



The effects of the culture wars : debating political ideologies in the university
by Beth Anne Crookston

A thesis submitted to fulfill the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English
Montana State University
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Abstract:

An absolute definition of political correctness does not exist in the American vocabulary. Every use of the word has different implications that depend on the speaker or writer. This thesis attempts to define political correctness and the implications the term has on the culture wars within the university and American culture. Political correctness is an aspect of the culture wars that has affected both academic and popular culture's opinions on politically correct ideas. I explore how the pejorative aspects of political correctness have affected the term feminism, the nuances of Black English, and the composition classroom. Feminism and its ideas have been negatively affected by PC and the culture wars, which have degraded and unfairly labeled aspects of feminism. Certain terms within Black English have also experienced negative effects because of the ambiguity of political correctness within the culture wars. The composition classroom is an important forum for such changes and ideas to be discussed through certain pedagogical theories.

My method of uncovering and discussing these ideas was to research many different sources in order to see a broader picture of political correctness and its implications within the culture wars. I believe it is just as important to examine popular culture's ideas of political correctness as it is to study the effects of PC on academia; therefore, I used many sources from web sites as well as academic journals and texts. The results of my research indicate that every source had its own ideas about the effects of political correctness and the culture wars.

In conclusion, while political correctness has no definite meaning, most agree the term carries negative connotations. Within the context of the culture wars and subsequent debates about politically correct ideas, feminism and aspects of Black English have been negatively affected as well. Certain pedagogical theories and practices may be used in the composition classroom in order to shed light on the negativity of political correctness, feminism, and Black English, and thus hopefully open students up to new ideas and expand their paradigms concerning the culture wars.

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This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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ABSTRACT

An absolute definition of political correctness does not exist in the American vocabulary. Every use of the word has different implications that depend on the speaker or writer. This thesis attempts to define political correctness and the implications the term has on the culture wars within the university and American culture. Political correctness is an aspect of the culture wars that has affected both academic and popular culture's opinions on politically correct ideas. I explore how the pejorative aspects of political correctness have affected the term feminism, the nuances of Black English, and the composition classroom. Feminism and its ideas have been negatively affected by PC and the culture wars, which have degraded and unfairly labeled aspects of feminism. Certain terms within Black English have also experienced negative effects because of the ambiguity of political correctness within the culture wars. The composition classroom is an important forum for such changes and ideas to be discussed through certain pedagogical theories.

My method of uncovering and discussing these ideas was to research many different sources in order to see a broader picture of political correctness and its implications within the culture wars. I believe it is just as important to examine popular culture's ideas of political correctness as it is to study the effects of PC on academia; therefore, I used many sources from web sites as well as academic journals and texts. The results of my research indicate that every source had its own ideas about the effects of political correctness and the culture wars.

In conclusion, while political correctness has no definite meaning, most agree the term carries negative connotations. Within the context of the culture wars and subsequent debates about politically correct ideas, feminism and aspects of Black English have been negatively affected as well. Certain pedagogical theories and practices may be used in the composition classroom in order to shed light on the negativity of political correctness, feminism, and Black English, and thus hopefully open students up to new ideas and expand their paradigms concerning the culture wars.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

American universities constantly struggle with the issue of who gets to control knowledge and education. Numerous debates occur within departments, between departments, with the administration and the public over what is important in education, as well as what is acceptable material to teach in the academy. The university's liberal education program intends to form the citizens of the United States, so it is not surprising that conflicts exist over what students are taught in order to shape them into knowledgeable and active participants in our country. Within the past couple of decades, educators have attempted to showcase multiple paradigms of knowledge to students, thus causing a political debate over varying beliefs. Liberals, conservatives, and every stance in between hold various ideas about the presentation and material acceptable and necessary for college students to become citizens of the US. The political debate over college curricula makes up a small portion of the culture wars, which is a discussion over not only the definition of culture, but who controls it.

The culture war is an ongoing debate over the power of the individual will in our country, and how that will affects our culture as a whole. Each individual involved in the culture wars strives to have his or her idea included in our culture, such as critics like David Rieff who want to discredit the ideas and existence of the culture wars:

To insist that there is no war should be obvious, at least to anyone who has spent time in a war zone. To insist further that a society which can expend so much of its energy on what, when all is said and done, is little more than a debate over school curricula in a country where most people forget

what they learned at school almost immediately upon leaving it, and on what are the most politically, culturally, and morally appropriate ways of disbursing arts funding in a society where the arts...are very little valued.
(1)

Pessimism will not help students develop into intelligent members of society, especially if people agree with Rieff that students forget what they learn in school. College graduates deserve more credit for the time they invest in their education. A war is not always fought on a physical battlefield with bloodshed. War is generally a game of strategy, with each side making mental maneuvers before any physical fighting even happens. A culture war will not have any physical bloodshed because it takes place within the ideas of the society. Rieff disregards the decisions that support curriculum in the academy, or he would write more positively over the debate of such issues. I believe decisions surrounding what is taught in the university are vital concerning the development of the well-rounded minds of students. The core of what I will be discussing relies on the debate over school curricula, especially how the culture wars have shed light on certain issues academia must confront in order for education to serve a definite purpose. Education should expand the minds of students in order to give them multifaceted viewpoints to help them function in society. But the political divisions in society also exist in the university system, and as long as the division of political ideas exists, a power struggle over the education and knowledge of our country will continue.

I believe the purpose of education is the discovery and invention of truth and knowledge through the many disciplines in the university, which shows students how to learn and form their own ideas about our culture. Students must be introduced to

multiple ideas that have come from diverse cultures and populations in order to view all perceptions and possibilities of knowledge. According to Gary Kamiya of the San Francisco Examiner, "the real purpose of a liberal education is not to inculcate values but to teach students how to learn" (qtd. in Aiex 1). Teaching students multiple ways of viewing subjects enables them to form their own values and opinions, which is vital to a democratic society because a democratic society is based on individual ideas or the voice of the people. Students need to be exposed to multiple viewpoints in order to form their own educated beliefs.

The university curriculum should offer students various ideas instead of over-emphasizing limited information and expecting them not to question. Part of a solid education is developing critical thinking abilities in students, but some critics believe that by opening students' minds to different ideas, the old accepted ideas will be shut down. Conservative Marc Berley writes, "Students are increasingly taught that there is no correct answer to any question. They are taught, rather, that there are only different answers, and where difference is to be celebrated, any notion of correctness is to be avoided" (1). Instead of assuming no correct answer exists, educators and students both recognize that multiple paradigms are available in which to view the world. The university is a mature learning environment where all avenues of discussion should be open, but respect should be a main priority in classroom discussion.

In order for multifaceted discussions to take place, students need various ideas from multiple cultures need to be exposed. One school's policy is to offer these discussions; as California State University states in their Goals of a Multicultural

Education, "Multiculturalism does not deny, ignore, or demean such fundamental expressions of diversity. On the contrary, it recognizes and respects them and utilizes them creatively to enrich and enhance the educational experience. It realizes that respect for the human person requires respect for people in all diversities in which they are encountered" (77). Multiculturalism and its position in the curriculum holds one of the many areas of debate in the culture wars. Multiculturalism involves allowing multiple cultures to voice their ideas in the academy, and lets other cultures within our society voice their opinions, ideas, and work. There should be nothing difficult about allowing multiple viewpoints from diverse cultures to be introduced into the classroom, but the desire for political control of the university causes rifts in the intellectual discussion of multicultural issues. These rifts complicate the emergence of multiculturalism in the academic curriculum.

One such rift is the debate over political correctness in the university, which is closely tied with multicultural ideas. PC, a truly ambiguous term, has moved beyond the university debates into the general media. Conservatives have many explanations for PC's origin. The conservative accounts argue that PC started as a communist idea to overcome democracy, or that it began in the civil rights movement of the 60s, or that PC is the current attempt of the liberals to push their ideas on the university and culture as a whole. Meanwhile, liberals began using the term political correctness as a joke, berating other liberals for not practicing what they preach. As time progressed and conservatives adopted PC as a weapon against liberals' ideas, liberals have stopped using the term PC

because of its pejorative connotations. Now liberals instead focus on ideas of promoting equality for all people within the academy and society.

Conservatives still use the term PC in order to accuse liberals of menacing the dominant power structure, and to belittle liberal projects and ideas. As Nola Kortner Aiey writes, "the PC label is applied to activities that in some way question, subvert, or threaten the dominant power structure" (1). Conservatives view political correctness as a threat and focus on the term in order to persuade the general public that multicultural changes in our society are unnecessary and even detrimental. Because of conservative outcry, political correctness has become an easy label to apply to ideas such as multiculturalism, ethnic studies, feminism, and other minority ideas in order to taint public opinion. While conservatives have adopted political correctness to discuss all that is evil with the left's way of thinking, liberals have shied away from the word, focusing more on valuable debates with clear meanings. PC has become a word with no solid meaning, more of a myth distorted for whatever the user's purpose may be.

Political correctness is not the only word misunderstood and distorted in the culture wars. How and what words are used in the culture wars are a main component of the debates between the varying degrees of conservatives and liberals, leaving them and anyone in the middle or periphery confused and uneducated about what word choices to make. The most often discussed word changes are those referring to minorities and disabled, such as the term "Native American" being considered more appropriate than the word "Indians" for historical significance or "mentally challenged" being less hurtful than "retarded." Word changes not often discussed are those that have dealt with

feminism and its many beliefs and differences. The meaning and usage of feminism have been the most prevalent victims of PC word evolutions. Regarded as an idea to liberate women from male oppression, feminism has evolved into a dirty word in some arenas, making women sound as if they complain too much. Certain groups have lumped feminist ideas into terms that are detrimental and destructive to the movement, such as the term victim feminism which makes feminism seem like it is seeking sympathy more than equality. Another term changed by the culture wars is "nigger," as in who can properly use the word and the definition of its true meaning. The misunderstanding of these terms' meanings and significance are ignored and the public remains ignorant without open discussion. The university should offer a forum for such terms in order for understanding and acceptance to happen.

