CHAPTER THREE

GENDER IDENTITY, SEXUALITY AND POLITICAL CORRECTNESS IN THE ERA OF TRUMP

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Introduction

In his cry to “Make America Great Again,” President Trump utilized a hackneyed and unoriginal phrase, used by several previous presidential candidates and eventual presidents in their bids for the highest office of the land. He then turned this phrase into a palimpsest that attempts to create a new Republic in which the requirements for citizenship rest on the foundations of anti-narrative, anti-establishment, anti-government, anti-identity politics, anti-political correctness, and, in fact, anti-Semitism. Not surprisingly, the other half of this coin establishes a parallel anti-narrative that serves to vilify anyone opposed to the policies and practices of President Trump and his new Republic. Accordingly, anyone who is pro-life is anti-motherhood; anyone who is pro-same sex unions is anti-family; anyone who is pro-gun control legislation is anti-American; and so on. Upon close examination, one may realize that a connecting thread among these narratives is religion, a powerful ideological force that casts all who do not agree with the Trumpian new Republic-an state as, in fact, anti-God.

This new Republic is by nature, religious, not constitutional. This observation was recently supported by then Attorney General Jeff Sessions’ citation of a biblical verse, Romans 13, to defend the Trump administration’s current policy of separating children from their parents at the U.S. border. The Attorney General, the highest legal public official in the country, exhorted the public to accept that religious doctrine was the governing law of the land when he stated, “I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13, to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained the government for his purposes” (The
From a communication point of view, the constitutive and dialectical nature of this anti-narrative is worth examining. Communication scholars have long argued that language, and therefore the particular narratives it engenders, is constitutive. This means that language shapes reality and ultimately human action and interactions. In other words, we are how and what we communicate. The stories that we tell about ourselves and others create our worldview and often become our truth. As Walter Fisher (1995) reminds us, “life itself—that is, its interpretation and enactment—is to be understood in narrative terms” (170). From this standpoint, questions regarding the kinds of realities about gender and sexual identity that are being created by Trump's anti-narrative become relevant. Rhetorically, an exploration of such questions offers insights into why the idea of political correctness matters and, if its attacked or derided, what the possible real-world consequences might be for individuals. If we believe that narratives frame reality, then it is salient to investigate with what effect. Accordingly, this chapter argues that the prevailing narrative of political correctness has been hijacked and overridden by an anti-narrative that seeks to de-establish it from its original constitutional framework. The reader is further invited to read political correctness as a constitutional narrative which creates a more just, humane and equitable reality for citizens. Using narrative analysis, the author looks at how the reproaching of political correctness, as it relates to gender and sexual identity, functions to excommunicate groups of individuals who self-actualize in a non-conforming way from the new Republic. Specifically, Trump’s policy, announced through a number of tweets, banning transgender troops from serving in the military is examined as a case that illustrates this argument.

Narrative Analysis and Political Communication

The narrative paradigm maintains that humans are essentially story-tellers who generate and communicate stories that serve to help us understand our subjective realities as well as guide collective reasoning and shape behavior (Gring-Pemble 2001). Conceptualized by Walter Fisher, the narrative paradigm provides a useful framework for analyzing the nature of human communication. According to Fisher (1984), human communication is often evinced through storytelling, or narratives that display our past experiences and subsequently explain our behaviors and beliefs. In other words, people tend to communicate through narratives which “attempt to explain or normalize what has occurred...[and] lay out why things are the way they are or have become the way they are” (Bamberg 2010: 3). They therefore provide a gateway into “the realm of experience, where speakers
lay out how they as individuals experience certain events and confer their subjective meaning onto these experiences” (3). Fisher further explains that “symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one’s life” (1984: 6). Because “narration is the dominant mode of human communication, [it] is particularly well-suited to evaluating public moral arguments” (Gring-Pemble: 344). How individuals evaluate narratives is based on two things, as stated by Fisher; narrative fidelity and narrative probability. Narrative probability concerns the elements that make a story coherent and narrative fidelity has to do with whether a story "rings true" to experience. Fisher believes that humans use so-called “good reasons” to judge stories and evaluate characters. These good reasons will lead us to adopt “good stories” as against “bad” ones, meaning that, based on what Fisher argues is our natural preference for that which is true and just, we will know a false narrative from one that is true.

