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**The Debate on Political Correctness with
Special Focus on Education:
Intentions, Consequences and Controversies**

Diplomová práce

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Abstrakt

Fenomén politickej korektnosti je pomerne zložitý fenomén, ktorý vyvoláva veľa kontroverzií a viaže na seba veľké množstvo kritiky. Napriek tomu, že o politickej korektnosti sa v Spojených štátoch najintenzívnejšie diskutovalo v 80-tych a 90-tych rokoch 20. storočia, neznamená to, že je téma politickej korektnosti vyčerpaná a už sa vo verejnom živote neobjavuje. Autorka si kladie otázku, prečo je politická korektnosť kritizovaná; zameriava sa na otázku vzdelávania a cez rešerš literatúry – ako sekundárnej tak i primárnej – prichádza k záveru, že je to primárne kvôli nezamýšľaným negatívnym dopadom daného fenoménu, najmä obmedzovania slobody prejavu – či už skutočného alebo obávaného, ale tiež obecnou umrtvovaním verejnej debaty či netolerancie disentu. Zároveň sa v debate o politickej korektnosti v oblasti univerzít ukazuje kultúrna polarizácia americkej spoločnosti, ktorá debatu zdanlivo drží v mŕtvom bode tým, že ani jedna strana debaty – konzervatívna ani liberálna – nie je ochotná ustúpiť zo svojich pozícií.

Abstract

The phenomenon of political correctness is a fairly complicated phenomenon which creates a lot of controversy and draws a lot of attention. Despite the fact that political correctness was in the United States discussed mainly in the 1980s and 1990s, it does not mean the topic of political correctness is already out of public life. The author asks why political correctness is criticized, focusing on the question of education and through literature research – both secondary and primary – comes to the conclusion that it is mainly due to unintended consequences of the phenomenon, chiefly through limitations imposed on the freedom of speech – either real or perceived, and also

generally having a chilling effect on public discourse or lack of tolerance towards dissent. At the same time, cultural polarization of American society manifests itself quite strongly in the debate about universities. The polarization keeps the debate in a stalemate as neither side of the debate – liberal or conservative – seems to be willing to reconsider its position.

Klíčová slova

politická korektnost, Spojené státy, vzdělávání, debata, historie, jazykové kodexy, liberální ortodoxie

Keywords

political correctness, United States, education, debate, history, speech codes, liberal orthodoxy

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Prohlášení

1. Prohlašuji, že jsem předkládanou práci zpracoval/a samostatně a použil/a jen uvedené prameny a literaturu.
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3. Souhlasím s tím, aby práce byla zpřístupněna pro studijní a výzkumné účely.

V Praze dne 31.7.2013

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V čem se oproti původnímu zadání změnil cíl práce?

Ciel' práce sa oproti pôvodnému zadaniu zmenil na snahu - okrem predstavenia samotného konceptu - sústrediť sa na analýzu debaty o téme politickej korektnosti a ilustrovať túto debatu na konkrétnom príklade oblasti vzdelávania.

Jaké změny nastaly v časovém, teritoriálním a věcném vymezení tématu?

- Časové vymedzenie bude sledovať rámec celkového konceptu politickej korektnosti od jeho približných počiatkov v 80-tych rokoch 20-teho storočia a tiež analyzovať súčasný stav debaty a konceptu.
- Teritoriálne vymedzenie ostáva stále rovnaké a zameriava sa na Spojené štáty.
- Vecné vymedzenie korešponduje s pôvodne zamýšľanou štruktúrou, i keď skúmanie dopadov politickej korektnosti sa zameralo primárne na otázku vzdelávania.

Jak se proměnila struktura práce (vyjádřete stručným obsahem)?

Introduction

I. PC: definitions and brief historical overview

II. Current debate

- for & against
- "fighting" against PC

III. Special Focus: Education

- K-12 Education
- Higher Education

Jakým vývojem prošla metodologická koncepcie práce?

Tak, ako bolo zamýšľané, sa v prvej časti sa bude jednať o historickú analýzu vývoja konceptu politickej korektnosti; v druhej časti pôjde o interpretatívnu analýzu stavu daného konceptu a debaty o ňom. Tretia časť bude prípadovou štúdiou a analýzou prejavov a dopadu konceptu PC.

