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The Meaning of Political Correctness at Middlebury

by Daniel E. O'Neil

Regrettably intellectual freedom at Middlebury College, as well as throughout a significant segment of American academia, has been consistently asphyxiated by the pathetically disgusting phenomenon of Political Correctness. It has become painfully evident that Middlebury's administration and faculty have made a deep commitment to the suppression of "incorrect" opinions with regard to sexism, racism, elitism, and various other perceived social inequities and injustices.

The relentless determination, perhaps enthusiasm, demonstrated by several prominent administrators in their drive to eliminate fraternities—to the point of explicitly threatening with suspension and expulsion those students who dare to question, by due process of law, the college's fraternity policy—is indicative of the authoritarianism of the present Old Chapel regime. Less radical, yet equally abhorrent, is the recent campaign to remind the college community that, among other "offenses," "negative" comments concerning sexual orientation" constitute sexual harassment and consequently are subject to administrative discipline. Obviously, dissent from politically correct positions, even when expressed in a peaceful, minimally confrontational manner, is strictly prohibited.

There are, I would suggest, members of the faculty who actually endorse diversity of opinion. Yet the faculty in its entirety is condemnable as well. One need only recall its unsightly role in the abolition of fraternities and observe its current deliberations over a community service requirement, apparently designed to instill an exceedingly "correct" sense of social consciousness in students. It would appear that much of the faculty is less interested in teaching than in meddling in the extracurricular lives of the students.

The most recent attempt at thought control is the proposed mandatory course in environmental science, "Cherishing the Earth." While the existence of pressing environmental issues is undeniable, there is at present a vast divergence of opinion regarding the severity of the situation and appropriate alleviation measures. The instructors of such a course, who almost certainly would be highly politicized and perhaps environmentally extremist, would find this opportunity to impose their personal views upon students irresistible. Worse, the severe penalties imposed this past fall by Stanford officials on members of the university's marching band following the organization's satire of Oregon's efforts to save a threatened breed of owl reflect the intolerance of mere disagreement with "correct" environmental thinking. Given this situation, is free thinking really encouraged?

Furthermore, the implementation of "Cherishing the Earth" would represent a dangerous precedent in the hands of those who would require mandatory courses of instruction in the Western culture's continuing oppression of women and minorities. Simply consider the efforts of the University of Texas English Department to replace the equivalent of Middlebury's

“Freshmen Writing Courses” with a standard course on the pervasive nature of sexism and racism in contemporary American society. Haverford College’s “Social Justice Requirement,” which may be fulfilled by courses such as “Psychological Issues of Lesbians and Gay Males” or “Feminist Political Theory” is similarly repulsive, yet dangerously near. In short, no course dealing with any single, highly politicized subject should be incorporated as a graduation requirement.

Fortunately, however, there remains one party within the Middlebury community which appears to oppose the college’s nonsensical agenda. At the March 10 meeting of the Student Government Association, an overwhelming majority of elected representatives adamantly rejected “Cherishing the Earth.” This follows the SGA’s initial and subsequent votes affirming its belief that the institution must respect “a student’s right to associate with any organization outside the boundaries of the college.” Somehow the fact that the student
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body is generally determined
to resist this encroaching
Political Correctness is beyond
the comprehension of Old
Chapel and much of the faculty.
More likely is the scenario that
prevailing student sentiments
have been ignored.

The time has arrived for the
Board of Trustees to seize authority
from their ridiculous subordinates
and to assume direction of the
corporation. Middlebury alumni must
reassert their disapproval of the
College’s recent actions and continue
to seek more worthy recipients of
their financial capital. The situation
is critical.