Researchers such as Gring-Pemble (2001) believe that the stories that people adopt to create meaning eventually guide collective action and thus have consequences for policy making. Narrative analysis is therefore an effective way of evaluating political stories. In quoting Bennett and Edelman (1985), Gring-Pemble writes that “Just as any narrative is likely to imply a wider set of related stories and an ideology, so a term or a simple reference in any political text may evoke a full-fledged story.... Political communications are always seedbeds of stories” (343). These tales often paint a picture of how political actors would like for the public to view issues as well as cultural groups. In her research about the rhetorical constructions of welfare recipients in congressional hearings, debates, and legislation between 1992-1996, Gring-Pemble wrote that:

in the context of the welfare reform hearings and debates, the demographic and character attributes ascribed to welfare recipients in the hearings and debates implicate a more comprehensive story about the past and future behaviors, lifestyles, and aspirations of welfare recipients. Ultimately, these depictions of welfare recipients serve as evidence to support legislative proposals and policies designed to enforce values and desirable behaviors (343-344).

In applying narrative analysis to the oratorial proceeds of legislators, Gring-Pemble showed how the ways in which welfare recipients were spoken about, i.e. the stories about them that were told by politicians debating the issue of public assistance, gave way to a dominant narrative that informed the public moral argument and eventually public policy.

According to the study, those who received public assistance were predominantly painted through political debates and congressional hearings as misfortunate, feckless, and young. Ultimately, as stated by Gring-Pemble, “these depictions formed the basis upon which legislators constructed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996” (347). A similar application of narrative analysis may be conducted to examine political stories being told by Trump and his administration regarding political correctness as it applies to gender and sexual identity. What narrative is Trump creating about the latter in his attack on political correctness, and what implications do these discursive practices hold for public policy and the public moral argument?

Gender and Sexuality: A Theoretical Overview

Ideas about gender and sexuality are deeply rooted in cultural and social norms. Societies therefore tend to have a deep investment in particular expressions of these ideas. Such expressions tend to be fixed, and non-conforming articulations are often met with harsh consequences, including death. Take for example the increased risk of bullying and death due to suicide LGBTQ youth face in American and other societies. As reported by Marx and Kettrey (2016) “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer students are approximately 91 percent more likely to be bullied than their heterosexual peers” (Par. 4). Additionally, according to the same authors, “[s]tudents who are bullied for their actual or perceived sexuality or gender expression (that is, victims of homophobic bullying) are more likely than students who are bullied for other reasons to experience depression and suicidal thoughts” (par. 5). Not adhering to standardized gender and sexual identities also has negative consequences for businesses as well. One prime example is the public fallout that retail giant, Target, experienced after its announcement in 2015 to remove gender-based labeling from its stores. Public reactions abounded across the internet, including Target’s own website and while there was some support of the Corporation’s move, sites were also awash with comments such as:

“Well back to Walmart for me. So over this political BS.”
“Dear Target, I spent thousands of dollars on Christmas shopping - not one penny was spent at Target this year!”
“What is wrong with being [proud] to be a girl, or being [proud] to be a woman?”
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“Call it what you want. Target has cowardly caved to the Leftist liberals intolerant of anyone whose principles defy their lack of.”

These statements seem to reveal monolithic ideas about gender and sexual identity that maintain there is something natural and ordained about traditional gender/sex categories. They also expose continued social and cultural reliance on a gender binary that positions men and women as fundamentally different and therefore oppositional to each other. These are conceptualizations in which “ones” sex at birth is used to define the person as either male or female, or as he or she” (Losty and O’Conner 2018: 40). However, as Palczewski, De Francisco and McGough (2018) argue, actual research does not support this male/female dichotomy but instead show that “gendered behavior variances among women and among men are actually greater than those between men and women” (6). Also, gender/sex exists more along a continuum, thereby producing diversity beyond the binary. These findings clearly challenge the notions that sex and gender differences are universal and that the “sexes” are naturally “opposite.”