Které nové prameny a sekundární literatura byly zpracovány a jak tato skutečnost ovlivnila celek práce?

Jedným z nových prameňov bola publikácia "Political Correctness: A History of

Semantics and Culture" (Hughes, Geoffrey, Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), ktorá bola užitočná pre prvú časť práce. Prínosom bola tiež kniha "The Closing of the American Mind" (BLOOM, A., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), vďaka ktorej v mojej práci bude reflektovaný filozofický rozmer konceptu a spôsob, akým funguje a presadzuje sa v prostredí amerických univerzít.

S tým súvisí i ďalší prameň, "Political Correctness and Higher Education" (LEA, J., New York : London : Routledge, 2009), ktorý zachytáva vývoj konceptu PC a bude užitočný v tretej časti mojej práce, kde sa pozriem na počiatky PC na amerických univerzitách, do rovnakej kategórie spadá Illiberal Education (D'Souza, Dinesh, Boston: Atlantic, 1991). Pri skúmaní základných a stredných škôl smerovanie práce ovplyvnila publikácia "The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Children Learn" (Ravitch, Diane, New York: Knopf, 2003).

Charakterizujte základní proměny práce v době od zadání projektu do odevzdání tezí a pokuste se vyhodnotit, jaký pokrok na práci jste během semestru zaznamenali (v bodech):

- uvedomenie si, že nie je cieľom postihnúť celý koncept v celej jeho šírke
- zúženie prípadovej štúdie
- postihnutie filozofických stanovísk a polarizácie debaty (nielen) o politickej korektnosti v USA
- analyzovanie nezamýšľaných dopadov PC

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Introduction

Although the phenomenon of political correctness was most hotly discussed in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, it does not mean that “PC” – as political correctness is sometimes referred to – no longer matters today. Quite the contrary – the debate about it is still very much alive, and so is the phrase “political correctness run amok”. Indeed, the expression “political correctness” is itself now considered to be a term of derision rather than being a neutral description of the phenomenon in question.

This thesis will be interested in finding out why political correctness is criticized and why it attracts attention. It will therefore focus mainly on the debate about the phenomenon of political correctness, trying to answer the questions of what the debate includes, who takes part in it and how it has been developing since the inception of political correctness. Why is it important and what, if anything, does it show about the American society?

The thesis will then hold that political correctness, attempting to "solve the problems" of society and establish a sensitive, inclusive environment, has actually become a problem itself, as it is criticized and discussed mainly due to its unintended – either real or perceived – negative consequences, chief role among which is played by the concern that political correctness stifles free speech.

Also, this work will argue that the intense way in which the debate has been developing might to a considerable extent be related to the polarisation of American society on cultural issues. The contributions to the debate and their accounts are often informed by partisanship rather than clear analysis and do not start from neutral position; argumentation frequently shifts to the realm of interpretation. Interestingly enough, the debate does not follow the “left vs. right” division at all times – even though such division does make an appearance in the discussions – but in a number of cases, PC could be regarded more as a clash between the traditionalist, conservative section of society and the “progressive” section. As the debate touches upon a number of America’s deepest sensitivities, and, one could perhaps say, also insecurities, it is all the more important to pay close attention to the debate and approach it in a balanced and sober way, because it might expose the underlying truth about how America approaches its own identity.

And not only America, for that matter. Political correctness plays itself out also in other states with diverse populations, such as Great Britain, Canada or Australia.

Here in Central Europe, however, political correctness is not a concern of crucial importance. The literature on this topic is also fairly scarce. The author of this thesis managed to locate a master's thesis at our Faculty on the subject of "political correctness as an attempt at social transformation" from over 10 years ago, which focused mainly on description and the linguistic level. This work, however, will attempt to move more toward the analysis of the debate, with the "added value" of being able to take one more decade into consideration to see how the debate developed.

Although political correctness is probably best known through its manifestations on the level of language, there is much more to the concept. It will therefore be useful to delineate the limits this work has set for itself. First, as far as the time frame is concerned, this work will focus on the current discussion on PC which started in the late 1980s. Although ideas and policies motivated by similar considerations as those that drive today's PC – such as changes to language or school curricula – are found also in earlier times and different societies than the American one, they are not going to be studied in this work. That is not only in order to keep the analysis focused and navigable, but also because such policies often grew out of ideas and aims different from what political correctness as defined in this work stands for.