The college classroom offers an excellent opportunity for the discussions of language and issues of the culture wars. Concentrating on the composition classroom where I have experience with such issues, I will address how the culture wars have filtered into the composition class, how teachers can and do approach composition using PC and multicultural theories as tools, and what the implications multiculturalism imposes on future composition classrooms and education in general.

Overall, I believe the university should be open-minded to the ideas that are debated in the culture wars instead of struggling with who holds the power of education and knowledge. All ideas should be open for discussion in order for intellectual opinions to form. But as Terry Teachout writes, "This is not a polite debate over different styles of intellectual discourse. It's a struggle for power, the power to teach the young and

shape the culture” (4). The control over education will continue its debate within the culture wars, but the fact remains that students need exposure to all angles of the debate in order to find the have the tools to create their own truths.

CHAPTER 2

THE DEFINITION OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

As it is typically used, a conclusive definition for the term political correctness does not exist. The phrase describes an action that others are doing, or an idea that others are supporting or developing, but PC never describes the actions of the speaker using the term. No one ever says, "I am politically correct," since people do not admit any adherence to PC because of how pejorative and loaded the term has become. No one wants to identify with any usage of political correctness because of its negative connotations. People are commonly accused of being politically correct, but no one is proud to be so. Denying one's political correctness is unnecessary because in politics, as well in the university, there is no neutrality; everyone takes some sort of stance with their opinions. By saying, "I am not PC," the speaker is attempting to establish a false neutral position, claiming to refuse to identify with any political ideology. Since there is no conclusive definition of political correctness, as it changes with whoever is using the term, a paradox emerges.

No one can claim to be PC because of the ever-altering usage, and no one can claim to not be PC for the same reason; therefore, any claim of political correctness does not exist. PC is a term generally used to argue for or against (usually against) an open culture, ideas of multiculturalism, and equality for everyone within our society and universities. The origins of political correctness are highly debated and need to be

documented in order for any clarity to occur. To explore this complex word, I explain the origins of the term and how it is used in the culture wars within the university. I explore the multiple definitions of the term, as well as why those definitions do not fit into the paradox, or appear to confine the word even more.

The Origins of Political Correctness

The earliest explanation for the origin of political correctness dates back to 1923 in Germany. Agustin Blazquez and Jaums Sutton write that PC “was developed at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, which was founded in 1923[...]It was a group of thinkers who pulled together to find a solution to the biggest problem facing the implementers of communism in Russia. The problem? Why wasn’t communism spreading?” (1). Originally, PC was a label used to signify those who agreed with the popular political ideas and attempted to persuade those who did not to follow those beliefs. Blazquez and Sutton seek to compound the origins of the term PC with its usage today. Obviously a conservative viewpoint that wrongly blames PC for spreading communism in the United States, this 2002 article does have some truth to it. Stalinists used PC to signify those parties that supported Stalin’s political beliefs. Margaret Boyd elaborates on this explanation when she says, “The term ‘political correctness’ is now used to discredit egalitarianism, but it was first used in the 1930s as a serious term among Stalinists” (1). The invocation of Stalin to explain the origin of PC only exemplifies how the words political and correctness began as the phrase political

correctness. Connecting the ideologies of Stalin's PC and the modern day PC says that the ideas today are communist in nature.

Stalin's PC explains the historic usage of the term, not the umbrella term that PC is today. According to Paul Berman, the term PC originated with Leninists: "'Politically correct' was originally an approving phrase on the Leninist left to denote someone who steadfastly toed the party line. Then it evolved into 'P. C.,' an ironic phrase among wised-up leftists to denote someone whose line-toeing fervor was too much to bear" (5). Regardless of whether the term originated with Stalin or Lenin, communism is not the goal of current day political correctness when liberals attempt to give a voice to all individuals, regardless of what conservatives want the public to believe. I have always thought that ideas of equality and giving a voice to every person regardless of differences signifies the political ideas of democracy. But the ideas of democracy become blurred when certain notions are threatened by new ideas of acceptance and understanding.

PC is also credited as originating in the 1970s. Stephanie Herman acknowledges one woman as beginning the usage of the term: "Karen DeCrow, president of the National Organization for Women from 1974 to 1977 [...] is credited with coining the term 'political correctness' in 1975" (1). A different explanation of the origin of PC is a common reference guide on the Internet called "xrefer" that places PC's origins

At some point in the 1980s, first in America and soon afterwards elsewhere, the term *politically correct* (abbreviated *PC*, *P.C.*) began to be used in the sense 'marked by others adhering to a typically progressive orthodoxy on issues involving especially race, gender, sexual affinity, or ecology [...]. American politics is being corrupted and diminished by the doctrine of Political Correctness which demands rigid adherence to political attitudes and social mores of the liberal-left, and which exhibits a

malevolent intolerance to anybody who dares not comply with them. (1)

Specifically attacking liberals with their definition of PC, “xrefer” swings to the Right in order to attack liberals for attempting to give voice to all individuals within our society.

In fact, most definitions of political correctness come from conservative voices.

One such voice is an even more obvious attack from Philip Atkinson which also attempts to date PC’s origins:

Political Correctness (PC) is the communal tyranny that erupted in the 1980s. It was a spontaneous declaration that particular ideas, expressions and behaviour, which were then legal, should be forbidden by law, and people who transgressed should be punished. It started with a few voices but grew in popularity until it became unwritten and written law within the community. With those who were publicly declared as being not politically correct becoming the target of persecution by the mob, if not prosecution by the state. (1)

There are so many misconceptions in this statement that I feel I must break it down piece by piece. The ambiguity that is laced through this statement is obvious in the failure to give credit to any sources or define certain ideas. Atkinson dates PC as having “erupted in the 1980s,” but when exactly and how PC came to be are questions left unanswered.

Since PC is a “spontaneous declaration,” Atkinson implies that PC came out of nowhere, an unpremeditated idea from some political entity, since he does not blame liberals in this statement. And the implication that PC has become law is original and surprising, since he cites no laws, nor gives any solid examples. It is difficult to believe that the ideas behind a term such as PC, that has no real dictionary definition, can become a law.

Conservatives rely on the ambiguity that accompanies PC to make the term sound more

scary and distorted than it actually is. Robin Tolmách Lakoff believes the use of the term began in the 1990s: "In 1990, p. c. would have been an excellent choice for *Time*'s word of the decade (if *Time* had such a category). For over ten years it served as the weapon of choice to defang what was perceived, or represented, by the right as the threatening menace of the left" (90-91). Conservatives use PC as a way to misrepresent ideas generally thought of as liberal, attempting to speak louder than the left on liberal ideas in the university. During the 1990s, conservatives began to monopolize the media in order to flood the public with misinformation about liberal ideologies.

Political correctness started to receive national attention during the early 1990s, when more various definitions arose in the media. As Berman writes, "The national debate over 'political correctness' began in the fall of 1990 with a small, innocuous-seeming article in *The New York Times* - and within a few months was plastered across the covers of *Newsweek*, *The Atlantic*, *New York*, *The New Republic*, and *The Village Voice*, not to mention the TV news-talk shows and the newspaper op-ed pages" (1). The media began using the catch phrase political correctness to describe academic arguments over what material was taught in the university, and each source had their own idea of what the word meant.

The media attention of what occurs in the university gave national attention to multicultural ideas, but it also created a backlash, which caused liberals and their "PC" ideas to appear more like nagging than thought-provoking insights. Berman discusses the overblown nature of the media when he writes that to liberal professors

and their supporters, and to post-modern liberals who spice up their

teaching and writing with a few sprinkles of race/class/gender-ism or a bit of world-weary deconstruction, something about the current debate is very chilling. They see the *Newsweek* cover pointing a finger at the "Thought Police," which means themselves, and they see President Bush denounce them, and they look around for their own allies, who turn out not to be many[...]Isn't something overblown about the outrage over P. C. and the new theories and curricular debate? [...] mightn't the real target in the anti-P. C. campaign, as some writers have conjectured, be the heritage of democratic openness and social reform that dates from the sixties? (19)

Berman states that PC received a lot of attention during the early 1990s, but that the ideas behind the uproar about PC originated in the radical ideas of the 1960s, such as the civil and equal rights movements. Margaret Boyd also places PC's current ideology around the same era, saying "It resurfaced in feminist circles in the 1970s as a reminder of the dangers of closed ways of thinking or as a term of humorous self-criticism. American neoconservatives adopted the term in the early 1980s as a polemical description of their adversaries" (1-2). The liberals' ideas of the 60s and 70s shed light on multicultural ideas, using political correctness comically towards the various beliefs behind multiculturalism, whereas conservatives took over the term in the 80s at some point in order to start a McCarthy-like era in the universities and society. This new era relied on misconceptions of the definition of PC, which is why I feel it is important to regroup and discuss how PC is defined, and what it means in regards to the debate over multiculturalism and the culture wars.

