



THE TRIBUNE

Biting our tongues in the era of political correctness

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November 22, 2017

When history books look back at the times we live in, it would not be a stretch to call this the era of political correctness. Far from just being a talking point in last year's presidential election, there is no doubt it is playing a substantial role in shaping how we discuss and debate key issues facing the country.

Feel you cannot share your true opinions for risk of offending someone? You are not alone. A recent poll by the Cato Institute shows how much this mentality is shaping public opinions: 58 percent of survey respondents agreed they have self-censored some of their opinions due to the current political climate, while 71 percent believe political correctness has effectively silenced important discussions we need to have. This is probably the most concerning aspect of political correctness because it limits our ability to discuss critical issues that may be considered offensive.

While the PC movement grew out of a legitimate desire to reduce threatening speech, it is now used in many ways as a sword against non-hateful opposing viewpoints. Having a well-reasoned and rational discussion about whether affirmative action really helps disadvantaged groups get ahead or whether changes are needed to our immigration policy inevitably leads to a person being called a racist. For too many people dominating political debate in the media and academia, today's most fundamental right is the right to not be offended.

The same poll by the Cato Institute showed the fallacy of supposed "microaggressions," which theorizes that phrases like "America is a melting pot" or "everyone can succeed in this society if they work hard" are backhanded insults to minority groups. A vast majority of Latinos and African Americans surveyed were not offended by most of the commonly phrases cited by academics pushing the theory.

Despite a lack evidence to back up the claims, the president of the University of California instructed faculty leaders in 2015 to avoid unintentionally offending students through use of microaggressions while in the classroom. Political correctness has reached a point where stating "America is the land of opportunity" is now something that is objectionable. Never mind that the principle of meritocracy goes back to our nation's founding and was the reason so many immigrants flocked to come here in the first place. How can honest discussion on campuses across the country occur if people must constantly be assessing what they can or cannot say? The theory of microaggressions remains ill-defined. Generating a coherent list of phrases that universally offend minority groups has not been properly research. Despite a lack of evidence, many universities are now incorporating such lists into diversity training. This training

does more harm than good by promoting hypersensitivity and diverts limited resources from more beneficial uses. Yet because of seepage of political correctness into every corner of society, college administrators feel the need to embrace it at the expense of their students.

Beyond stifling debate on legitimate political issues and turning our universities into safe spaces, PC culture has a divisive effect of putting a focus on race as a person's defining attribute instead of who they are as an individual. A 2016 CBS/New York Times poll found the percentage of Americans who view current state of race relations as bad hit a low not seen since 1992 in the wake of the Los Angeles riots. If political correctness sought to improve harmony in society, it has badly failed by every objective measure.

It's time to move past PC culture and restore vigorous but respectful debate. We should not go out of our way to offend someone, but we also should not be afraid to discuss our differences or feel the need to self-censor our political beliefs. If we allow the media or academics to determine what is off limits from discussion because it could be construed as offensive, our Republic is threatened. Without diversity of thought or opinion we fail to properly think things through and solve difficult problems. This applies to government as much as it does to a company which worries about groupthink mentality.

Political correctness is supposed to be about promoting diversity by making all groups feel included. The 58 percent of Americans who feel the need to self-censor their thoughts probably don't feel today's culture is so inclusive.