Next, this thesis will not attempt to review the phenomenon of political correctness and the debate about it in its entirety, due to its complexity. Rather, this work will look at one particular area in more detail in its "special focus" part. That area is, as the title says, the question of education. Originally, the plan was to study the debate on political correctness on the example of race. Education was then given preference, however, seeing that political correctness as such was born in and is still very closely connected to America's universities and education in general and acknowledging the fact that the consequences of PC – and the discussion about them – is perhaps better visible on the example of education than on any other. Within education, it is then especially the humanities that attract most controversy and attention in relation to political correctness, which will also be reflected in this work.

This thesis will be structured as a critical review and analysis of the literature that exists on the subject. The method of historical and interpretative analysis will also play a role in the work. Where applicable, the author will provide comparisons of secondary sources with primary materials, i.e. teaching standards, textbooks, test resources, student conduct codes etc. in order to either contradict or confirm the positions advanced by secondary sources.

The text is divided into three chapters. The first one aims to characterize political correctness, so as to clearly – or at least as clearly as possible – define what ideas, policies and considerations are at the core of the debate this thesis aims to track. It will explain what the original intentions behind political correctness are and also look at the connection between political correctness and multiculturalism, because this connection plays a considerable role in the debate in education. Next, the first chapter will briefly examine the historical development of both the concept of political correctness and the term “political correctness” itself. The chapter will conclude with a part dedicated to the linguistic level of PC, which is perhaps what most people associate with PC first and foremost. A special subchapter on ironization and parody of political correctness will also be included, so as to show the wider reception of PC.

The second chapter seeks to put the phenomenon of political correctness into context, “activate” the ideas and intentions described in the first chapter and introduce the debate about the consequences of political correctness that attract most attention. The chapter will open by addressing several inconsistencies that critics say are inherent in political correctness; it will continue by examining the charges that PC is intolerant, creates the so-called “victim culture”, and generally reaches pathological proportions resulting in the silencing of public discourse. At the end of this chapter, two counter-views are included, addressing the – possible – relation between political correctness and the right.

The third and last chapter offers the promised special focus on education. Generally, it aims to develop the ideas and discussions examined in the first two chapters and show on more concrete examples how the debate on the concept of political correctness plays itself out and what it includes. The chapter is divided into two main sections; the first one looks at K-12 education, focusing on the discussion about the questions of censoring, or, rather, sanitizing textbooks and influencing curricula because of “politically correct” concerns. It will examine these questions by looking at textbook publishing industry, and then focusing on the realms of history and literature, giving special attention to the case of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*. The chapter will also discuss the question of how political correctness manifests itself in the preparation of tests and what conclusions can be drawn from it.

Next, the second section of the third chapter deals with the question of universities. Here, the debate on political correctness will be examined through the question of affirmative action in university admissions and its relation to PC, the

conservative charge that liberal professors proselytize their students with the agenda of PC, and the question of changing curricula; the section will also look at campus life and how the “PC debate” develops in relation to speech codes and sensitivity trainings.

A concluding chapter will then provide a summary of the main points and findings, drawing broader conclusions about the debate on political correctness and its relation to American society at large.

As far as the sources for individual parts of this thesis are concerned, a very useful source for (not only) the first chapter of this work was the book *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture* written by Geoffrey Hughes, Emeritus Professor of the History of the English Language at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; his work provides a workable overview of the phenomenon of political correctness. Also, *The War of the Words* (1994), a selection of essays put together by British editor Sarah Dunant, was useful in that it not only offered impartial treatises on PC, but also represented the proponents of the phenomenon.

For the realm of K-12 education, the most authoritative, comprehensive and useful source was the work of Diane Ravitch who is a historian of education and now works as a research professor at New York University. Ravitch was a U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education and is also associated with the Brookings Institution. She has been writing extensively about education for several decades now; this thesis used mainly her book *The Language Police* from the year 2003, where she describes various book sanitization efforts and argues that such sanitization has detrimental effect on the students, their minds and their horizons.

In the same part (K-12 education), the author of this thesis used and consulted a variety of primary sources, too – in order to “verify” the claims of PC’s critics. The author looked namely at test questions and test preparation guidelines, sensitivity and anti-bias guidelines of several publishing houses, American textbooks available online and teaching standards which should act as guidelines in creating curricula.