Despite these facts, societies still cling to the idea of a gender norm. Explanations of why may be derived from the various ways in which gender and sexuality have been conceived over time. In other words, there are different (and competing) philosophies about gender and sexuality that have helped shape our expectations. One of the most influential theories about gender and sexuality emanate from the concept of biology. These are generally regarded by researchers as biological theories, which define gender as “biologically tied to sex, and distinctive hormones, brain structures, and genitalia [which] typify each sex.” (Palczewski, De Francisco and McGough 2018: 30). Biological explanations of gender usually call upon nature as the unquestionable authority in determining identity. They give rise to commonly held ideas such as that men are naturally more aggressive than women, or that women are naturally weaker than men. Such theories are often employed to justify why men and women should occupy different social and cultural roles, and why they should be treated differently more broadly. For example, in the world of sports, biology was used to either prevent or restrict women from competing with men. In 1948, the IAAF introduced a rule that required women who wanted to compete to provide a medical certificate proving their eligibility (Kretch 2017). In the 1960s, in order to compete internationally, women were “required to undergo physical inspections of their breasts and genitalia by a panel of physicians prior to competitions” (266). Other iterations of biological theories of gender and sexuality rely on chromosomal determinations,

despite research proving chromosome combinations beyond XX and XY, as well as brain development, which posit that men and women are intellectually different, with men being, on average, smarter than women.

Another popular theory of gender and sexuality is psychological in nature. Known as psychological theories, these very Freudian concepts “emphasize the internal psychological processes triggered by early childhood experiences with one’s body and interpersonal interactions with primary care givers” (Palczewski, De Francisco and McGough 2018: 30). Whereas biological theories emphasize nature, psychological theories stress nurture. Here we encounter ideas such as the notion that someone can be “turned” gay, or that a boy or girl will be confused about their gender identity if they spend too much time doing feminine or masculine things respectively, such as wearing the wrong color or playing with the wrong toys. Psychological theories affirm that boys should identify with their fathers and girl with their mothers and that a variation from this pattern represents deviant behavior. The psychological lexicon has been replete with such positions, ranging from Freud’s penis envy theory to Chodorow’s idea that mothers play a central role in the gender identity formation process. There are several dangerous downsides to this way of thinking about gender and sexuality, such as the pathologizing of non-conforming gender and sexual expressions. For example, before 1973, the American Psychological Association (APA) classified homosexuality as a disease and mental illness in its Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (Drescher 2015). Thinking in this way about those who do not identify according to traditional gender norms persists. We hear of families subjecting their sons or daughters to shock therapy or “conversion” therapy in efforts to “cure” their “gayness.” Women who identify as lesbian have even been raped by men to “correct” their so-called unnatural behavior. The consequences are often tragic, as in the case of 17-year-old transgender youth, Leelah Alcorn, who took her own life in December 2014 after being subjected to conversion therapy aimed at converting her back to being a boy (Shear 2015).

What both of these approaches to dealing with gender and sexual identification have in common is an exaggeration of difference and states of being that are unchanging. But as Palczewski, De Francisco and McGough (2018) warn, “if something is presented as caused by biology, this creates the impression that it is unchangeable. Biological determinism—the idea that biology (sex) determines gender differences—means that inequalities are natural and, hence, cannot be changed by social action” (37). Similarly, Hyde, quoted in Palczewski et al, concludes that “there is no foundation for the continued belief in prominent psychological gender differences [since] males and females are similar on most, but not all, psychological variables.

That is, men and women, as well as boys and girls, are more alike than they are different" (41).

