

OPINIONS

Essence of 'liberal arts' endangered

by Peter Savodnik

I am writing in response to last week's Campus editorial, "What's so liberal about liberal arts?", in which the author attacks the essential foundations of the traditional Western university, and, at the same time, hints at the politicization of higher education in the United States.

Most notably, the author pulls the word "liberal" from its political context and applies it to the phrase "liberal arts," or "liberal education." The Puritans who founded Harvard College over three hundred years ago planted the first seeds of a liberal arts curriculum in America. When John Adams wrote

cally-influenced education is necessary in order to promote political awareness, that colleges have an obligation to expose their students to life beyond the academic forum.

Yet that is what a liberal arts education is all about: isolation, students who study and teachers who teach, for no other reason than learning itself. The American college is a product of the English university, namely Oxford, once compared to a monastery in which students were totally enveloped by their work. No end-games. No politics. That is the essence of absolute education.

The author of the editorial continues that we might not have

That is what a liberal arts education is all about: isolation, students who study and teachers who teach, for no other reason than learning itself.

his *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* in 1765 he stated, "...it is remarkable that they have left among their posterity so universal an affection and veneration for those seminaries, and for liberal education." The phrase "liberal arts" does not carry any political connotations with it. There are no "socialist arts," no "democratic arts," not even any "conservative arts." The term "liberal arts" is purely educational in meaning.

More importantly, the editorial seems to imply that education should somehow reflect the political world at home and abroad. The notion that our education should in any way be related to the Persian Gulf War, or any current event, is absolutely ludicrous.

There is something so characteristically precious about a liberal arts education, about a Middlebury education; what students study, what teachers teach, is for the sole purpose of learning, erudition, the pursuit of knowledge.

Certainly, attending Middlebury College is a tremendous privilege. We live on a campus isolated from the real world. Some will argue that a politi-

gone to war had Americans possessed a greater appreciation for Iraqi culture. Perhaps a finer understanding of the Iraqi people would have resulted in a sooner peace. Maybe if everybody who studied French or Spanish were fluent in Arabic we would never have resorted to military intervention. Nonetheless, Saddam Hussein committed a heinous crime, recognized not only by the West, but by his fellow Arab states as well. Hussein was a threat to the world's oil supply, the international balance of power and long-term stability in the Middle East. Regardless of whether or not we appreciate his culture, his language or his people, Kuwait, as of February 22, remained the 19th province of Iraq.

Equally important, Americans have a very close affinity with their European brethren, yet we have played significant roles in both world wars, fighting an enemy with whom we share numerous cultural ties.

Critics will maintain that traditional, Western education confines its pupils to a parochial frame of mind which breeds racism, sexism, homophobia: all of the prejudice typical of ethnocentric, white, Anglo-Saxon

However, we cannot mix politics with college; we can



PC does not exist at Middlebury

by Melissa Ryan and Cynthia Stillinger

Upon reading the letter "The Meaning of Political Correctness at Middlebury" by Dan O'Neil in last week's Campus, we felt the urgent need to reply, but we were almost as significantly plagued by an overwhelming sense of confusion. Mr. O'Neil's self-righteous response to what he has seen as the self-righteous PC movement strikes us as reactionary backlash toward a phenomenon that does not exist at Middlebury. Yes, Political Correctness is an issue at many American colleges and universities. The phrase evokes manifestations of change in several areas of higher education: the administration, the curriculum, and the student body. Political Correctness as such is problematic, to say the least. However, there is no point in attempting to address the pros and cons of Political Correctness when it does not apply to

the situation. There is little or no evidence of support for the movement you claim is stifling intellectual freedom at Middlebury. Does the student body consider itself PC? Mr. O'Neil acknowledges that the answer is no; the SGA rejected the proposed "Cherish the Earth" course. Thus he cries "thought control" where none exists. Apparently, what he so stren-

a social justice requirement (which might include gay-lesbian psychology or feminist politics) is to him "repulsive;" sexism, racism and other forms of prejudice are merely "perceived." The implications of his chosen words are very disturbing: this is the language of hate and intolerance. He may dismiss this assertion as more baggage of the PC movement, but he cannot deny that the language we use is both reflective and creative of the culture we are. More importantly, if he has an intellectual argument to present, sensationalist language is not an appropriate mode of expression.