Some of the materials used mainly for the section on university education are arguably the most crucial for the entire debate on political correctness as they played a role in opening the debate in the 1980s and 1990s. One of such books is Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* from the year 1987, in which he discusses the question of relativism present in university education; this relativism, in Bloom’s view, instead of opening students’ minds actually closes them and threatens critical thinking.

Another important source was *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (1991) written by Dinesh D'Souza, an Indian-American conservative political commentator, concerned with how political correctness, identity politics and multiculturalism dilutes traditional university curriculum, stifles free speech, limits freedom of conscience and generally threatens the role and standing of universities.

This text referenced also the work of Roger Kimball, an art critic and public commentator, who is well known especially due to his 1998 book *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*. Here, he argues that “tenured radicals”, i.e. the activists from the 1960s who achieved important positions in the academy, are now decomposing American universities from the inside by trying to, essentially, destroy the tradition of Western culture on which curricula were traditionally based. He joins D'Souza in his fear that the standing and purpose of American universities is undermined.

A fairly large part in the section on universities was played also by the FIRE, Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, whose website, with the aim of tracking and publicizing examples of efforts to curtail free speech on American campuses, has created an entire database of various primary sources related to the debate on PC, for example university speech codes, information about various sensitivity trainings etc. The current president of the FIRE, Greg Lukianoff, who joined the ranks of the critics of political correctness with his book *Unlearning Liberty* (2012), will also be referenced.

These sources were then complemented with various reports, journal, newspaper and magazine articles discussing the question of political correctness.

1. Political Correctness: Characteristics

1.1 What is Political Correctness? (Attempts at) a Definition.

“Political correctness” seems to have become a bit of a buzzword in the past few decades not only in the United States, but also in other countries. The evolution of the concept has arguably gone through several phases since its inception and “political correctness” now manifests itself in a number of environments and issues. It is a

complex and protean phenomenon¹ which might mean different things to different people or groups; as a result, it might prove to be rather difficult to define.

Even though it is “much easier to say what this phenomenon is *not* than what it is,”² generally it is possible to state that political correctness is a representation of a critical stance towards society, culture and the existing social system. Political correctness, however, is not an ideology, “based on a fixed, written and wide-ranging statement of beliefs in the same way as, say, Marxism. It is instead an underlying attitude, one that is very difficult to pin down and which moves in mysterious ways.”³

At the core of political correctness is a reformist idea with the view and aim of changing and improving society, essentially by changing the way things are named and framed. These attempts are aimed mainly at establishing equality, equal representation and removing the possibility of insult in various areas and issues in which some believe a group is being discriminated against or viewed with a bias. Such sensitive issues include gender, race, national and ethnic identity, culture, religion, age, sexual preferences, disabilities and others.

As far as the definition of political correctness in dictionaries is concerned, the Merriam-Webster dictionary uses the adjectival version of the term, i.e. “politically correct”, and defines it as “conforming to a belief that language and practices which could offend political sensibilities (as in matters of sex or race) should be eliminated”⁴.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines political correctness as “language, behaviour, and attitudes that are carefully chosen so that they do not offend or insult anyone – used especially when you think someone is too careful in what they say or how they behave”⁵. The last part of this definition – “someone is too careful” – refers to an important dimension of the debate on political correctness, according to which political correctness has become “too much of a good thing” and reached extreme proportions. This view will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter of this work.

¹ Geoffrey Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell 2010), 3.

² Roger Howard, “Through the Looking Glass. Political correctness, foreign policy and bad decisions,” *Center for Policy Studies*, London, 2008, Accessed July 2, 2013, <http://www.cps.org.uk/files/reports/original/111027170101-20080721PublicServicesThroughTheLookingGlass.pdf>, 6.

³ Roger Howard, “Through the Looking Glass. Political correctness, foreign policy and bad decisions,” 6.

⁴ Merriam Webster, “Politically Correct,” Accessed January 20, 2013, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/politically%20correct>.

⁵ Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, “Political Correctness,” Accessed June 20, 2013, <http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/political-correctness>.

