, roles, activities, and images in textbooks and on tests. The CIBC guidelines are still cited; they circulate on many Web sites, and they continue to serve as training materials for bias and sensitivity reviewers. 30

CIBC's initial goal was to encourage publishers to include more realistic stories and more accurate historical treatments about blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and women. It awarded annual prizes for the best new children's books by minority writers. However, soon after it was founded in the mid-1960s, the nation's political and cultural climate changed dramatically. In the wake of riots and civil disorders in major American cities, including New York, the racial integration movement was swept away by movements for racial separatism and black power. CIBC was caught up in the radicalism of the times. Its goals shifted from inclusion to racial assertiveness, from the pursuit of racial harmony to angry rhetoric about colonialism and the "educational slaughter" of minority children. As its militancy grew, CIBC insisted that only those who were themselves members of a minority group were qualified to write about their own group's experience. It demanded that publishers subsidize minority-owned bookstores, printers, and publishers. It urged teachers and librarians to watch for and exclude those books that violated its bias guidelines.

CIBC's critiques of racial and gender stereotyping undoubtedly raised the consciousness of textbook publishers about the white-only world of their products and prompted necessary revisions. However, in the early 1970s, CIBC demanded elimination of books that it deemed "anti-human," racist, and sexist.

CIBC attacked numerous literary classics as racist, including Hugh Lofting's Dr. Dolittle books, Pamela Travers's *Mary Poppins*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*, Ezra Jack Keats's books (*Snowy Day* and *Whistle for Willie*), Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and William H. Armstrong's *Sounder*. The American publisher of Dr. Dolittle, agreeing that the series contained stereotypical images of Africans, expurgated the books to remove offensive illustrations and text. The original version of the books has now disappeared from library shelves and bookstores.

CIBC attacked fairy tales as sexist, asserting that they promote "stereotypes, distortions, and anti-humanism." It charged that such traditional tales as "Little Red Riding Hood," "Cinderella," "Jack and the Beanstalk," "Snow-White," "Beauty and the Beast," "The Princess and the Pea," "Rumpelstiltskin," and "Hansel and Gretel" were irredeemably sexist because they portrayed females as "princesses or poor girls on their way to becoming princesses, fairy godmothers or good fairies, wicked and evil witches, jealous and spiteful sisters, proud, vain, and hateful stepmothers, or shrewish wives." The "good" females were depicted as beautiful, the "bad" ones as evil witches. The males were powerful and courageous, while the females were assigned to "traditional" roles as helpers. Typically, the characters in fairy tales rose from poverty to great wealth, CIBC complained, but no one ever asked about the "socioeconomic causes of their condition"; no one ever talked about the need for

"collective action" to overcome injustice. In the eyes of CIBC, fairy tales were not only rife with sexist stereotypes, but with materialism, elitism, ethnocentrism, and racism too.

CIBC's *Human (and Anti-Human) Values in Children's Books* listed 35
235 children's books published in 1975. Each was evaluated against a checklist that measured whether it was racist, sexist, elitist, materialist, ageist, conformist, escapist, or individualist; or whether it was opposed to those values or indifferent to them; whether it "builds a positive image of females/minorities" or "builds a negative image of females/minorities"; whether it "inspires action versus oppression"; and whether it is "culturally authentic." Only members of a specific group reviewed books about their own group: Blacks reviewed books about blacks, Chicanos reviewed books about Chicanos, and so on. Few of the books reviewed had any lasting significance, and few of them are still in print a quarter-century later. One that is still read is John D. Fitzgerald's *The Great Brain Does It Again*, which CIBC rated as racist, sexist, materialist, individualist, conformist, and escapist.

The author Nat Hentoff reacted angrily to what he called CIBC's "righteous vigilanteism." Although he agreed with the council's egalitarian goals, he warned that its bias checklists and its demands for political correctness would stifle free expression. He interviewed other writers who complained about the CIBC checklist but were fearful of being identified. CIBC's efforts to eliminate offensive books and to rate books for their political content, he argued, were creating a climate in which "creative imagination, the writer's and the child's, must hide to survive." Its drive against "individualism," he said, was antithetical to literature and the literary imagination: "Collectivism is for politics," he said, not for writers.