The label of PC provides a convenient escape from very real issues ...

ously objects to are the issues which the PC movement attempts to address. The label of PC at Middlebury provides a convenient escape from the very real issues of sexism, racism, elitism, and other "perceived" social inequities. He may call his opinions simply "incorrect," but to us, they are very dangerous.

For example, "negative comments concerning sexual orientation" are not a harmless, and certainly not a "peaceful, minimally confrontational" form of "dissent from politically correct positions." This goes beyond the political; this is human respect. Mr. O'Neil may defend his rights to speech as vociferously as he can, but to intimidate, persecute, or even offend the gay and lesbian communities with his "incorrectness" is more than a breach of administrative policy; it is morally wrong.

We take issue with much of the language in Mr. O'Neil's article. He labels the campaign against hate speech "abhorrent,"

Lastly, we would like to defend the much-maligned faculty, which he claims is "less interested in teaching than in meddling in the extracurricular lives of the students." We would ask Mr. O'Neil to consider his academic experience at Middlebury (the college, not the corporation) and the professors who have contributed to his higher education. Would you dismiss their efforts so carelessly? Secondly, though he may be inclined to view Middlebury in terms of "us vs. them," this is for many of us a community—a community which counts students, administrators, faculty, staff, trustees and him as members.

In conclusion, we respect Mr. O'Neil's need and his right to speak out; however, he must respect ours as well. He cannot argue us away with the inappropriate label of Political Correctness; the issues existed before the phrase. In the future, if Mr. O'Neil would like to glorify fascism, please do not masquerade it under the cloak of diversity. Silence equals death.

DKE's position defended and explained

by Rodrigo J. Prudencio

While reading Anne Pellet's article in last week's Campus it became apparent that she, and perhaps many other students, continue to be unclear on how DKE views its present situation at Middlebury.

To begin with, I want to emphasize that we in no way cower from the sexual issue at hand. We are fully aware that we are members of a national organization that is single-sex in membership; we do not pretend to hide this fact. However, when John Butolph said that this problem "has gone beyond the gender issue," he was correct. Because our house is privately owned and independent of the college, DKE feels the

issue centers on the freedom of association and assembly which are secured in this country's Constitution. As a private organization, the DKE Alpha Alumni Association argues that it is entitled to invite guests to its house. These guests are the current brothers of DKE. In threatening us with sanctions if we make use of this invitation, the College is overstepping its jurisdiction over its students and their membership to organizations not affiliated with Middlebury College.

A similar situation occurred a while back and its outcome is relevant to how DKE views its current conflict. For a number of years, the Central Intelligence Agency had done its recruiting

on campus, in the offices of CC&P, and every year student organizations mounted demonstrations against such activity. Students argued that the CIA's recruitment standards based on sexual orientation violated the college's handbook and therefore felt that it was inconsistent with school policy to allow them to use a college facility for their interviewing. Eventually the CIA moved its recruitment to an off-campus location. Throughout all of this, however, neither the college, nor the demonstrators, questioned the rights of the students who were interviewing. They could not deny an individual's privilege to associate (or job-hunt in this case) with any organization of her or

his choice, as long as it remained off-campus. (Please do not take my use of this example to be an endorsement of the CIA and/or its activities.)

Still, the accusation of being insensitive to gender issues remains. It is incorrect to imply that we are behind the times when it comes to the question of single-sex membership. In fact, we are extremely aware of the changes which are going on within formerly single-sex clubs and what those changes suggest about the evolution of gender relations in our country. However, the situations of the Rotary Club and the other formerly all-male institutions which Ms. Pellet referred to are different

(continued on page 21)

(continued on page 21)