Political correctness manifests itself through language, policies and ideas that seek to achieve representational fairness, to remove stereotypes, to combat intolerance and to reject prejudice. Essentially, the aim of efforts seen as part of political correctness is to achieve social equality and equality of opportunity, leaving behind the memories of discrimination and oppression from the past. Political correctness sees people primarily as members of broader groups and works with group identity rather than the identity of an individual.

1.2 The Relation to Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism and “political correctness” are closely related, given that both of them are reformist ideas and movements, striving, essentially, to make the world an inclusive and welcoming place for everyone equally regardless of their cultural background.

Because this work will be concerned mainly with the question of education, it makes sense to explain what multiculturalism stands for and what it means through its application in education. In the words of James A. Banks, Director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, the goals of multicultural education are “ideals that teachers and administrators should constantly strive to achieve,” and such education “seeks to create equal educational opportunities for all students, including those from different racial, ethnic, and social-class groups.”⁶

Banks identifies five “dimensions” of multicultural education, which are “content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure.”⁷ Content integration refers to the effort to include, in teaching, content from a variety of cultures and groups. In the knowledge construction process, teachers are required to “help students to understand, investigate, and determine how the biases, frames of reference, and perspectives within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it.”⁸ Prejudice reduction refers to class activities aimed at developing positive inter-racial, -ethnic and -cultural attitudes through emphasizing positive images of given groups in order to eradicate misconceptions students often have. Equity pedagogy

⁶ James A. Banks, “Multicultural Education: Goals and Dimensions,” *College of Education, University of Washington*, Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://education.washington.edu/cme/view.htm>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

means teachers changing their teaching styles in order to better meet the needs and learning styles of their diverse classes, for example through giving preference to cooperative activities rather than competitive ones when teaching African-American or Mexican-American students. Last but not least, an empowering school culture is created when schools change their environment in such a way that students from various diverse groups (racial, gender etc.) experience equal status.⁹

To explain further the relation between “political correctness” and multiculturalism, one could refer to the fact that “[m]ulticulturalism is often given as the driving ethic that prompts one to be politically correct.”¹⁰ In the conservative critique of political correctness, however, political correctness and multiculturalism are often seen as one thing, or, rather, multiculturalism is seen (and criticized) as part of “the politically correct efforts” to enforce diversity and cultural inclusiveness.

1.3 The Origins and Development of Political Correctness

Just as it is difficult to define the concept of political correctness itself, so is it hard to analyse its development. Due to the fact that the term has gone through several phases and its meaning has been evolving, political correctness “might even be said to have reversed its meaning in the process.”¹¹ In the words of Geoffrey Hughes, “political correctness” as a concept predates the debate, does not have a simple history and is a complex and discontinuous phenomenon.¹²

Today’s political correctness can be traced back to the campuses of American universities in the mid-to-late 1980s.¹³ As nearly half of Americans go to college, the phenomenon had an impact on large part of the country; the discussion about political correctness gradually came to include a number of participants from outside the academic world, for example then-President George Bush, public intellectuals or various journalists.¹⁴

The state of American politics and public discussion in the Eighties when political correctness became a subject of society-wide debate needs to be considered

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Don Closson, “Politically Correct Education,” Probe Ministries, 1992, Accessed June 24, 2013, http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4218113/k.490C/Politically_Correct_Education.htm.

¹¹ John Lea, *Political Correctness and Higher Education: British and American Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2009), 10.

¹² Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 3.

¹³ Dunant, *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, viii

here: these were the times when America was, in Dunant's words, "in the grip of a sustained period of right wing government, preaching aggressive free market economics and reduced government welfare". Equally important, conservative values put forward for example through the activities of the Moral Majority¹⁵ got the upper hand in public discourse and the "issues of race and gender (issues always associated with the left) had been more or less knocked off the political agenda. PC, both on and off campus, has helped to put them back on."¹⁶

One of the influences that helped reintroduce these issues into the political mainstream was the fact that many members of the "revolutionary" sixties generation rose to important positions at American universities. Indeed, today's political correctness is believed to be the legacy of a number of reform movements originating mainly on the left which were active in the 1960s and 1970s, seeking social change and recognition for previously marginalized groups. Probably the most emblematic of these was the African-American civil rights movement, but it was also other groups that "spoke up", for example women, homosexuals, Native Americans or Hispanics.