The Definitions of Political Correctness

Conservatives attack the ideas of multiculturalism through many facets, using PC as their keyword for wrong doing by the liberal left. Liberals once used the term to

criticize other liberals for dogmatic thinking, but now seem to discard it because of its pejorative nature. Conservatives use the term to desecrate all liberal ideas. The comparison of how different the conservatives and the liberals define PC is something I tackle in this section. Throughout my research, I have noticed that the conservatives have a much stronger voice in publications, both academic and from the general media. The general consensus of the conservative opinions is that PC is destroying the American university, as well as American youth. As Nola Kortner Aiex contends,

the term 'politically correct' has become an all-purpose pejorative epithet conflating and condemning a number of initiatives, such as affirmative action in hiring and in college admissions, multicultural education, broadening the canon of classical texts to include women and minority groups, protest against unpopular ideas, and changing vocabularies for representing particular groups. (1)

Aiex points out how the term has negative connotations that involve various causes. I can not find anything wrong with any of the ideas presented in her definition, but to refer to the ideas as a "pejorative epithet" allows the reader to be aware of the complications surrounding the term. Most conservatives write and speak about how horrible political correctness is, and their definitions are always negative, blaming liberals for all that is wrong with the academy today. Berman believes the conservatives are attempting to win the greater public opinion, writing that

The postmodern professors gaze at their accusers, and they see bad faith. They see conservatives who claim to be more liberal than the liberals, and cultural critics who talk about insulating culture from politics but who wield the literary canon like a club, knocking heads whenever their own political preferences come under attack. And the postmodern professors would laugh – if they weren't ducking under a table. (21)

Conservative critics of political correctness claim to be victims of an ideology the liberals

are forcing on the universities and society, but even the conservatives cannot agree on a unified definition because of the ambiguous and negative connotations of the term.

While Aiex referred to PC as a “pejorative epithet conflating and condemning” ideas within the university, Andrew Sandlin writes that PC “is the policy on numerous American campuses to stifle discussion deemed to threaten the sensitivity of ‘under-represented’ groups: homosexuals, blacks, women, the handicapped, etc.” (1). Aiex claims PC is an umbrella term representing many ideas that cannot be confined to one phrase. Sandlin claims PC ideas cannot be discussed without disrespecting or “threatening under-represented” groups of people. But the PC ideas that stifle attempts to give respect to under-represented people within the university and culture. At least both critics agree that the ideas behind the term political correctness concern themselves with multiculturalism and equality for all, which are positive aspects of politically correct ideas that have become pejorative. Another critic Marc Berley defines PC as “the inane but dangerous thought and speech code that threatens the free speech and intellectual curiosity of so many students and their teachers at colleges across the country – closing rather than opening minds” (1). I wonder how if PC attempts to give respect to everyone through suggesting new approaches to language it can be viewed as breaking down free speech. In his speech Bill Lund says that “For the first time in our history, Americans have to be fearful of what they say, of what they write, and of what they think. They have to be afraid of using the wrong word, a word denounced as offensive or insensitive, or racist, sexist, or homophobic” (1). These critics fear that non-offensive terminology will strip them of their power within the university and society.

All of the conservative critics seem to agree that PC has something to do with what language is appropriate in a college setting, but the opinions seem to range on what is happening to the language of the university. Lakoff believes there is at least one commonality with the negative connotations of PC when she writes,

“Political correctness,” “politically correct,” and the common abbreviation for both, “p. c.” cover a broad spectrum of new ways of using and seeing language and its products, all of which share one property: they are forms of language devised by and for, and to represent the worldview and experience of groups formerly without the power to create language, make interpretations, or control meaning. Therein lies their terror and hatefulness to those who formerly possessed these rights unilaterally, who gave p. c. its current meaning and made it endemic in our conversation.
(91)

PC is all about who has the voice and power in the academy and culture. Conservatives feel stripped of their voice and power, and have thus discovered a blanket term (PC) to pigeonhole liberal ideology. Conservatives attack political correctness and its implications because it took power and control away from the right. Liberals recognize the power struggle concerning political correctness and attempt to find different avenues of expression for their ideas.

While conservatives believe that PC strips them of their power and hurts the university system and culture, liberals agree with conservatives on how difficult it is to define the term. Alexander Gregor of the University of Manitoba that “It is very difficult to put a definition to *political correctness*. It is a term widely but loosely used today; but it is too young a concept to have received the attention and standardizing influence of the dictionary editors. So it quite probably has a somewhat different meaning for everyone using it” (1). A definitive definition of PC does not exist because there is no agreement

of what the word means; a word can have multiple meanings, but it is still difficult to define even the multiple meanings of PC. Gregor goes on to say that

political correctness is a term that has been introduced by the detractors of the ideas which the PC movement, as it is called, is assumed to represent; and there hasn't been developed a generally accepted word or phrase that represents what it is the supporting forces are after. The 'enemy' has therefore set the agenda for the debate. In consequence, we are left peering into a fundamentally important social phenomenon through a window created by fear, distrust and scorn. (3)

Political correctness represents too many ideas to pack into one term. Conservatives recognize this notion and use the ambiguity of PC to assign its pejorative connotations, thus negatively affecting every idea encompassed under the umbrella of political correctness. Neither liberals nor conservatives are able to reach a consensus of what political correctness means. In line with Gregor's ideas, Tyrone Henry writes

Quite simply, "political correctness" has no meaning in its current usage. Supercilious in connotation, "political correctness" implies that people who have certain views don't have the courage of their convictions, but are merely being "p.c." to please some unknown entity. It is an epithet, a convenient catch phrase for those either indolent or just incapable of forming a cogent argument against that with which they disagree. (1)

If Gregor is right when he believes the "enemy" is responsible for the agenda of political correctness, and Henry is correct in his assumption that those who use the term PC can not form a decent argument against the multicultural ideas that supposedly lie behind political correctness, then I am led to believe that liberals understand what the agenda of conservatives in the culture wars seems to be. Why liberals do not have more of a voice in the PC debates is questionable, especially in the mass media. Liberals have not been able to organize the term PC, which makes their debate weaker than conservatives who

have flooded the media with their ideas. Liberals see the power behind the ideas of political correctness, larger issues that have more value than what the term PC means and how it is used. Conservatives use the power of the term PC to stifle the ideas of liberals, hoping no one will notice the tricks up their sleeves.

The Stakes are High

Overall, the stakes are high in the debate over political correctness for both liberals and conservatives. Both liberals and conservatives want power and control of the university. Academic power and control manipulate the shaping of the students into citizens, and both political sides want new citizens to sway to their political side. The two main sides of the PC debate want power and control over the university and public opinion, but their methods of attaining power differ. Conservatives are more obvious about their desire for power, overflowing the media with conservative opinions to gain popular opinion within our culture. Liberals focus on education as their main vehicle in the quest for control; they count on intelligence to form political opinions and ideologies. Ultimately, both conservatives and liberals want power over the education of not only students, but the general public as well.

Academic control complexifies through the debate over what is at stake with the term political correctness and its multiple interpretations. Basically, whoever controls the political power of the university controls education, public opinion, and society, in that order. Education is important because it controls what is taught to the citizens and

leaders of tomorrow's country today. Any political facet or belief in control can influence and persuade students to accept a way of thinking, hopefully convincing the student to support whatever political party is in control of the academy. But new recruits to political parties are not the only advantages to controlling the university system.

Although education may not directly affect public opinion, the people who control what the public sees (TV), hears (radio), and reads generally have college educations. Whoever influences the creators of media while they are students in college could influence their ideologies for life. The influence over any sort of media opinions directly affects how the public views cultural issues, which in turn affects our society in general. How the public views cultural issues affects the ruling class consciousness, which in turn affects the contents of our country and how the government and society are run. Political parties realize this influence, which is another reason the debates over issues such as political correctness are so important.

Conservatives attempt to control the university and culture by negating the ideas of PC in order to scare people away from a sound discussion over the issues involved and trivialize important ideas to American society. These ideas influence the public more than liberal ideas because liberals generally do not rebuke conservative opinions in the same forum. Liberals avoid the issues of political correctness in the media because of PC's ambiguity. Conservatives claim that political correctness tries to regulate speech in a country where free speech is the first Bill of Rights. Liberals want people to think before they speak, to be respectful of others. Conservatives want college students and citizens of this country to believe that liberals are the enemy, that liberals are responsible

for putting restrictions on what people can say, which leads to restrictions on how people can think. But most liberals are not attempting to harm anyone with language awareness; liberals are trying to educate the masses about how certain words and speech patterns affect everyone in this country, how powerful language can be, and how language can help to evolve thinking. The debate over PC will not solve the issues that truly lie underneath both the conservative and liberal viewpoints of political correctness. As Cornel West writes,

we know that argument and critical exchange are not the major means by which social change takes place in the world. But we recognize it has to have a role, has to have a function. Therefore, we will trash older notions of objectivity, and not act as if one group or community or one nation has a god's eye view of the world. Instead, we will utilize forms of intersubjectivity that facilitates critical exchange even as we recognize that none of us are free of presuppositions and prejudgements. (331)

Arguments over whose ideologies are "correct" will lead our nation nowhere. No one is completely right in his or her beliefs, and the desire for power does not help the greater good, which I believe is the inclusion of all viewpoints into our society. Liberals want to shed light on the diversity of our society by giving voices to those who have been oppressed in the past. Conservatives view this liberal desire as an attempt to undermine their ideologies and force liberal ideologies on those who do not have liberal views.

Regardless of political views, all Americans must realize that we come from multiple backgrounds and ideologies; there is no one true American. Multiculturalism may seem to push other cultures into the mainstream limelight, when actually multiculturalism gives a voice to those who have never spoken before. Obviously, listening to the multiple voices of this country will be overwhelming at first, but it is a

necessary step for unity and cohesiveness in our culture to occur. As West says, “the United States has become the land of hybridity, heterogeneity, and ambiguity. It lacks the ability to generate national identity and has an inferiority complex vis-a-vis Europe, and the U.S. must deal with indigenous people’s culture, including the scars and the dead bodies left from its history” (327). In order to find a national identity, we must come together as a people instead of dividing ourselves into political and cultural categories.

