

Help! How do you define PC?

By Chad Bryant

What does it mean to be Politically Correct? Despite much publicity of the term, I had no idea, so in search of an answer to my query, I went to Catherine Stimson's lecture "On Being Labeled Politically Correct" on Thursday, March 7.

According to Ms. Stimson (Miss or Mrs. is not PC), there are three "demonizations" of PC:

1) It represents all that is bad in higher education. An example might be the loss of free speech. I'm vague on this point. To be honest, I was desperately attempting to find an open seat during this juncture of the lecture.

2) It has become a political weapon against change. This I DO understand. Ultra-conservatives often use the myth of not being labeled PC as a disastrous consequence that will ultimately flood their lives with misery and despair. What they are really afraid of is saying what they know to be offensive and ultimately flooding their lives with misery and despair.

3) It is keeping the institutions of higher education from discussing other, more important, problems. For example, the low rate of literacy in the country and the lack of science and math students that America is producing. This point is a tactic which surfaced in Stimson's lecture several times. I would like to call it Let's-Find-Subjects-That-Everyone-Agrees-Upon-And-Somehow-Link-It-To-My-Argument.

So, what does Politically Correct mean? As Stimson came to the conclusion of her speech by talking about how

*PC, or not PC, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The calls and chants of close-minded liberals
Or to take up arms against these PC viewpoints
And by opposing them die. To think—to differ—
And more; and by differ to say we end
The suppression, and the repressed opinions
That never are debated. 'Tis an option
Devoutly to be wished. To think—to differ.
To differ—perchance to offend: ay, there's the rub!
For in differing what offenses may come
When we decide to say what is not right,
Must give us pause.*

America's common political values, freedoms and equality "bond us together by putting us at odds," I realized that I was not going to find the answer in this muck of intelligentsia garbage. So I went to dinner at Proctor.

There, John Rothstein '93 spoke for the left wing portion of Proctor in calling PC "a slur" for people who have the decency to respect the cultures, races, religions and gender of others. He also gave a glimpse of what an example of being PC at Middlebury might be.

"I resent being called PC for saying 'women' instead of girls," he said.

And on the right wing, I found Brian Howie '93. He said that PC is a college policy of eliminating prejudices such as racism and sexism and is often manifested in hate speech rules that forbid students to say anything that is interpreted as racist or sexist. These rules, commented Howie, often induce the "opposite of what they are trying to accomplish" because repression does not change opinions.

Despite their differences in opinions about being PC, very few Middlebury students with whom I spoke felt

oppressed by it. The whole issue of what PC is and how we are affected by it can be summed up, for me, by returning to Stimson's lecture and observing the actions of Professor Pardon Tillinghast, Middlebury's personification of "class." After almost falling asleep several times during the opening rounds of the lecture, Tillinghast graciously gave his seat to a young woman who had dashed up the stairs in an attempt to make the beginning of the lecture. At first, she refused his offer as she tried to catch her breath, but after much insisting by Tillinghast, she accepted the seat. Tillinghast then quietly left the lecture.

Whether one is PC or not is the question, and to argue, or give lectures,

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on the subject is ridiculous. What matters is common courtesy toward other individuals, despite their radical or reactionary views. Professor Tillinghast may have left the lecture, but he probably knows far more than those of us who stayed and listened.

Multicultural housing

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is an important investment for Middlebury to make and African-American and Hispanic-American students certainly support it. It would not be residential, however, and, as Norman pointed out, "The emphasis is on social needs as well as academic needs, so in a sense, our proposal [for a bicultural center] is broader than the needs covered by the multicultural center." Senior Jean Tait, president of AAA, concurred, "While it's important for Middlebury to catch up and have a multicultural center, it's more important in our eyes to have a center for the African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans who have been here much longer and who are people of color in their own country."

The Community Council approved the Enhancement Committee report, which included the bicultural center proposal with a few changes in language. Originally, the report emphasized that admissions preference be given to students of color. In response to concerns that this would contradict the goal of eliminating exclusiveness at Middlebury, the two groups agreed to emphasize the openness of admissions criteria. Students who demonstrate commitment to African-American and/or Hispanic-American studies will be considered regardless of gender, race, class, sexual orientation and ethnic or religious heritage.

Dean Emerson indicated that because of budget constraints, the multicultural center is further down the road in relation to the academic interest houses which can and will be implemented next fall. Thus the Community Council has decided to include the bicultural center as one of those houses. While there are still reservations about a residential bicultural center based on what Residential Life Committee member Tom Chambers '91 described as "fears of exclusive and self-perpetuating tendencies," the purpose of the Academic Interest House is to be

membership on the academic interest of the individual.

Emerson stressed that the CC supports the residential concept for the African-American and Hispanic-American students who have actively been asking for a house, as long as the academic criteria are met. To distinguish further chances of exclusiveness, membership is limited to one year. Fernando Zucchi '91 of the Residential Life Committee explained that it would be a similar concept to the fraternity membership system in that the residents of the house would only be a portion of all students involved in that academic area. He also emphasized that the outstanding idea was to provide a tangible structure that visibly shows support and representation for a specific group of people—in this case, students of color.