In the 1980s, the New Left academics started to be presented by the new right as "dangerous radicals who were undermining higher education by politicizing it."¹⁷ The debate on what was seen as political correctness on campus - sometimes referred to as "campus culture wars" - came to include such instances as changes in curricula, outlawing hate speech and generally trying to influence language on campuses, support for affirmative action and other issues. The debate will be addressed in more detail in chapter 3 of this work.

1.4 The Term "Political Correctness"

Examples of using of the term "political correctness" date back to the 18th century. These earlier usages, however, are in majority of cases unrelated to the way and sense in which the term is perceived and used today. The term "correctness" seems to have been presented and understood in its literal sense in the past, being thus in no

¹⁴ Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 5.

¹⁵ Moral Majority was a political organization of the Christian right active during the 1980s. The aim of Moral Majority was to lead conservative Americans to be more active politically in relation to issues Moral Majority deemed important.

¹⁶ Dunant, *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, ix.

¹⁷ John Annette, "The Culture War and the Politics of Higher Education in America," In: Sarah Dunant (ed.), *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, 3.

way related to the question of the treatment of disadvantaged groups and the language used to address them. “Politically correct” was an expression referring to something that was in accordance with prevailing policy. This is the case, for example, of a statement by James Wilson, one of the first justices of the Supreme Court, in the case *Chisholm v. Georgia* in 1793, which is considered to be the very first use of the expression “politically correct”: “The states, rather than the people, for whose sake the states exist, are frequently the objects which attract and arrest our principal attention... Sentiments and expressions of this inaccurate kind prevail in our common, even in our convivial, language... ‘The United States,’ instead of the ‘People of the United States,’ is the toast given. This is not politically correct.”¹⁸ Here, the term “politically correct” is really used in its literal sense, and the meaning in this particular use was “politically accurate.”¹⁹

A later example of the use of the term, not concerned merely with the literal sense of the phrase, is its use by communist politicians. In Marxist-Leninist and Trotskyist language, “correct” was associated with the prescribed party line.²⁰ The term can be found in the works of Chinese communists too: the expression “politically correct” made an appearance also in the English translation of Mao Zedong’s “Little Red Book”, where it was connected to the idea of “correct lineism”, i.e., again, following the correct line, the prescribed political way.²¹

In today’s sense, however, the term has been used roughly since the 1970s.²² At first, it was used by the New Left to poke fun at their own expense, to refer to those who were “over-earnest, humourless and rigidly prescriptive [...]”; [t]he meaning of these terms on the left, then, was an ironic mirror image of the one now attributed to them by the right.”²³

Indeed, the “image attributed by the right” is what now essentially plays a major role in how the entire movement called “political correctness” is framed, viewed and presented. The term “political correctness” itself is now actually a derisive term which has been adopted by the right, or, generally, those with a more conservative and traditionalist worldview, to refer in a pejorative way to various sorts of promoting

¹⁸ The Phrase Finder, “Politically Correct,” *The Phrase Finder*, Accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/287100.html>.

¹⁹ Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 62.

²⁰ Stefan Collini, “Marxism and Form,” *The Nation*, November 22, 2005, Accessed July 2, 2013, <http://www.thenation.com/article/marxism-and-form>.

²¹ Dunant, *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, ix.

²² *Ibid.*, 64.

²³ Deborah Cameron, “Words, words, words,” In: Sarah Dunant (ed.), *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate* (London: Virago Press, 1994), 19.

multiculturalism, minority rights, cultural sensitiveness and inclusion and the like, i.e. the causes that are important for “political correctness” as defined above. In the words of Polly Toinbee, a British journalist specializing in social concerns, “[t]he phrase ‘political correctness’ was born as a coded cover for all who still want to say Paki, spastic or queer, all those who still want to pick on anyone not like them, playground bullies who never grew up.”²⁴ The fact that the term “political correctness” is now nearly universally accepted as a way to show scorn, shows that the entire “project” of the right to mock the aims and methods of (what they call) political correctness has been successful.²⁵ The reasons why the conservatives and traditionalists criticize “political correctness” include the view that “political correctness” is an orthodoxy imposed on society, that it stands for intolerance by not allowing points of view that differ from the “politically correct ones”, silences public discourse, infringes on people’s freedom of speech and that it is essentially un-American and undermines democracy. These criticisms will be developed further in parts 2 and 3 of this thesis.