Instead of finger pointing and blaming others for our misconceptions of society, we must pull together in order for education and awareness to occur. Conservatives need to cut down their usage of the label political correctness as all that is wrong with the opposing political factions and embrace change within our culture. The liberals’ job is to bring everyone together into a forum for discussion and unity; as West writes, “the left should be diverse in its representations and its constituencies, but the left always has to be an attempt to find, in the rich diversity of the human world, some point of moral unity that brings us all together” (338). Political correctness is another roadblock to cohesiveness as a country and culture, and liberals need to stand up to the accusations of conservatives in order for any progress to be made in the quest for unity in our culture. The term political correctness has allowed blinders to remain in place for too long. The pejorative connotations of political correctness need to be abandoned by all in order for positive discussion surrounding supposed “PC” issues to occur.

CHAPTER 3

THE LANGUAGES OF THE CULTURE WARS

The culture wars have shaped the meanings and connotations of certain words within the university and society. As discussed in the first chapter, the language of the culture wars displays or inhibits the ideas being debated. For example, the multiple meanings of political correctness both display the ideas of the culture wars and also inhibit those ideas because of its pejorative connotations. PC is not the only phrase to exhibit multiple meanings. In the university, the development of multicultural awareness brings attention to certain phrases that receive negative and unwanted meanings, such as the notion of feminism. During the turmoil of the culture wars, the societal view of feminism has evolved into a term that shuts down discussion as opposed to enhancing conversations in the classroom.

For instance, during one of my composition classes last fall, I assigned Adrienne Rich's essay "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying," and felt a lot of resistance from my class. The class could not get past the fact that Rich discusses feminism and women's equality in this piece, and the focus on women caused them to shut down the discussion completely. The males in my class felt threatened by Rich's ideas, saying they were excluded from the discussion because Rich only seemed to talk to women. I thought the females in my class would stick up for Rich, saying she focused on women because she felt women had been excluded from our patriarchal society for too long. I

had no such luck. The females agreed with the males that men were excluded from Rich's ideas, and in today's post-feminist society men and women are equal. I pointed out that we have made progress, but women are still unequal in certain areas, such as equal pay. To my disbelief, the class agreed that such issues are no longer important. According to my fall class, women have made enough progress in equality. Out of twelve females in my class, only one told me she enjoyed reading Adrienne Rich. Most of my students resisted feminist discourse, categorizing feminist beliefs as man-hating ideas that hinder discussion. I realized then that feminism, as an aspect of the culture wars, has been received in a complex way by many college students. Feminism is a subject that some students no longer feel worthy of discussion or attention, which has caused feminism to develop negative connotations, changing the way it can and should be discussed in the university.

Black English has also changed because of the culture wars, with students referring to this form of English as slang because of its modern day popularity and influence in rap music. Multiple ways exist as to how to refer to black people, such as African-American, Afro-American, colored, or black. The most acceptable term to use is difficult to determine when the goal is to avoid offending anyone. One specific term my Caucasian students stay far away from in Black English is "nigger." The power of this word scares my students into avoiding discussion, much like the ideas of feminism. My students dismiss the importance of the discussion surrounding Black English much in the same way they dismissed the discussion of Rich's essay. The taboo "N-word" shuts down discourse involving Black English and issues, which hinders education surrounding

such important topics. I do not believe "nigger" is a word *anyone* should be using, but I do think the racial rules and restrictions that apply to the term are unfair to our society. Why are only certain people allowed to use and discuss a word in the English language? Discussion is vital in order for complete understanding and awareness of the nigger's history and future. The word should not be used in the English language, but it is utilized by blacks with certain rules that accompany it. Respectful terminology is important to academia and culture in order for inclusion and discussion to take place. Both feminism and aspects of Black English are taboo subjects in the university and vital parts of the culture wars because of conservative opposition to liberal ideas. Conservatives resist the inclusion of feminism and Black English into the university because these subjects promote recognition of diversified people, thus decentralizing the power in the university. Each needs to be broken down and examined in order to determine how each can survive.

The Demise of the Term Feminism

Feminism has become a bad word in some parts of our culture today because negative connotations have been identified with feminist ideas. The positive influences of feminism have been shut down by misinformation and distortion of ideas. At the mere mention of the term feminism in my composition classes, I hear groans. These groans make me question why feminism receives the negative connotations that it does in our society, especially when women have made real progress towards equality with men in the last one hundred years. I do not understand why my students of both sexes do not

feel appreciative towards feminism and feminist ideas. After researching how feminism has evolved in the past century, I have come to the conclusion that the culture wars and the subsequent misinterpretation of feminist ideas have shaped the growing negative connotation of feminism. The subsequent division of feminists into subcategories by supporters and critics of the term feminism diffuses the power of feminist ideology. As Tammy Bruce writes,

If women can be divided, there will be no real threat to the male-dominated status quo. Paint feminists as lesbians, and straight women will stay away. Add that feminism is racist, and you can deter black women from working with women from other communities on the truly color-blind issues that make all women sisters - rape, domestic violence, reproductive freedom, and male responsibility. (142)

The definitions of the feminist opposition's division of feminism deteriorates the values and goals of feminism, and this division takes place on many levels.

Victim Feminism

A dramatic change in the meaning of the word feminism occurred with the creation of the term "victim feminism," which is a critical interpretation of the first outspoken feminists. Calling attention to the injustices that men have put women through, the term "victim feminism" establishes women as victims of our patriarchal society. Naomi Wolf coined the term to contrast her ideas of "power feminism."

"'Victim feminism,' according to Wolf, claims power and purity by identifying with powerlessness itself[...]victim feminism has repulsed the mainstream media and ossified women's communities for years" (Day 2). According to "victim feminism," women are powerless over their ideas and fate in life, thus they are "victims" of male oppression and

helpless to change any part of society. Contrasting with “victim feminism,” “power feminism ‘seeks power and uses it responsibly,’ ‘hates sexism without hating men,’ is ‘unapologetically sexual,’ and ‘wants all women to express their own opinions.’ Above all, it does not whine” (Day 2). The two terms were meant to show the differences in perception of feminism, but “victim feminism” receives more attention than “power feminism” because feminism looks worse when those supporting feminist ideas appear to be whiney and powerless as opposed to gaining power and control of themselves. Therefore, “victim feminism” is more popular with critics who want to discredit the goals of feminism and trivialize feminist claims.

The idea behind victim feminism credits three major feminist books with its development as a pejorative term, as Justus Causus writes,

Three books were central to the progressive emergence of modern victim feminism during the 1960s. They were Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* which was first published in 1963, and Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* and Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch*, which both appeared on the bookshelves for the first time in 1970. These three books established the platform for the progressive replacement of the original highly individualistic, ‘positive’ classical feminism with a general critique of men and masculinity and an incessant collective carping which dominated the victim feminism of the 1980s, and continues to dominate the mainstream feminism of the 1990s. (2)

“Victim feminism” makes all feminists seem like whining little girls who are not getting what they want. The purpose of the term is to trivialize strong feminist ideas, which Causus does by crediting Friedan, Millett, and Greer with victim feminism’s origins. Coupling victim with feminism decreases the value of feminism. Many men feel threatened by being blamed for the wrongdoing in our culture, and feel women are

seeking sympathy instead of equality by using victim feminism. Even if “the patriarchal regulation of female sexuality was weakened” (Causus 2), which is a major accomplishment in the feminist movement, calling attention to women’s victim status has caused men (and even women) to be overly defensive against feminist ideas. The ideas of victim feminism have not directly caused the demise of the term feminism, but the perception, response, and interpretation of victim feminism’s ideas have given feminism a bad name.

Backlash

Another contributing factor to the demise of the word feminism is blaming feminism for women’s problems in our culture and the academy. As Causus writes,

Modern feminism faced a serious problem – a growing number of women were saying that they were unhappy with things and some were attributing this unhappiness to feminism itself. Enter Susan Faludi, and the argument that the 1980s had witnessed a sustained counterassault on women and women’s rights: a backlash, aimed at reclaiming ground lost to the feminist movement, and convincing women that feminism was the cause of all their problems[...]Faludi claimed that the backlash was constituted by popular ideas that were in reality myths constructed by (among others) the media, popular culture, psychology, the New Political Right and advertising. According to Faludi, backlashes are recurring phenomena which appear every time the women’s movement makes any progress in the elusive search for sexual equality. (7)

The backlash, like the many definitions of political correctness, is a myth constructed by those people in opposition to multicultural and feminist ideas. This backlash caused women’s rights to be viewed as trivial in society, a trait I still see today in my composition classes. The backlash is caused by the response to feminist ideas within our society. The reactions of those who oppose feminist ideas turn feminists into whiny

victims, whereas feminists typically struggle to find their voices for equality. Women are often blamed for bringing too much attention to themselves, and the construction of the definition of "victim feminism" aims to diffuse the power of feminism's goals, namely equality. The backlash has caused most feminists to appear as victims in the public eye.

For example, feminism in the academy has been attacked since its creation through women's studies. One of the defense mechanisms of the feminist opposition says that feminists have too much power and influence in the university. These accusations do not make sense because feminism is a relatively new idea that is still developing. Any new idea in the academy is going to receive a lot of attention, because as Annette Kolodny states, "academics are not comfortable with rapid change" (5). New ideas take time to intermingle with the established practices in academia. For instance, English literature curricula has begun to incorporate feminist and minority literature, but the same traditional novels are still repetitively taught. As an undergraduate student, I read Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness in five different classes, whereas I only read Toni Morrison's Beloved once. Feminist literature remains second par to the "classics" because feminist ideology, or more specifically equal focus on women, is still relatively new to the university curriculum. A lot of feminist ideas are still being worked out within the academy and society, and because of the varying ideas of what should be done to promote equality and feminist awareness, a multitude of feminist beliefs are heard.