Both theories about gender and sexuality have deep religious resonances and are often buttressed by biblical allusions or references to nature. As Cruz (2002) pointed out “sexual orientation is one area where the extra-human sources of authority of God and/or Nature are often taken to have spoken” (1012). Biological and psychological theories about gender and sexuality draw upon the authority of that which is considered “natural.” This nexus was vividly demonstrated in the case of the Campaign for California Families (CCF) response to a bill introduced in the California legislature to amend a law to allow transsexual persons born in the state to change their sex designation on their birth certificates. In their Assembly Floor Alert opposing the bill, CCF wrote:

AB 194 [name of proposed bill] is an attack on nature. People are born with 46 chromosomes, XX for females and XY for males. You are born either make or female, and there are no in-betweens. This bill would promote an unnatural and radical sexual agenda that erodes nature and attacks the sensibilities of families. (quoted in Cruz 2002: 1015).

In their opposition, CCF not only located their arguments within the principles of biological approaches to defining and defending gender identity, they also conflated biology with Nature and by extension, God. The argument here is that which derives from Nature comes from God and anything (or anyone) that does not conform to those normative principles are unnatural. These are claims that help to inform Trump’s anti-narrative about gender and sexual identity. That is, individuals identifying as LGBTQ are anti-Nature. They are also the basis of the religious state that the Trump administration is trying to create, one in which those who identify as non-conforming will become identity refugees (Blackett 2017). In a state governed by the constitution, such individuals have rights. In the new religious Republican state, they have none. One way in which this precariousness of citizenship for the LGBTQ community and those who support their cause emerge is through changing the narrative about political correctness and its objectives, making it a pejorative and abhorrent term that “trespasses” on one’s religious (and possibly other) freedoms. It is, as previously stated, an anti-narrative rooted in communicative acts that seeks to delegitimze individuals’ civil and constitutional rights. This anti-narrative also seeks to construct an account of gender and sexuality that is more in line with the biological and psychological theories that try to explain such identities. How we communicate about gender and sexuality matters, as it is through those expressions that identities and relationships are created, maintained and altered (Palczewski, De Francisco and McGeough 2018).

Language as Constitutive: Implications for Gender and Sexual identity

Communication and other scholars identify gender and sex as a communicative process (West and Zimmerman 1987; Butler 1990; Romaine 1999; Palczewski, De Francisco and McGeough, 2018). In this process, language plays a central role, as it is accepted that reality is largely constructed and represented to us and others through language (Romaine 1999). This language is both verbal and nonverbal and figures in the social construction of individual as well as group identities. According to Barczewski, De Francisco and McGeough (2018), “People use conversation to assert individual, interpersonal and group identities” (63). This idea springs from the understanding that all reality is socially constructed, predominantly through language. As Berger (1991) opined in his seminal work, *The Social Construction of Reality*, “[t]he common objectivations of everyday life are maintained primarily by linguistic signification. Everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen. An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life” (51-52). Meade (2015) also alludes to the constitutive nature of language and communication when he contends that communication is essential to the social order and that meaning (i.e., social reality) arises through social interactions and the human communicative processes. Accordingly, we construct and enact gender through our discourses, using language to display ourselves as gendered beings (Romaine 1999).

Through this process of reality construction, societies have created varying indices or lexicon, both verbal and non-verbal, to communicate gender. For example, there are specific titles by which societies choose to address those who are considered male and female, such as Mr. to refer to men and Miss to reference women. There are also certain linguistic codes societies use to illustrate what is considered “feminine” and “masculine,” such as who is a “boss” or a “lumberjack.” The use of language in this way typically announces the prevailing gender binary and paves the way for stereotypical and hegemonic interpretations of gender and sexuality. Language thus communicates certain ideologies about gender and identity, shepherding our understandings of what is “natural” or “unnatural” about certain gender expressions. Expressions that are deemed non-normative are often marginalized and discursively treated as other and abnormal. We
therefore end up with language such as “fag,” “faggot,” “dyke,” “homo,” “sodomite,” or descriptions associated with illness or disease to reference those who identify as LGBTQ. Such language produces a discourse of defamation and dehumanization, which influences the “interaction of self—and other assessment” (Wodak 1997: 3). In other words, such language constitutes a certain reality about those it seeks to describe and invites us to perceive non-conforming gender and sexual identities in a specific way. As Whorf (1956) iterates, “[w]e dissect nature along lines laid by our own language. [...] the world is presented as a kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds.”