In retrospect, CIBC appears to have had minimal impact on general books. Despite having been denounced as racist, *The Cay* and *Sounder* remain commercially successful. Fairy tales continue to enchant children (although they are seldom found in textbooks and are usually bowdlerized). The public was only dimly aware, if at all, of CIBC's lists of stereotypes, its reviews, and its ratings. Publishers kept printing and selling children's books that defied CIBC's strictures.

Where CIBC did make a difference, however, was with publishers of K–12 textbooks. Textbook houses could not risk ignoring CIBC or its labeling system. No publisher could afford to enter a statewide adoption process with a textbook whose contents had been branded racist or sexist or ageist or handicapist or biased against any other group. The publishers' fear of stigma gave CIBC enormous leverage. When publishers began writing their own bias guidelines in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they consulted with CIBC or hired members of its editorial advisory board to counsel them about identifying bias. James Banks, a member of the

CIBC advisory board, wrote the bias guidelines for McGraw-Hill; his wife, Cherry A. McGee Banks, was one of the main writers of the Scott Foresman–Addison Wesley guidelines.

CIBC multiplied its effectiveness when it worked in tandem with the National Organization for Women (NOW), which was also founded in 1966. Unlike CIBC, which operated from New York City, NOW had chapters in every state. CIBC and NOW frequently collaborated to fight sexism and to promote language censorship in the publishing industry and in textbooks. Feminist groups, some associated with NOW, others operating independently, testified at state hearings against unacceptable textbooks, pressured state and local school boards to exclude such books, and lobbied publishers to expunge sexist language from their books. Feminists demanded a 50-50 ratio of girls and boys, women and men, in every book. They counted illustrations to see how many female characters were represented. They noted whether girls and women were in passive or active roles as compared to boys and men. They made lists of the occupations represented, insisted that women have equal representation in professional roles, and objected if illustrations showed women as housewives, baking cookies, or sewing. They hectored publishers, textbook committees, and school boards with their complaints. And they made a difference.

In 1972, a group called Women on Words and Images published a pamphlet titled *Dick and Jane as Victims: Sex Stereotyping in Children's Readers* that documented the imbalanced representation of boys and girls in reading textbooks. In the most widely used readers of the mid-1960s, boys were more likely to be lead characters and to play an active role as compared to girls, who were portrayed as dependent, passive, and interested only in shopping and dressing up. At textbook hearings around the country, feminist groups brandished the book and demanded changes. Within a year of the pamphlet's appearance, the authors reported that they had drawn national attention to the problem. Publishers consulted with them for advice about how to revise their materials. By the mid-1970s, every major publishing company had adopted guidelines that banned sexist language and stereotypes from their textbooks. 40

By adopting bias guidelines, the publishers agreed to police their products and perform the censorship demanded by the politically correct left and the religious right. Publishers found it easier to exclude anything that offended anybody, be they feminists, religious groups, racial and ethnic groups, the disabled, or the elderly, rather than to get into a public controversy and see their product stigmatized. It was not all that difficult to delete a story or a paragraph or a test item, and most of the time no one noticed anyway.

The publishers reacted differently to pressure groups from the left and right. Companies did not share the Christian fundamentalist values

of right-wing groups; they sometimes fought them in court, as Holt did in the *Mozert v. Hawkins* case described earlier. By contrast, editors at the big publishing companies often agreed quietly with the feminists and civil rights groups that attacked their textbooks; by and large, the editors and the left-wing critics came from the same cosmopolitan worlds and held similar political views. The publishers and editors did not mind if anyone thought them unsympathetic to the religious right, but they did not want to be considered racist by their friends, family, and professional peers. Nor did they oppose feminist demands for textbook changes, which had the tacit or open support of their own female editors. In retrospect, this dynamic helps to explain why the major publishing companies swiftly accepted the sweeping linguistic claims of feminist critics and willingly yielded to a code of censorship.