Some critics go so far as to blame the various feminist ideologies for scaring people away from feminist ideas, such as Stephanie Herman who writes,

Feminists soon realized they could linguistically intimidate almost anyone

in the world of academia whose ideology differed from their own[...]. Initially, feminist censorship involved only offensive labels such as 'chick,' 'babe,' or 'toots.' Proponents argued that one should avoid judgmental or demeaning descriptions regarding her character, behavior or appearance, when simply referring to a person that is female. (2)

Feminists are not trying to intimidate anyone; we just want to take the power out of words that are used negatively against women.

Lesbianism and Feminism

One word and idea that I hear constantly squashed in my classes is lesbianism. Referring back to the Adrienne Rich example, the students shut down discussion because Rich discusses lesbianism in her essay. My students felt Rich's discussion was weakened by her inclusion of lesbianism into her essay. As a conservative critic, Causus believes lesbianism and feminism are considered synonymous in the feminist movement because "In feminist thought, lesbianism is the apex, the vanguard of feminism" (10). Conservatives attempt to make lesbianism synonymous with feminism; as Greta Gaard says, "it is such a cliché that it is easy to forget: to the conservative mind, lesbianism is the quintessence and ultimate aim of feminism" (130). Lesbianism is not the ultimate goal of feminism, but the celebration of equality amongst women obviously attracts lesbians to the feminist movement and rightly so.

But why do people automatically reject the ideas of feminism when the writer proclaims her sexual preference for women and integrates that preference in her work? I believe men do not want to be left out of any discussion, and lesbianism threatens their stronghold stance in the culture. In line with this idea, Gaard writes, "to the dominant culture, the lesbian represents the ultimate threat of feminism: a woman who is

independent of male approval psychologically, economically, and sexually” (115). If women are no longer trying to appeal to men, men feel left out of the discussion. Maybe when males are no longer part of the equation, they feel rejected and resent lesbianism because it does not include them. Men are not seen as inessential to women; women just want to be equal to men. Sexual preference aids women in strengthening their stances in the feminist movement, not excluding anyone. This fear of exclusion is caused by the misinterpretation of feminist beliefs, like so many other misunderstandings involving definitions.

Opponents of feminism also use lesbianism to exclude heterosexual women from the feminist movement. Attempting to make lesbianism synonymous with feminism silences, even frightens heterosexual women away from feminist ideas. The right uses the specter of lesbianism to add further negative connotations to the term feminism. Lesbianism should be a celebrated aspect of the feminist movement, but we should not consider the term synonymous with feminism as the opponents of feminists would like. The connotations of lesbianism, like “victim feminism,” have been altered by the feminist opposition in order to deter support for feminism within our culture. Opponents of feminism have misrepresented these terms in order to undermine the power of the feminist movement. Not only have these definitions been misrepresented in language, pronouns of the English language are up for debate as well. Pronouns are such a part of everyday language usage that adapting them to treat genders equally may even alter the perception of gender. Feminists seek to change the way we think about our patriarchal culture, one of those changes taking place in the language we use everyday.

The Language of Feminism

Language usage is one of the most important weapons of the feminist movement; as Herman writes, "women's weapons are traditionally their tongues" (1). The intellectual and linguistic ability of women aids in the goal of equality between the sexes. Ideas spoken and ultimately put into practice receive the most criticism of those opposed to feminist ideas. The academy is an intellectual playground to hash out feminist ideas, and the strength of feminist arguments depends on the language we use and change. As William Safire writes, "In wiping away the undoubted masculine tilt to a thousand years of English, and in attempting to imbue our language with gender equality, are we going too far too fast? Contrariwise, in making our language reflect a belated sense of fairness, should we tell tradition-bound male chauvinists, 'Sorry, buddy, but you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs?'" (1). Safire observes the speed in which solutions for gender equality have surfaced with no one solution working thus far. There seems to be more argument over the change of language than conclusions. Safire also seems to be saying that anyone involved in using the English language needs to make sacrifices in order for changes to occur. But those sacrifices should not be seen as negative if they promote the equality of all people. Changing words in the English language to be more gender neutral and include both men and women is a major part of the feminist movement, and necessary in order to make any progress in equality.

The Pronoun Debate

The most often talked about change needed to make the English language neutral

is the generic use of *he* to represent both men and women. Many suggestions as to what replace *he* with exist, but each has its own problems as well. According to John McWhorter, "a bad odor has grown around this gender-neutral feint as of late, as the feminist revolution has led a call to eliminate words and expressions from the language that promote the conception that the levers of power in society are the province of men" (118), and rightly so, in my opinion. The pronoun *he*, which is used to represent both genders when used generically in a sentence, complicates the equality issue in language. For example, Millar mentions how the use of pronouns has been affected by multicultural or gender inclusive ideas: "The constant use of *he* to supposedly denote *he or she* reinforces the male domination of the world view and the world" (2). The use of *he* instead of including both genders exemplifies the male-centeredness of the English language. The gender inclusive idea behind using *he or she* is that both genders should be included in a sentence because one gender does not represent the other.

But the male domination of our society still shows through by placing the *he* before the *she*. As McWhorter writes, "*he or she* is founded upon good intentions, but ultimately it will not do. For one thing, the man is still first. Why not *she or he*? But then, two wrongs don't make a right - why should women be first either?" (118). One could argue for either pronoun order, but neither choice is completely inoffensive; consequently, one gender always comes second in the pronoun *he/she* or *she/he* example. Alternating pronouns sequences in a paper proposes an option, but this option implies the need to keep track of how often each is used.

Even the suggestion of using *s/he* puts the pronouns in a certain gender order, with the female *s* first. *S/he* does not seem like a complete word, as McWhorter notes, "then there is *s/he*, which is a complete disaster. This one makes no pretense of being intended for spoken language; it is as unpronounceable as the glyph that the artist formerly known as Prince has adopted. Even in writing, however, just look at it - it's too darned ugly to be used as frequently as a pronoun has to be" (120). *S/he* looks more like an e.e. cummings creation than a pronoun to be used for gender equality. The problem then with the English language is that we have no gender neutral pronoun.

The *he or she* debate signifies that we need to reevaluate the English language in order to produce or adapt more gender equal language. McWhorter points out that the pronoun debate has a limited audience and usage, saying "*he or she* is a construction of inherently limited domain. Conscious and forced, it could never go beyond writing and formal speech" (119). No one ever bothers to check their pronoun usage in casual conversation, but the audience is usually more immediate in a conversation, whereas in writing and formal speech the audience consists of many people and interpretations. The debate over pronoun usage is important to how the feminist movement is perceived by our society. The inclusion of a female element in basic speech and writing aids in the recognition and acceptance of women. If we start changing how we talk about genders, the hope is that thought will also evolve in the process. Taking the time to consider a female presence in pronouns, without using the "generic" *he*, gives recognition to the female gender. If people are paying attention to the female equality in speech and writing, maybe they will begin paying attention to female equality in society.

The pronoun debate is a minuscule part of the changes necessary for feminist ideas to be present in our language. I do not believe we need to make up new words in order for feminism to be accepted in our society, but making the terminology we presently utilize include both genders is necessary for equality. The possibility of adapting words we already have to solve such problems as the pronoun argument already exists, as McWhorter believes we have a gender neutral pronoun:

The issue has been brilliantly resolved for several centuries, if only our grammarians would wake up and realize that language is a lava lamp and not a clockworks. English has long offered a very simple solution that could neatly apply to both casual and formal speech, sail over the problems of whether men or women are to go first, and spare us the drain on the mental battery of parlor tricks like switching between sentences. [...] I said that English has no *originally* singular gender-neutral pronoun. It does, however, have a *presently* singular gender-neutral pronoun, and that is none other than the *they*, which all of us use in this function all of the time despite the frowns of prescriptivists. (121)

I hear *they* used all the time as a singular pronoun by students, but I will admit that it grates my nerves. I realize my annoyance with *they* allies me with prescriptivists, but I do not believe I am alone. The idea of adapting *they* as the gender neutral pronoun of the English language is sound in theory, but there are too many people who resist change in the language, in the rules that have been taught since grade school. More people use *they* as a singular pronoun when writing because of the awkwardness of *he/she*, *she/he*, *s/he*, etc. I am not aware of any gender issues when I use *they*, which leads me to believe that I use it out of convenience. McWhorter is correct; even if I do not agree with changing the language, and I think *they* sounds just as awkward as *he/she* examples, I am already using the pronoun to signify gender neutrality. Amazing how language changes without

even the realization of its evolution. But some language changes occur with rules and restrictions already attached. Some changes are forced upon our society through cultural norms and acceptable behavior, such as the changes that have happened within the Black English dialect of our country.

The Effect of the Culture Wars on Black English

The debates about Black English are another example of how language involving minorities has evolved during the course of the culture wars. Like the feminist movement throughout the last fifty years, Black English has received a lot of criticism and debate over its value and usefulness to society. An open dialogue concerning Black English needs to occur for cultural cohesiveness and understanding to happen and the culture wars to end. One reason discussion is difficult is that many believe Black English should not be recognized as a separate dialect within the English language, that Black English is merely slang. But Black English is actually a prime example of language evolution and usage within our culture. As McWhorter writes,

Black English is in fact uniquely well suited to show the application of what we have learned about language change, dialects, and language structure to real-world issues. Powerfully influential on our popular culture, spoken by a group widely distributed across the country, existing in an ever-challenging relationship with mainstream society, and adopted by an increasing number of members of other minority groups, Black English is the nonstandard dialect all Americans have the most immediate, edgy, and electric relationship with. (128)

Everyone in our society has exposure to Black English in one way or another because of its influence on popular culture. The words and semantics of Black English are excellent examples of how language can change the view of a minority in our society. Because of this exertion of influence, Black English exemplifies changes that have been made with racial equality since the civil rights movement through the exposure of the dialect to our society. Black English is the strongest and most widely used dialect in our country, and as elegant as any other dialect, as McWhorter says, "Black English - socially marginal, melodious, in-your-face, percussive, marvelous, to-be-dropping, slangy, gansta-rapping, exotic Black English - is every bit as sophisticated as the prose of Jane Austen" (129). A beautiful dialect with a rich history, Black English has enriched the English language. But some aspects of Black English receive resistance both from within the African American culture and without, such as how to properly address blacks.