Words, therefore, matter, since language helps to shape the way we view and experience the world. Those who are in control of language get to set the agenda and shape social reality, which is why there is usually a power struggle over who gets to name and thus define reality. Language, and communication more broadly speaking, is therefore highly political in its application. For example, patriarchal control of language makes such language phallocentric in nature, as French feminist Helene Cixous (1980) points out. As such, it “hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine” (251). What Cixous describes is a process of erasure made possible through how language is used politically to define female subjectivity. A similar argument can be made as it pertains to gender and sexual identity. That is to say, the group that is in control of how we communicate about gender and sexuality will also regulate the construction of said subjectivities. As noted above, a vocabulary that encourages a dichotomous understanding of non-conforming identities, such as Trump’s anti-narrative regarding the LGBTQ community, can create tyranny.

Littlejohn (2001) reminds us that “[i]t comes as no surprise... that language is an instrument of oppression” (p. 224) that has been used to mute the experiences and voices of others. Fairclough (1996) also cautions us not to underestimate “the significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power” and suggests that the best way to ensure equity is to “increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because consciousness is the first step towards emancipation” (p. 1). Raising social consciousness about how certain language oppresses is precisely the project of political correctness, a movement aimed at changing the social dialectics of language when it distributes power unequally. It too is engaging in a political application of language, and rightly so, to challenge a narrative that promotes an ideology of fear and discrimination. Since words matter, and language is that which constructs social reality, the socio-linguistic conventions that govern a binary or otherwise monolithic understanding of gender and sexuality must change. Fairclough’s observation that we must pay attention to language because of its ideological assumptions that try to “naturalize” or normalize certain worldviews is important:

It is not just that language has become perhaps the primary medium of social control and power, though that is noteworthy enough; language has grown dramatically in terms of the uses it is required to serve... If, as I shall argue, ideology is pervasively present in language, that fact ought to mean that the ideological nature of language should be one of the major themes of modern social science. Language is therefore important enough to merit the attention of all citizens. In particular, ... nobody who has an interest in modern society, and certainly nobody who has an interest in relationships of power in modern society, can afford to ignore language. That, to some degree or other, means everyone (3).

Hence, the concern of the political correctness movement with challenging and changing language that creates a hostile environment for citizens who do not conform to biological and psychological gender and sexual orientation expectations, is valid. The movement is invested in creating a new lexicon that validates the experiences of those whose gender and sexual identity expressions do not adhere to the binary. In doing so, political correctness is engaging in a mission that is constitutional in nature, since it is supporting the rights of citizens to self-actualize according to their own freedoms. This is a right protected by the Constitution which “protects both the affirmative freedom to express oneself and the negative freedom from compelled expression with which one ideologically disagrees” (Cruz 2002: 1029). As Cruz goes on to say, “[t]he First Amendment has frequently been understood as protecting self-realization” (1030). Political correctness strives to create a world where individuals are not compelled to express their gender and sexual identity according to a worldview that is ideologically incompatible with how they self-realize. Therefore, when the Trump administration attempts to delegitimize political correctness through its anti-narrative, it is seeking to de-establish constitutional freedoms. With this in mind, the discussion now turns to an examination of the dominant narrative produced by Trump via his anti-political correctness rhetoric, i.e. political correctness, as it relates to gender and sexuality, is anti-constitutional and therefore anti-state.

