



## **Column: Political Correctness Leaves Us Tongue-Tied and Confounded**

Michael Smith

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Do you support political correctness? Or does PC trigger your gag reflex?

In 2019, global technology company Morning Consult polled 13,000 U.S. adults about whether they felt there was “too much prejudice” or “too much political correctness.” Responses split 48/52 percent, respectively.

However, three-fourths felt that insistence upon PC language effectively shuts down political discourse. Moreover, prior to starting the current Democratic presidential primaries, a NPR/PBS/Marist poll warned Democrats that American sentiment against political correctness is growing.

Many believe Hillary Clinton’s affinity for PC became an albatross around her neck in 2016. Many also believe President Trump’s 2016 victory was partially due to a successful backlash against PC.

President George H.W. Bush cautioned against excessive PC in a 1991 University of Michigan commencement speech: “In their own Orwellian way, crusades that demand correct behavior crush diversity in the name of diversity.”

The PC movement has been around a while but really got kick-started in 1969 through Woodstock-era rebellion against a white heterosexual male culture and power structure. Flower

power encouraged openness and egalitarianism, and extended a cultural voice to females, non-Caucasians and the poor.

Rules for “acceptable” speech changed, then changed again. Keeping current became tedious and fatuous, and practitioners of the rules became supercilious. To illustrate, “queer” — pejorative for homosexual individuals — was lexically banished. Then swoosh, LGBT — lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender — morphed into LGBTQ. Say what?

That’s right, GLADD, advocacy group for LGBT, added the “Q” to its Media Reference Guide in 2016, and explained that “Q” means just what you think but also can mean “questioning.” As in “not sure.” GLADD’s Guide guides us away from saying “homosexual,” now, too. GLADD pronounced it an “outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive.” Translation: not PC.

If you’re PC-challenged, self-“help” is available at online tutorials. Basically, you must self-censor denigrating words, racially insensitive words, and “sexist” words like “policeman” and “mailman.”

Students at the University of New Hampshire authored a Bias-Free Language Guide in 2013 and posted it on UNH’s website for “incoming student” indoctrination (the word “freshman” is now sexist). By 2015 the guide had stirred such a stink and become such jocular fodder for late-night commentators that the university’s president apologized and had it removed from official school media.

It’s still online, though. It urges students to use “inclusive” language. Here are excerpts, if you can stomach them: nonsense like saying U.S. citizen or resident, not “American”; other sex, not opposite sex; white people, not Caucasian; undocumented, not illegal; non-disabled, rather than “normal”; and people with intersex characteristics, as opposed to hermaphrodites.

Changing college student demographics like gender, race, and sexual identity are reflected in affirmative action admission policies, and courses on LGBTQ, African-Americans, and obesity. As a result, critics claim colleges are now PC incubators, encouraging intolerance for

conservative ideas or traditional conventions, and that courses and research are watered-down junk.

Of research, libertarian think tank The Reason Foundation, says “A (college) culture has developed in which only certain conclusions are allowed — like those that make whiteness and masculinity problematic.” To test that thesis, Reason submitted various frivolous “research” for publication, like one claiming to have “examined genitals of 10,000 dogs in dog parks to learn about rape culture and queer performativity” (whatever that is). No matter, the “academic” journal *Gender, Place & Culture* published it, calling the paper “excellent scholarship.”

According to the Cato Institute, 65 percent of Americans believe colleges should expose students to “all types of viewpoints even if they are offensive or biased against certain groups.” Former Democratic President Barack Obama might agree. In a 2015 speech in Des Moines, Iowa, Obama said, “I don’t agree with that, that you as students at colleges have to be coddled and protected from different points of view.”

But many colleges do just that with tactics like “trigger warnings,” where professors signal that upcoming content may offend, so students can leave if they choose. Numerous schools have also established “free speech zones,” small off-campus areas, ostensibly to facilitate speakers and demonstrators, but in actuality are intended to restrict expression to confined areas.

Eleven states, though, including N.C., have laws prohibiting free speech zones. N.C.’s law additionally requires institutions to sanction any person under its jurisdiction that substantially disrupts free speech rights.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) tracks U.S.colleges’ efforts to sanitize or muzzle free expression. FIRE rates schools Red (least free-speech protections), Yellow (better but still restrictive), and Green (guaranteed free-speech rights). For 2019, FIRE reported on 466 schools. Only 45 colleges received a green rating, eight of which were in the Old North State.

Controversial, inflammatory speech is often uncomfortable. But many have given their life to protect our First Amendment guarantee of the right to free speech. There's that, plus there's the possibility that we may learn something from controversial, inflammatory speech.