Labels in Black English

I would like to focus on the semantics of Black English for this chapter on the language of the culture wars. One aspect of the meaning of Black English words that intrigues me is the acceptable and respectable way in which black people can be addressed by other races and by themselves. Which terms are acceptable to use and by whom, and how did those terms come to be? What signals people to the different usage of terms? As Lakoff notes, during the civil rights movement,

Some of the revolutions of the 1960's were bearing linguistic fruit. Late in that decade the Black Panthers has reclaimed "Black," recognizing that the use of terms based on euphemism ("colored," "darky," "Negro,") would necessarily imply inferiority. Only by re-appropriating and re-contextualizing the word that characterized the most salient difference

between them and the majority community could they undo centuries of damage. That decision was shocking: since when did a disempowered group have the right to *name itself*? That was a contradiction in terms. Yet it stuck: by 1970, "Black" was in common use in the national media. (91-92)

Blacks proclaimed the word's usage starting in the 1960s, and because of the strong influence of the African American culture in our society, the term is still utilized as a respectful label. African Americans took it upon themselves to define how they wanted to be addressed. Judith Butler states that this self-naming action is an attempt to gain control of their position in our culture when she writes,

If maybe that the conceit of autonomy implied by self-naming is the paradigmatically presentist conceit, that is, the belief that there is a one who arrives in the world, in discourse, without a history, that this one makes oneself in and through the magic of the name, that language expresses a "will" or a "choice" rather than a complex and constitutive history of discourse and power. (228)

Here Butler expresses how groups that use the self-naming process stake a claim within language that surpasses any historical context or power over those groups. In order to gain acceptance within our culture, blacks have taken control of Black English to show their choice of participation in the English language.

"Black" is not the only label blacks use in their self-naming process. African American is a term used to signify the cultural background of American blacks, and it is also considered a respectful and acceptable label. "Black" seems to be the most acceptable terminology for all to use, but there are other terms that have rules and restrictions on who can use them, the strongest word being "nigger."

“Nigger” is specifically part of the Black English vocabulary; even those other minorities who adopt Black English in their everyday usage generally stay away from “nigger,” at least in the presence of black people. According to the “rules,” only blacks can use the word because of the racist connotations and history of the word. The usage of “nigger” has changed since the days of slavery, but blacks have resisted the incorporation of the word into the general vocabulary of English.

“Nigger” began as a word to describe black people; as Randall Kennedy writes, “*Nigger* is derived from the Latin word for the color black, *niger*. [...] it did not originate as a slur but took on a derogatory connotation over time. [...] No one knows precisely when or how *niger* turned derisively into *nigger* and attained a pejorative meaning” (4-5).

“Nigger” was harmless at first, merely denoting color, much like the label “black.” Generating discussion about the negative connotations of “nigger” is difficult because most people refuse to approach the subject: “The claim that nigger is the superlative racial epithet - the most hurtful, the most fearsome, the most dangerous, the most noxious - necessarily involves comparing oppressions and prioritizing victim status. Some scoff at this enterprise” (Kennedy 28). The discussion of “nigger” must involve comparisons to other hurtful epithets because to make the term the most hurtful implies the existence of other words that are less pejorative. Most people are afraid to discuss such a volatile term of the English language because of the effect of the word on black people. Many a racist will refer to blacks as “niggers,” but never directly to a black person. Even racists recognize the hurtful and insulting connotations of the word when it is directed at blacks.

But the usage of “nigger” may be expanding in our culture due to its growing popularity in American slang.

“Nigger” has become a common slang term in our country. During R. Kennedy’s research he consulted the Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang to find a definition of “nigger” (4). Rap music has introduced “nigger” to the masses, with such titles as “Dr. Dre’s ‘The Day the Niggas Took Over,’ A Tribe Called Quest’s ‘Sucka Nigga,’ Jaz-Z’s ‘Real Nigger,’ the Geto Boys’ ‘Trigga Happy Nigga,’ DMX’s ‘My Niggas,’ and Cypress Hill’s ‘Killa Hill Nigga’” (Kennedy 43). Thus through the influence of rap music on those outside the African American culture, people of all races have begun using the word “nigger,” which exhibits the influence of music and slang on our culture. McWhorter writes that “the slang is perhaps the least interesting aspect of Black English in terms of its relationship to standard English or its implications for education” (128). The “slang” word “nigger” is the most used slang from Black English, and I would say the most volatile. The discussion around the word “nigger” is not interesting because it technically does not exist. Blacks and whites alike are too afraid of rocking the boat by discussing the restrictions surrounding the word.

Just by discussing the word “nigger,” I am breaking one of the social norms of the English language. I am white, and am breaking the semantic and culturally accepted rules of the word “nigger” because of my race. Three theories exist as to why myself and anyone beside black people cannot use the word, of which R. Kennedy discusses:

One is that the long and ugly history of white racist subordination of African Americans should in and of itself disqualify whites from using *nigger*. A second holds that equity earned through oppression grants

cultural ownership rights: having been made to suffer by being called "nigger" all these years, this theory goes, blacks should now be able to monopolize the slur's peculiar cultural capital. A third theory is that whites lack a sufficiently intimate knowledge of black culture to use the word *nigger* properly. (131-132)

There do not seem too many holes in Kennedy's argument for the exclusion of whites from using "nigger," but apparently equality of usage does not exist regarding the word. Racist subordination is a solid reason for not letting other races use the term "nigger," but why would the race that was subordinated want to continue using the word?

Kennedy's second reason attempts to answer this question by saying blacks have earned the ownership rights to say "nigger," but I am not sure ownership would make me want to use certain terms. I agree that whites and other races lack an intimate knowledge of blacks and African American culture, but I wonder what is so intimate about a word that has been used to degrade blacks for centuries. The inclusion of multiculturalism in the university has given attention to the unfairness of restrictions put on the usage of "nigger." If multiculturalism is meant to include all races in the culture of America, exclusive components cannot exist regardless of what race is excluding those components. If black people want equality with other races, whites specifically, then why restrict discussion and usage of one word? Like political correctness, I feel the word "nigger" should not be used at all in our culture. While PC is too ambiguous and multi-faceted to be used correctly, "nigger" is too hurtful of a term for anyone of African American descent to be accepted by all of society.

The university is where the discussion of issues surrounding Black English and feminism take place, making it an excellent forum to interpret different ideas and theories

about multiculturalism and the culture wars. In her discussion of the culture wars, Patricia Williams writes, "there is no place where this particular battle has been more visible than in universities; there is no fiercer entrenchment than the lines drawn around the perceived property of culture [...] It is a battle marred by ignorance and denial" (72). More specifically, the classroom is the ideal arena for the political discussion of language change to be exchanged and determined. The clarification of the term feminism and the breaking down of Black English barriers need to be examined intellectually, and the college classroom is an excellent and appropriate forum for such give-and-take. In the classroom, ideas can be respectfully expressed and responded to, and the research from such exchanges can help to enrich society's views on issues involved in the culture wars.

CHAPTER 4

POLITICAL PEDAGOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Multiculturalism and minority issues have directly and indirectly changed the composition classroom. Minority issues not only include racial or cultural ideas like multiculturalism, but also the inclusion for gender issues and disabled persons in the goal of equality. The ideas stemming from minority issues are essentially the promotion of equal treatment for all individuals, regardless of any sexual, cultural, or physical differences. One idea that affects equal treatment of all people is political correctness. Political correctness is a common myth prevalent in the battle of the culture wars that students are bound to bring up in the classroom environment because of the term's ambiguity. But the myth of political correctness does not have to be avoided in the composition classroom. PC is ambiguous enough to be used as a tool in the development of student writing and thinking. Multiculturalism and multiple definitions of political correctness generate ideas that change the way composition can be taught and learned. The composition classroom acts as an important battleground for the contrasting ideas of PC. The classroom is an excellent forum for discussion, to let ideas and opinions be expressed without getting dismissed by those who do not agree. In addition, composition aids in the understanding of our language, and "language serves as an excellent analogy for understanding how culture works" (Thurrow 2). In this chapter, I focus on how multiculturalism and other facets of minority issues have changed the

composition classroom, how teachers can and do approach composition using the myth of political correctness and multicultural theories combined as tools, and what the implications multiculturalism imposes on future composition classrooms and education.

Language Use in the Classroom

The ideology of multiculturalism changes what teachers can express both verbally and written in the classroom. The promotion of different cultures, genders, or physical differences attempts to include *everyone* in the classroom discussion. Since the 1990s, language use by teachers and students has expanded because of gender inclusive and racially sensitive language which represent what can be respectfully said in a public environment. Some critics of multiculturalism believe inclusive terminology puts limitations on what can be said. Multiculturalism attempts to broaden awareness of different ideas, and inclusive terminology tries to include those varying ideas in the classroom discussion. But the limitations present a positive and necessary challenge to members of the university. Encouraging inclusive language in the classroom opens the ideas of political correctness to discussion. The "limited" terminology helps students to understand what is limited and why concerning PC. According to Harvey Millar of St. Mary's University,

Political correctness is a new challenge faced by faculty. The need to show respect for ethnic and racial plurality, as well as the need to be inclusive of women, poses a challenge to our use of language and to our actions... One may view political correctness as saying the 'right thing at the right time' in a highly politicized climate. It forces individuals such as faculty to be mindful of their language during teaching. (2)

Classroom discussion necessitates putting thought and respect into the words spoken in the classroom. The awareness of what and how to speak and write in the class positively affects the classroom environment by aiding in the development of language skills.