As for whether the African-American and Hispanic-American house will differ from other academic interest houses as a cultural center, Emerson responded that the difference will be in the expansive space allotted for library, seminar room, offices, etc. The difference won't be one of residents' race, especially with the admissions criteria opening membership to all students.

"The bicultural center will not be defined in terms of ethnicity but in terms of academic interest in the study of [African-American and Hispanic-American] culture, history and literature," said Emerson.

A concern some students have along this line, however, is the limited number of such academic courses. Ofelia Barrios '93, president of the Hispanic-American League, believes it would defeat the purpose somewhat to base admission into the bicultural center solely on academics.

"There isn't even an academic major for either African-American or Hispanic-American studies, so how can students be qualified to live there based on that?" she questioned.

But the Enhancement report also proposed enrichment of such curricula, and the Community Council has forwarded their proposals to the Educational Committee in hopes that African-American and Hispanic-American academics will eventually expand.

Emerson said that the details of implementing the African-American and Hispanic-American Cultural Center still have to be worked out. The AAA and the Hispanic-American League have already submitted their proposal for a house and, as a definite structure showing Middlebury's commitment and support for a major American culture, it may induce more students of color to come to Middlebury and remain comfortable while here.

"It is a genuine hope on everybody's part that the bicultural center will become a focal point for interest and education in the Middlebury community," said Emerson.



*****All TICKETS for the following events can be obtained at the Flynn Theatre Box Office, 153 Main St., Burlington (telephone 86-FLYNN) or at the UVM Campus Ticket Store, unless otherwise indicated.*****

•THE CLANCY BROTHERS AND ROBBIE O'CONNELL return to the Flynn Theatre Thurs., Mar. 14, at 8 pm. Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with the finest in the field of traditional Irish song! Tickets \$17/\$15/\$12.

•AIRJAZZ will be at the Flynn Sun., Mar. 17, at 1 pm. This trio has brought the art of juggling to new comic heights as they continually explore the outer limits of their acrobatic craft. Tickets \$8.50/\$6.50. The event co-sponsor, University Mall, has arranged to donate fifty tickets to local families of Operation Desert Storm.

•SONNY ROLLINS is also at the Flynn Fri., Mar. 22, at 8 pm. Legendary jazz pioneer, Rollins is considered by many to be the greatest saxophonist alive, bar none...this tenor saxophone colossus and his powerhouse sextet promise to make musical history at the Flynn. Tickets \$18.50/\$15.50/\$8.50.

•MATTHEW BUCKLEY once again brings his amazing array of traditional Celtic instruments to celebrate St. Patrick's festivities. Beautiful, haunting tones awaken the Irish in us all. See him Thurs., Mar. 14, 7:30 pm at the Daily Bread Bakery & Cafe, Bridge St., Richmond. Tickets are \$3.50 adults, \$1.50 children. Call 434-3148 for information.

•"ARACHNOPHILIA: WOMEN'S MIXED MEDIA" is the featured exhibit this month at the Burlington Metropolitan Art Gallery, City Hall. In celebration of Women's History Month, paintings in a variety of media and styles, including those by Stephanie Douglas, will be displayed. The gallery is open Mon.-Fri., 8:30 am-4:30 pm.

•CONTROVERSIAL EXHIBIT "Unknown Secrets: Art and the Rosenberg Era," is a mixed media collection featuring artists such as Picasso, Leger, Alice Neel and Rockwell Kent. The exhibit, rejected by many galleries and museums because of its controversial subject matter, examines the political and cultural climate of the McCarthy period by focusing on the trial and execution of the Rosenbergs. The show can be seen Mar. 15-May 12 at the Wood Gallery, Vermont College Arts Center, Montpelier.

•CERAMIC DESIGN for Middlebury College Students: the Vt. State Craft Center at Frog Hollow is offering a 10-week course, taught by Bob Green, that will meet Tuesdays, Feb. 26-May 7, 7-9 pm. Both beginning and advanced students will explore ceramic sculpture and vessel-making techniques such as coil and slab construction, as well as use of the potter's wheel. All work will be stoneware or Raku glazed and fired, and/or burnished and primitively fired. Tuition is \$95, Material Fee approx. \$30. To register and for more info. contact Kathy Scott at 388-3177.

•GRANTSSS The Burlington City Arts and the Community Arts Grants committee wish to announce that grant applications are now available for 1991 Community Arts Grants, individual awards from \$100 to \$1000. Those interested can receive info. and applications at the Burlington City Arts Office on the first floor of City Hall, or call 658-9300 ext. 122. Deadline is April 19, formal awards ceremony is May 22.

•INTERNATIONAL ART HORIZONS is sponsoring a competition open to all artists of any media. \$30,000 in prizes and an exhibition at the Soho Art 54 Gallery will be awarded to the winners. The jurors are from New York's Museum of Modern Art, the Frick Art Museum (Pennsylvania), the Boca Raton Museum of Art (Florida), the Texas Modern Art Museum and the Taft Museum (Ohio). Applicants must submit slides and an official application form by April 12, 1991. To obtain a form, send a postcard to International Art Horizons, Dept. RASU, PO Box 1533, Ridgewood, NJ 07450, or telephone (201) 487-7277, or fax (201) 488-4004.

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