By the end of the 1980s, every publisher had complied with the demands of the critics, both from left and right. Publishers had established bias guidelines with which they could impose self-censorship and head off the outside censors, as well as satisfy state adoption reviews. Achieving demographic balance and excluding sensitive topics had become more important to their success than teaching children to read or to appreciate good literature. Stories written before 1970 had to be carefully screened for compliance with the bias guidelines; those written after 1970 were unlikely to be in compliance unless written for a textbook publisher. So long as books and stories continue to be strained through a sieve of political correctness, fashioned by partisans of both left and right, all that is left for students to read will be thin gruel.

EXAMINING THE ISSUE CRITICALLY

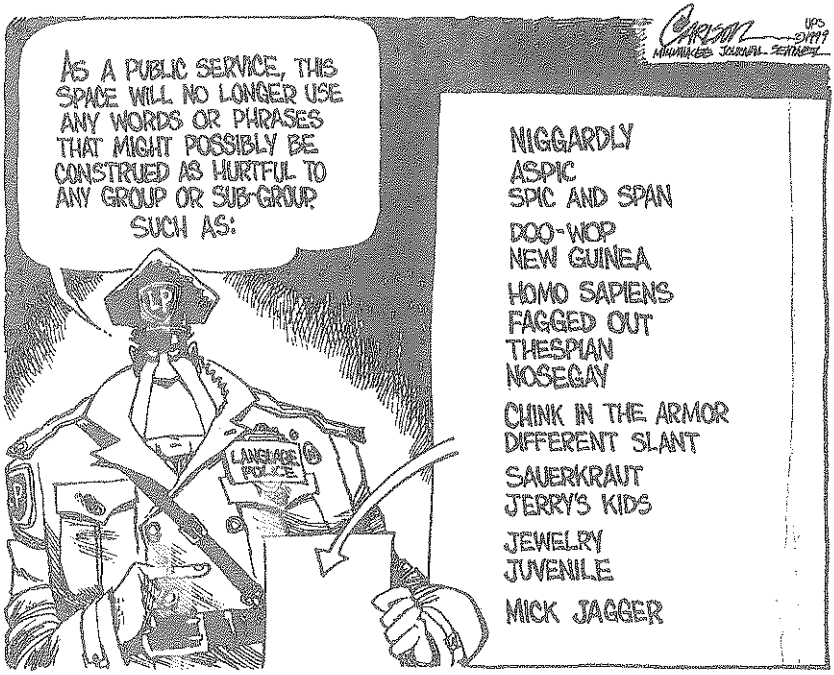
1. Controversies over political correctness often take the form of isolated incidents or situations, many of them based on college campuses and in college classrooms: for example, an instructor or student says something that offends administrators, other instructors, or students. The participants in such cases are often strident about their concerns and authorities rush in to put pressure on the parties to resolve their differences. Often it is difficult, therefore, to discern lessons or develop a guiding philosophy with regard to the validity of political correctness arguments. What makes Ravitch's analysis of political correctness in the world of textbook publishing different from those isolated but hot issues that arise from time on our campuses? Is the analysis of the publishing industry's censorship, from both the right and the left on the political spectrum, more or less abstract, more or less important than those incidents that so often make the news? What's at stake from Ravitch's perspective, and from your own, when it comes to the way information is imparted by college textbooks?

2. Have you found fault with any of your textbooks that seem to contain further examples of the kinds of censorship on the part of authors and college textbook publishers that Ravitch discusses? Do you have trouble knowing whether or not your texts have undergone censorship? Does the fact that it is difficult to know if censorship has taken place make the issue more or less important for you? Why?
3. To what extent is the publishing industry's "bottom line" the real problem with respect to the work of the language police? Is the public concerned about censorship in textbooks, or is this an "invisible issue" for most people? Does the public want unbiased textbooks? Who, or what group, could be put in charge of guaranteeing bias-free textbooks? Is a watch-dog oversight group a viable possibility? What solutions for this problem would you like to see put into effect?