2 Please see the organization, GLAAD’s, Media Reference Guide - Lesbian / Gay / Bisexual Glossary Of Terms https://www.glaad.org/reference/lgbtq for a lexical guide that seeks to educate.
Political Correctness as Anti-Constitutional

The idea of political correctness has been around since the 1790s (Chow 2016), and over time, has been celebrated in turn, and simultaneously, by both the so-called political Left and Right. Florence, (2015) cites Ruth Perry, a widely quoted historian as it pertains to the issue of political correctness, as saying that “during the early days of modern “political correctness” both sides of the aisle were active participants” (par. 3.). He further notes that “each side felt being politically correct was beneficial to society... Neither side owned the term, and it was for a time helpful and accepted to be politically correct” (par. 3).

A marked shift in perspective burgeoned during the height of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, particularly among political conservatives. As historically marginalized groups such as African Americans, women, lesbians, gay and the disabled began making headway in securing their civil and thus constitutional rights, backlash against political correctness became strident. There was now an intense struggle between maintaining existing views, conditions, or institutions (i.e., conservatisms), and the rising social and political change aimed at achieving what many regarded as progress (Florence 2015). Affirmative action has been one of the biggest targets of this backlash, even though this policy has ensured progress for many Americans regardless of their political affiliation or race. It is well documented that while people of color benefit from this legislation, white women tend to be the biggest beneficiaries (Massie 2016). Such contradictions leave one to wonder about the material motivations behind the attacks on political correctness.

The term political correctness has also been used by different groups to mean different things over time. As Weigel (2016) contends, “there is no neat history of political correctness” (par. 14) but what is clear is that the term has typically been used to draw attention to issues that are political, and, as a result, have implications for public policy. One such application draws attention to the politics of discrimination, as it pertains to race, gender and sexual identity. Trump’s 2017 ban on transgender troops in the U.S. military speaks to this type of politics. In a series of three tweets, Trump announced this “policy” to the world stating that:
Unsurprisingly, the language of Trump’s tweets is replete with assumptions about gender and sexual identity that mirror those held by some baronesses whose influence extends across Europe and are thus deeply rooted in political correctness. The cherished beliefs of transgender troops, along with all who identify as non-binary, are thus stereotyped using language that constitutes them as abstract monstrous, as dangerous to the safety of society.

It is all done with words and images. To modify an old adage: Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names can sometimes kill you. The process begins with producing stereotypes and “transphobic” thoughts. The other, as an abstract monster, is a fundamental threat to our cherished values.

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The story of Trump’s tweets is a disturbing echo of the way in which the military has been historically used to enforce gender norms. These norms are reinforced through aggressive rhetoric and policies that target transgender individuals. This has led to a culture of acceptance and understanding within the military, which is at odds with the way in which these individuals are treated in society.

The military’s rhetoric is often used to justify the discrimination and harassment experienced by transgender individuals. This is further reinforced by the way in which the media and public perceive these individuals. By portraying them as a threat to national security, the military is able to justify its policies and actions.

This rhetoric is not only damaging to transgender individuals but also has far-reaching consequences for society as a whole. By reinforcing negative stereotypes and limiting the opportunities available to transgender individuals, the military is contributing to a culture of discrimination and inequality.

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Conclusion

Political correctness, as articulated during the height of the civil rights era, sought to establish the civil liberties of historically disadvantaged groups of citizens, giving them a voice and protecting that voice as per the First Amendment. In this regard, political correctness served as a constitutional narrative that argued for fair treatment of all citizens under the law. However, Trump’s inverted rhetoric about political correctness casts it as an anti-constitutional narrative and insists that it destroys free speech and therefore violates the First Amendment. This story is echoed by many like-minded individuals, such as Forbes magazine contributor, George Leef (2016), in his response to the American Bar Association’s (ABA) rule 8.4 (g). This rule makes it a professional misconduct for an attorney to “engage in conduct that the lawyer knows or reasonably should know is harassment or discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status or socioeconomic status in conduct related to the practice of law” (americanbar.org). Displaying his disgust, Leef opined that “The same extreme sensitivity to words or conduct that might possibly offend someone that has already taken root on many of our college campuses is spreading outward to other parts of our society” (par. 1). Not only does Leef view what the ABA is trying to guard against as an “imaginary problem” (par. 12), he also derides issues such as microaggression, implying that they are invented.