Students have to think before they speak, which helps them develop their responses more intellectually. The awareness causes teachers to face the task of watching their own words as well as those of their students, which would also help teachers to develop their responses. The goal of the language awareness aims to broaden a way of thinking about and treating people with various backgrounds. If language changes in the classroom, ideas may change as well.

One such language change is the terminology referring to people with disabilities that often arises in the composition classroom. Referring to someone as "differently abled" instead of "handicapped" has altered how some discussions occur in the classroom. Teachers and students alike can possibly be unsure about how to refer to certain groups of people, which makes discussion in the class a learning experience for all parties involved. Using new terms such as "differently abled" or using "Native American" instead of "Indian" attempts to discredit old stereotypes and promote positive attention to minority groups. Some minority groups do not want the added attention, such as Dr. Kenneth Jernigan of the National Federation of the Blind who writes, "Euphemisms and the politically correct language which they often exemplify are sometimes only prissy, sometimes ridiculous, and sometimes tiresome. Often, however, they are more than that. At their worst they obscure clear thinking and damage the very

people and causes they claim to benefit" (1). More attention gets drawn to minority groups through new terminology and euphemisms, which apparently creates a double-edged sword of multiculturalism by both drawing wanted and unwanted attention to minority groups. Consideration for minority groups, however, is essential to achieve an understanding of multicultural ideology. The whole intent of multiculturalism is to give equal and fair treatment to minority groups.

Regardless of the validity and necessity of sensitive terminology in society, careful use of language is necessary in the classroom to avoid offending anyone. Purposely offending students may be one avenue to take when trying to teach critical writing and thinking. Carrie Cox quotes Felix Moos, a professor of anthropology and East Asian Studies at the University of Kansas as saying "A university is supposed to be a forum for expressing new ideas and concepts. But with political correctness, too many people are afraid of offending someone. We need to start by encouraging students to think creatively and not in such rigid terms of either this or that" (2). Instead of blaming PC for everything restricted in the classroom, teachers should lift those restrictions and promote open expressions of ideas, using whatever terminology helps students to express their ideas. Discussing disrespectful words is necessary in order to have a better understanding of what makes them unfair. Discussion of positive and negative terminology takes the power out of disrespectful words by unpacking the meanings and connotations.

Changes of language in the classroom have occurred because the classroom is more of a public setting than it once was. With open admissions to most state colleges,

diverse populations of people who might not have had the chance before are now attending school. The American university's action in regards to diversified enrollment is to create a training ground for all students, hoping to shape them into suitable citizens for the business world. Ronald Strickland of Illinois State University states, "The classroom might be considered part of the public sphere at least in that it is often seen as a training ground for students who will eventually enter the public sphere 'proper,' after preparation both vocational and civic" (2). Instead of encouraging scholarship and the development of critical thinking and writing in the composition classroom, teachers are currently training citizens to enter the "real world." While some training is necessary in preparing students for the job market, contemplation of controversial issues such as multiculturalism and gender studies is vital in advancing critical minds.

Training the Citizen

The idea of training citizens in the university dates back to Plato's philosophies, but since the emergence of PC in the academy, the development of good citizens has changed into an education that develops worker bees for businesses and the government. According to Alan Kennedy, "education as it emerges from the controversy over what is 'politically correct' now finds itself having to contend with business and government over what will be allowed as 'workplace correct' in the academy" (27). Composition teachers have to mold what they teach to what will be useful to students in the marketplace of jobs. Teachers currently instruct students on the proper, inoffensive

language acceptable to all sides of the debate over minority awareness because teachers are training students how to be accepted in the workplace environment. The instruction that *should* be occurring ought to help students think for themselves. The academy *should* be given the freedom to assist in such development, but since public awareness has grown more concerned regarding the classroom, it seems public opinion holds more weight than the academy.

The development of the classroom as a public sphere has brought more public opinion into the academy, where there is pressure to make students into workers instead of thinkers. Kennedy writes, "We have perhaps arrived at a time when the nature and degree of political commitment of the teacher of writing is a matter of public concern – at least insofar as the turmoil over 'political correctness' is really an issue of interest to the general public and not merely something cooked up by a few academics and a temporarily topic-starved press" (20). The instruction of writing has become a public concern because of the media's exposure of multicultural ideology. Composition teachers have to be more mindful of their own beliefs in the classroom because the general public is paying more attention to what occurs in the classroom. The public is now more concerned with how much money goes into an education compared to what job develops because of a college degree, especially now with the threat of war and an unstable economy. Ideas of multiculturalism have changed the language of the classroom into a more respectful and all-encompassing learning environment, molded it into a public sphere, and begun training the students to become workplace citizens. Knowing all these factors, how can composition teachers adapt to the evolution?

Theoretical Approaches to the Classroom

Composition teachers need to conceive of new approaches to the classroom. The first transition that needs to occur is a paradigm shift, not only for the teachers but also for the students. Harvey Millar writes, "The reality is that traditional educational paradigms must be challenged and changed where necessary" (3). The traditional paradigm sees that the students learn the "basics" of education; for example, in a traditional English curriculum, students study such authors as Shakespeare, Keats, Chaucer, but do not lend attention to female or minority authors. Those challenges to the traditional paradigms must take place in our multicultural society in order for students to understand issues surrounding multiculturalism. The difficult part of this process is developing a method to shift traditional paradigms.

Changes must begin at the onset of the class. The first class meeting should be an introduction of multiculturalism and gender studies to the students, letting them know that all opinions will be respected and discussed. Strickland suggests that "The walls of the classroom must be broken down in order to make it possible for knowledges from other discourses to intervene, and to make the knowledges, rhetorics, and literacies produced in a particular course available to engage other discourses" ("Pedagogy" 3). The "walls" that need to be broken down include preconceived notions about how the classroom should be run. Strickland believes teachers should break down the barriers between teachers and students by making students aware of teachers' research interests, identifying terms and jargon with the students, and raising "issues of accountability in

collective rather than individualistic terms” (“Pedagogy” 3). By involving the students in the composition world of research, terminology, and accountability, the students can get a glimpse into the ideas behind compositional theory and how those ideas affect students.

A conflict can arise when the composition teacher decides to introduce new knowledge such as multiculturalism into the classroom. According to Strickland, in the classroom “students are not really learning anything new. They are only adding to, reinscribing, and reaffirming what they already know; the ‘truths’ of the dominant ideology of our society” (2). Students do learn in composition classes, especially if critical thinking is promoted by the teacher. By offering multiple viewpoints, the students may be exposed to new ideas or various ways to look at an issue. If as composition teachers we are attempting to offer a new paradigm by breaking down the barriers between teachers and students, what good will it do if the students do not learn anything new? Strickland suggests the teacher “should adopt a confrontational stance towards students, and a critical, skeptical stance toward the subject matter; teachers should avoid posing as mentors to their students and champions of their subjects” (“Confrontational” 2). The teacher should let his or her viewpoint be known, but present these viewpoints as equal to the students’ opinions.

The teacher obviously holds the authority in the classroom, but that authority should not be forced on the students by the teacher’s opinion. For example, in one of my composition classes, I had a student who wrote a pro-Confederate Flag paper that really upset me. He thought the Confederate Flag represented unity in the southern United States and should be flown in pride of that unity. He went so far as to say that blacks

should accept the flag because it represents their history during the Civil War, which is a symbol this student thought blacks should be proud of. I had no idea how to approach this student. The grade of the paper could not be based solely on my disagreement with his opinion. I searched for gaps in his argument where he did not include support, but there were few places. I assigned a B for the paper because of grammatical errors and how the points added up, but I still believed it was too high for what I thought was a racist opinion.

He gave me permission to discuss the ideas he presented in the class because I did not want him to feel threatened, but I felt the subject begged for discussion. He agreed, and we had an excellent class discussion on racial issues and the value of certain symbols in the American culture. I confronted the Confederate Flag issue in class without my taking a stance because I knew the other students would take the opposite stance of the author. He thanked me for handling the paper's ideas as I did, and even mentioned that the class brought up issues he had not thought of when composing the paper. His opinion regarding the flag changed, and he was able to see what others thought of his ideas without him feeling threatened or ashamed of how he thinks. I did not plan on using confrontational or oppositional pedagogy in that situation; by confronting the student personally and in class, and allowing the rest of the class to assume the oppositional stance, I was able to see how the two pedagogical ideas worked out in practice. I now believe a confrontational or oppositional approach to pedagogy might be the method necessary to shifting traditional paradigms in the classroom.

Confrontational pedagogy offers an approach to composition that introduces the

students to controversial ideas and lets those ideas develop in the classroom and students' writing. It demands that "students must be confronted as intellectuals, rather than patronized as inferiors" (Strickland, "Confrontational" 1). In order to understand the concepts of multiculturalism in the classroom, students must be viewed as having their own opinions about controversial issues, and those opinions must be respected. The teacher's opinions remain valid, but should not be seen as absolute: "In order for knowledge to be produced, rather than merely reproduced, the teacher must resist the students' attempts to defer to the teacher as the authoritative dispenser of absolute knowledge" (Strickland, "Confrontational" 4). The teacher of composition should let his or her opinion be known in the class, but should inform students that his or her opinion is not the only one in existence. Teachers should encourage students to find their voices and opinions in regard to controversial material like multiculturalism, but also encourage students to see all points of view when forming their opinions. Confrontational pedagogy encourages students to discuss all aspects of controversial material, much like the methodologies of oppositional pedagogy.

