

The Middlebury Campus - March 21, 1991 - Opinions

# Revising O'Neil's definition of PC

by Jeffrey D. Spencer

I write to clarify certain distortions and misrepresentations of the PC "movement" which Mr. Daniel E. O'Neil aired in the March 14 edition of The Campus.

I am gravely concerned by those who attempt to become the martyrs of a misconceived notion of free speech and intellectual freedom.

Mr. O'Neil's comments are, as such arguments tend to be, not founded so much on a genuine intellectual interest in preserving diversity as they are on a wish to be able to openly advocate bigotry.

The cross Mr. O'Neil is bearing is not one which will heretofore represent the poor, abused Middlebury College students whose lives have been dictated to them, but rather it is one which he has crafted and placed on his back in order to divert people's attention from the real issues of sexism, racism, homophobia and heterosexism, etc.

Mr. O'Neil hastily finds labels such as "radical," "extremist" and "nonsensical" to describe what is, in fact, a way of thinking descended from traditional liberal thought. Mr.

O'Neil might be well advised to dust off his political spectrum and find out exactly where "radical" fit on it. He then should find an example of a truly radical movement. In suggesting this, I am not attempting to value liberalism more than other political beliefs. I am suggesting that the right, in order to alienate many people from multi-culturalism and cultural democracy, is trying to propagate the myth that these concepts are radical and anti-intellectual. Multi-culturalism and cultural democracy merely mean first, having access to one's own culture, tradition, and history, and second, learning about and respecting the multitude of other cultures, traditions, and histories around us.

These ideas might seem radical to those who wrongly use and subsequently hide behind other liberal principles such as freedom of speech. Freedom of speech docs not mean that anyone has the right to intimidate me because of my sexual orientation, nor does it mean that anyone has the right to spread extremely dangerous misinformation and stereotypes about, and hostility towards, gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. Jokes and negative comments do just that and are certainly not "peaceful and minimally confrontational."

I would try to refer Mr. O'Neil to a similar situation so that he could know exactly how it would feel to sit in his room

and hear “f---ing faggot”  
shouted at him.

Straight, while males, however,  
are neither hated nor persecuted  
in any way which is comparable  
to the ways in which African-Americans,  
gays and lesbians, etc. are hated and,  
often, attacked. Moreover, I resent  
the exploitation of the fraternity  
issue as an attempt to present  
privileged students as victims  
of discrimination.

Clearly, no matter how difficult  
it is for fraternity members  
to accept the changes made in  
that system, this issue is not and  
will never be on par with racism,  
homophobia, and sexism. The issues  
are completely different.

Finally, though sometimes  
it appears that checking our  
speech and choosing non-offensive  
terms merely serves to put  
a nice face on deeply-rooted  
prejudices and beliefs, PC serves  
a necessary function in the ongoing  
struggle against oppression. Obviously,  
the elimination of bigotry from our society  
must begin somewhere. Eliminating offensive  
terms from our vocabularies makes us think  
about whether or not we actually believe  
that females over the age of 21 are “girls.”  
Regulations against negative comments  
concerning sexual orientation (read: hate speech)  
should cause us to think about our society,  
which teaches us to dislike people for certain  
traits. This brand of teaching — teaching  
hatred — is the true danger to American  
society, and those who disguise their  
bigotry with desperate, melodramatic,  
sensationalist whining for intellectual  
freedom are the ones who are truly  
“condemnable,” “extremist,” and “disgusting.”