Voices such as Leef’s and Trump’s are not new, as the idea of political correctness has been under attack for the past 25 years, as mentioned before. However, they have become particularly potent since Trump’s candidacy and eventual win of the 2016 presidential election. Usually, the malcontent expressed pivots around issues of multiculturalism and diversity. That is to say, those who decry political correctness tend to eschew cultural and political change and favor established norms. They do so for political reasons, while making the argument that they are, in fact, scorning politics altogether. Trump’s anti-narrative regarding political correctness highlights this fairly well. While making it known at his political rallies and in other communications that he has no time for political correctness, Trump rails against NFL and other athletes who choose not to stand for the national anthem at the start of games. The main argument made by Trump and his supporters who decry this act of protest is that it is “unpatriotic” or “un-American.” What they are in fact saying is that they do not believe it is politically correct for athletes to kneel during or otherwise protest the national anthem. One might ask, why is political correctness endorsed in this instance while denounced in others? Perhaps it is because when political correctness is invoked as a measure to protect the rights of marginalized groups of citizens, it is seen as a threat to the establishment and its preferred “norms.”

It is clear from the example used above that those who oppose political correctness do not necessarily disagree with its underlying principles. They only object when it does not align with their politics. Opponents of political correctness are usually trying to hold on to the socio-cultural status quo and tend to reify so-called “American values” or norms. Such arguments ignore the fact that established norms can be harmful, discriminatory and often strip citizens of their civil rights. They also ignore the fact that historically, norms change as societies evolve. Certainly, it is curious that the term is most disparaged when it comes to issues related to the disadvantaged or minorities. Political correctness is more than just minding one’s manners, or watching one’s speech, the oversimplification that critics usually proffer in their “defense” of free speech. It is part of a civil rights and thus constitutional narrative that seeks to make society more just and equitable for all citizens. Since language is at the heart of how we construct social reality and subsequently our laws and policies, we must pay attention to when said language constitutes and institutionalizes unfair practices.

References


CHAPTER FOUR

POLITICALLY CORRECT EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF DONALD TRUMP

JUNG MIN CHOI, PH.D.
AND TREVOR AULDRIIDGE

Introduction: Donald Trump’s Moral Vandalism

Let’s be clear, the Right’s relentless attack on Political Correctness (PC) is about social control. Donald Trump’s constant attack on the media as a liberal machine that produces nothing more than “fake news” aims to delegitimize any viewpoints that are either different or critical of his partisan actions. This strategy is not novel, as a similar tactic was used by anti-PCCers throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. Historically, anti-PCCers have aspired to truncate any real discourse regarding democracy and multiculturalism. And yet, those on the Left are blamed for stifling open discourse and repressing free speech.

The recent presidential pardoning of Dinesh D’Souza, the conservative writer who led a rabid charge against the PCCers in the 1990s, should clearly indicate that the era of Trump will engender attacks against diversity and multiculturalism.3 The Right, now led by people like Nick Adams (2016) and Hanne Nabintu Herland (2017), is once again on a warpath against PCCers for rejecting their right to express themselves—even if their expressions are hateful or bigoted. The Right cites protests, denials, and/or cancellations of Trumpists’ talks, ranging from Alt-Righter Richard Spencer (Michigan State University, The Ohio State University, and University of Cincinnati), to conservative writers Milo Yiannopoulos (U.C. Berkeley and San Diego State University) and Ben Shapiro (California State

3 Dinesh D’Souza, author of Illiberal Education, was the posterchild of Anti-PC movement in the 1990s. In 2014, he pleaded guilty to violating federal campaign finance laws. He was given a full pardon by Donald Trump on May 31, 2018.