MAKING CONNECTIONS: POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AND SPEECH CODES

The following questions are offered to help you start to make meaningful connections among the four articles in this Case Study. These questions can be used for class discussion, or you can answer any one of the questions by writing an essay. If you choose the essay option, be sure to make specific references to at least two of the Case Study articles.

1. After reading the articles by Bronner, Leo, Doloff, and Ravitch, write an essay in which you argue one of the following positions: that the political correctness movement has taken a good idea and pushed it too far or that there is an ongoing need to monitor our language. Use examples from the articles in this Case Study, and your own experiences, to support your views.
2. What is the history of the term *politically correct*? When was it first used, by whom, and with what meaning? Has the meaning of the term changed over time? What is the status of the term today? Review the articles in this Case Study, particularly the one by Ravitch, for a summary of censorship from the right and the left, and find research materials in your library or on the Internet in order to write a report on the term *politically correct*.
3. After reading the articles by Bronner, Leo, Doloff, and Ravitch, where do you stand on the issue of speech codes? What are the historical reasons given for the need for speech codes? Do you think speech codes have, in fact, served a worthwhile purpose? Or, as their detractors claim, have speech codes silenced a segment of American society? Do you believe there is still a need to maintain speech codes? Write an essay explaining your position on campus speech codes.
4. Comment on the 1999 cartoon by Stuart Carlson on page 290, which appeared in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. What, for you, are the connotations of the term *language police*? What is Carlson's attitude toward political correctness? How do you suppose Leo would respond to this cartoon?


AS A PUBLIC SERVICE, THIS SPACE WILL NO LONGER USE ANY WORDS OR PHRASES THAT MIGHT POSSIBLY BE CONSTRUED AS HURTFUL TO ANY GROUP OR SUB-GROUP. SUCH AS:
LANGUAGE POLICE
NIGGARDLY
ASPIC
SPIC AND SPAN
DOO-WOP
NEW GUINEA
HOMO SAPIENS
FAGGED OUT
THESPIAN
NOSEGAY
CHINK IN THE ARMOR
DIFFERENT SLANT
SAUERKRAUT
JERRY'S KIDS
JEWELRY
JUVENILE
MICK JAGGER

5

Men and Women Talking

During the thirty years since the first edition of *Language Awareness* was published, the women's movement has given rise to a tremendous interest in the roles that men and women play in our society and especially the way those roles are both reflected and reinforced in our language usage. Women have claimed that men have been oppressors in relegating women to subservient roles, arguing that the way to achieve equality is to speak out, to break the silences that so often have made such oppression seem normal. The women's movement has also worked to expose the manner in which male linguistic domination has institutionalized women's diminished status. At base, this approach rests on the notion that language reveals thoughts and attitudes and that the way to remedy inequality is first to sensitize ourselves to the language we use with each other, and then to encourage more thoughtful and appropriate language to correct our problems. Sociology aside, language may be responsible for inequality but it can also be used to rescue us from ourselves. Men, on the other hand, have been used to the assumption that they are merely inheritors of linguistic tradition, and are not purely responsible for sexist language — and they may be correct. Consequently, a good deal of commentary rejecting anti-male bashing has also been voiced and seen in print.

The articles we have gathered here attempt to show men and women talking both among themselves and to each other. We begin with Audre Lorde's powerful speech to women about the need to break silences, to speak out, and to realize themselves through action growing out of an awareness of language. We turn next to Nathan Cobb's "Gender Wars in Cyberspace" and a discussion of the promise of equality the Internet held for women and why equality in that arena still seems elusive. Our next author, using the pseudonym of Juliet Gabriel, points out that the language men and women use to write personal ads may not get the desired results because the writers don't recognize "the things that make them shine," nor how to find appropriate language to convey them. Deborah Tannen gives an analysis of the way men and women give and interpret orders in the workplace and how the examination of other cultures may give us