Oppositional pedagogy steps away from the controversial material of multiculturalism and reviews the various ideas in opposition to one another. Adam Katz bases his theory of oppositional pedagogy on two principles: "first, abstraction (not abstention) from the dominant culture; second, material confrontation with the ruling class and its institutions within the structure" (211). Instead of confronting students with multicultural ideas, oppositional pedagogy sets opposing ideas against each other and explores the meanings and implications produced by all sides. Various theorists have

attempted using oppositional pedagogy in their classrooms:

Marxists and feminists have called for an oppositional pedagogy which can understand the way the concept of knowledge is implicated in the reproduction of the dominant ideology, and which can empower students to resist the neoconservative and corporate-sector demand for an educational system that shapes students to fit the needs of a capitalist and patriarchal society. (Strickland, "Confrontational" 2)

By exposing various beliefs, theories, and the minority viewpoint within the dominant culture, I believe a paradigm shift will occur in the students exposed to the new ideas.

Working through their own beliefs and comparing them with the ideas they are exposed to helps students to learn how other people think. When ideas and beliefs are challenged and debated, more ideas and beliefs have the opportunity to open students' minds:

A problem with both oppositional pedagogy and confrontational pedagogy arises when teachers' opinions may contrast with their students or colleagues. As stated before, teachers' opinions should not be regarded as sacred and untouchable; teachers' opinions are just as valuable as the students' views. But as Sarah Baumgartner Thurow says, "Adding more 'politically correct' courses does no good because the professors in these courses are still able to avoid confronting their opponents" (1). This statement shuts down the possibility of discussing varying ideas in the classroom. The students may become the opposition in the classroom, and the opposition could possibly assist both the teacher and students in developing their arguments. Teachers and students alike learn from opposing ideas because they not only have to develop their own opinions, but they also have to be aware of what others think. The question that then arises is how to present class material involving multicultural ideas that will promote confrontational and

oppositional thinking.

One theoretical approach to the composition classroom that may answer this question is critical pedagogy. The goal of any composition course should be critical pedagogy, which Henry A. Giroux defines as a pedagogical theory that “self-consciously operates from a perspective in which teaching and learning are committed to expanding rather than restricting the opportunities for students and others to be social, political, and economic agents” (9). Critical pedagogy combines the ideas behind oppositional and confrontational pedagogy, offering to expand ideas instead of hinder them. Critical pedagogy may help the teacher offer opinions in the class and be open to the opinions of students and colleagues by developing critical thinking behind their opinions. The conflicting ideas of multiculturalism and gender studies could be taught, analyzed, and discussed in a critical pedagogy classroom. Realizing what theories might best be appropriate to confront multiculturalism in the classroom, the dilemma then arises as to how to apply the theory to practice.

One such answer to the dilemma may be to teach multicultural ideas as themes in the composition classroom. According to Kennedy, “far from being an inoculation against success in late capitalist America, classes founded on resisting the dominant ideology might well be keys to success in it” (25). The presentation of theories that do not dominate our culture, such as multicultural, gender-inclusive, or other issues discussed by the minority may enlighten student awareness of various ideas. Theme-oriented composition classrooms aid in not only conveying new ideas to students, but also helping students to understand known concepts more thoroughly.

For example, feminism is one aspect of gender studies that can be used as a theme in composition classes. Rae Rosenthal writes about how she teaches a composition course “which focuses, in terms of content, on feminist issues in rhetoric and which, in its pedagogical approach, is deliberately and openly feminist” (139). Focusing on feminism as the class theme helps her students in understanding feminist language as well as their own language: “as the class reads and becomes more educated about discourse communities and the effect of gender on these communities, I have noticed that students become more aware of their own language and more skilled in the manipulation of that language” (140). By using a different theoretical basis than most students are accustomed to, Rosenthal assists in the development of student writing and thinking using feminist theory. Critical thinking, which involves students in their writing, is the goal of theme-oriented composition courses.

Cultural Studies and Marxism are two other approaches to theme-oriented classrooms available to composition teachers. Raymond A. Mazurek says that “Cultural Studies offers to teachers in the 1990s some of the same attractions that Freirean pedagogy offered in the 1960s and subsequent years: the hope of engaging students in critical reflection on generative issues that are simultaneously of great public significance and personal resonance” (173). Mazurek attempts to help his composition students to think critically. Donald Lazere also has the same goals when he writes “our primary aim should be to broaden the ideological scope of students’ critical thinking, reading, and writing capacities so as to empower them to make their own autonomous judgments on opposing ideological positions in general and on specific issues” (190). The goal of any

theme-oriented class based on minority-oriented ideas should be to aid students in the critical thinking of controversial subject matter. Focusing on the composition classroom, the presentation of controversial material should aid in the development of student writing.

A paradigm shift presented to aspiring composition writers may create resistance in students. According to Katz, presenting multicultural ideology in the classroom reflects "a problematization of the student's understanding of what 'belongs' in a writing class (or any class for that matter), and hence are directly connected to an implicit crisis in legitimacy and authority which can be made extremely productive for the purposes of the class" (216). Questioning what belongs in a composition classroom is the first step in resistance, and a healthy step if interesting discussion and writing are the desired products of the class. Resistance furthers the development of not only students' written voices but their verbal abilities as well. Katz goes on to say that "The students' resistance can be used to inquire into all of the interests and ideologies bound up in their everyday lives, as well as the relation between these interests and ideologies and their placement within the institution of the academy" (216). Student resistance to multicultural ideas should be welcomed in a composition classroom because such resistance will fuel discussions and writing produced in the class.

Resistance should not be mistaken for an attempt at converting the students to the teacher's beliefs. In her feminism-based composition course, Rosenthal says, "my goal within the classroom is not to convert each student; I aim rather to educate each student about writing, about discourse, about power, and about the distribution of that power"

(151). Student awareness of gender studies and multicultural ideology should be a goal in composition courses, not an attempt to persuade students to follow the teacher's beliefs.

Communication must be an open component to the composition classroom, and each student must remain open to conflicting ideas. As Thurow says, "The recent murder of an abortion doctor may serve as an image for the seriousness of this issue; for if it is no longer possible to use speech to resolve or at least contain our different understandings of good and evil, then the only means left is violence" (3). The escalated discussion of ideas into violence is a threat in the politically aware classroom, but the teacher and students must contain any such threat through open discussion and respect for one another for the well being of the class.

In order to achieve a composition classroom open to the ideas multiculturalism, students and teachers alike must shift their paradigms to achieve understanding and acceptance of various ideas. As educators, we must use the current language of multiculturalism and gender studies to enlighten students and each other, aiming to reshape the public sphere where if people can not at least get along, they will begin to have a better understanding of one another. Students need to realize that while the debate over multicultural ideas holds importance, the articulation of said ideas are as important as the ideas themselves. As Kennedy writes,

we need to consider the problems of teaching politics through writing, and to try to conceive of a rhetorical strategy and related writing pedagogy that does not insist on ideological compliance, that teaches students something fundamental about how to enter ongoing conversations (verbally or in writing), and that is not politically irrelevant or inert. (21)

One common pedagogical theory does not yet exist for minority studies, but a multitude of possibilities are available to teachers and students alike, allowing educators to work out theories through practice. Through the different pedagogical theories, whether it be confrontational, oppositional, or using multicultural and gender based ideas as themes in the classroom, the ultimate goal is to help students become better, more informed writers.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

One absolute definition of political correctness will ever be agreed upon within our culture. Everyone uses the term differently, which causes the term to remain ambiguous. The pejorative connotations of PC remains as either a joke for liberals or an accusation for conservatives. Should liberals continue to dismiss accusations of political correctness? I believe liberals should stand up to conservative accusations of destroying free speech and thought-policing, and defend the underlying ideas of multiculturalism and verbal inclusion that have become pejorative in conservative circles. The ambiguity of political correctness is hindering university education for students in this country. By educating students on the ideas that make up conservative accusations of political correctness, students can decide for themselves how to use that knowledge and incorporate it into their national identities as citizens. As educators, we should focus on the best possible education and presentation of knowledge for students, instead of arguing and fighting over who has the most control over the college curriculum.

One way to present well-rounded knowledge to the academy is through the language already used in the culture wars. We must promote the inclusion of notions of multiculturalism, feminism, and African American studies in order for education to occur and ignorance to diminish. We must do away with the misconceptions of feminism, such as "victim feminism," the backlash against feminism, and the connection between

lesbianism and feminism. We must fight against the exclusions such words as "nigger" promote in Black English in order to gain a full understanding of African American culture. A respectful and acceptable discourse must have an open forum in order for notions to be shared and knowledge to be gained.

Academia is the perfect forum for such discussion, since it is a place where learning is expected to take place in all disciplines. The classroom is the perfect arena where ideas can be exchanged without fear, harm, or disrespect. We need to awaken students to their belief systems and help them to shift those paradigms in order to see the bigger picture of the world in which we live. We all have some sort of stance politically and ideologically, and we should not be afraid of those stances in the classroom. I have found that while teaching, if I express my opinions and ideas to the class, students are more likely to express their own ideas. If I find my students tend to agree with my because they think that is what I am looking for in discussion, I take the opposite view in order for them to experience all sides to an issue. I find the classroom to be an excellent starting point to educate on the different cultures that make up our society.

Academia and the American society need to adapt to the multiple cultures that exist within our society. As Barbara Ehrenreich writes, "in the face of an increasingly global society, which is now more than 20 percent so called minorities, the old *monocultural* education will not do" (334). In light of this fact, we need to establish the university as an open forum for discussion. As educators and members of American society, we cannot shut down *any* idea regardless of how it affects other people. We must be free to discuss our thoughts without the fear of being "wrong," but we need to

express our thoughts in a respectful way to others. By supporting and promoting reactions to the many issues involving multiculturalism, feminism, Black English, and even the fluctuating ideas of political correctness, we can diminish harmful and hateful ideas through knowledge and education. Most of the misconceptions about the issues I have discussed are based on ignorance, and the university is the best forum to promote knowledge to fight the ignorance of our society.

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