The term “political correctness” is sometimes also abbreviated to “PC” or “P.C.” which can be traced to a quotation from *The New York Times* from May 11, 1986: “There’s too much emphasis on being PC.”²⁶ This use is also pejorative.

Due to the fact that the term “political correctness” is now perceived as a tainted term, “politically incorrect” started to be viewed as an essentially positive, or, rather, brave (self-)description of a text, speech or behavior, i.e. one which does not comply with “modern”, albeit (sometimes) illogical and useless, or even hurtful, tendencies. An example of this way of self-presentation might be *The Politically Incorrect Guide* book series by Regnery Publishing²⁷ which offers conservative take on a number of various topics, free from the “PC talk”.²⁸

In order to escape the negative connotations of the phrase “political correctness,” the supporters of (what the critics refer to as) “political correctness” have come up with

²⁴ Polly Toinbee quoted in: Ben O’Neill, “A Critique of Politically Correct Language,” *The Independent Review* 2 (Fall 2011): 279.

²⁵ Pam Chamberlain, “The Right v. Higher Education: Change and Continuity,” *Radical Teacher* 77 (Winter 2006): 3.

²⁶ Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 69.

²⁷ Regnery Publishing, *Politically Incorrect Guide Series*, Accessed July 13, 2013, <http://www.regnery.com/imprint/politically-incorrect-guides/>.

²⁸ It might be useful to note here, too, that these guides were criticized for inaccuracy and questionable scholarship – for example *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Science* has been re-named *The Incorrect Guide to Science* by journalist Chris Mooney in his review for *Science Progress*, an online journal specializing in science. In: Chris Mooney, “Yes, Virginia, There Is a War on Science,” *Science Progress*, May 14, 2008, Accessed June 28, 2013, <http://scienceprogress.org/2008/05/there-is-a-war-on-science/>.

various terms that should be used instead of “political correctness” to refer to what they are striving for. These alternative names include such terms as “minority rights”, “multiculturalism”, “the politics of recognition”, or “difference and identity politics.”²⁹ Several adjectives are also proposed as a replacement of the negatively charged term “politically correct,” such as “culturally sensitive”, “multiculturally unexceptionable”, “appropriately inclusive,”³⁰ “nonoppressive” and others; these terms could, indeed, be viewed as the “politically correct terms for political correctness”.

As far as the literal meaning of the phrase is concerned, Geoffrey Hughes³¹ claims that the term “political correctness” is actually a misnomer as it has now basically nothing to do with the meaning of the words “political” and “correctness”, mainly because it has spread into so many areas.³²

Because the issues most often covered by political correctness are in the majority of cases related to social concerns and not politics in its usual sense, one could ask whether the term “socially correct” would not be a better way of referring to the phenomenon. English writer Nigel Rees, however, does not think such a term would be appropriate, because “that would make it sound as though it had something to do with manners and etiquette. ‘Ideologically correct’ would give the game away, of course, and lead us back to politics.”³³

In order to keep things understandable and to avoid confusion, the author of this thesis will be using the term “political correctness”, but in a neutral way, not in the derisive sense created by the critics.

1.5 The Linguistic Level

“Political correctness” manifests itself very strongly on the linguistic level by creating and proposing various language changes. Of course, attempts at changing public discourse have occurred already in the past; plus, language does also change and innovate itself naturally. Such changes were, however, not driven by the same

²⁹ Simmons Solon, “Ascriptive Justice: The Prevalence, Distribution, and Consequences of Political Correctness in the Academy,” *The Forum* 2 (2008): 2.

³⁰ Henry Beard, Christopher Cerf, *The Official Politically Correct Dictionary and Handbook* (New York: Villard books, 1995), 100.

³¹ Hughes is Emeritus Professor of the History of the English Language at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

³² Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 3.

motivation as what is subsumed under the heading of “political correctness.” This thesis is therefore not going to address attempts at changing vocabulary in general, it will merely focus on those that came into existence as a result of political correctness.

Thus, the changes proposed within the framework of political correctness should help bring about social change and create a sensitive and inclusive environment. “Politically correct language” works for example with the idea that words that could insult, offend or hurt someone, especially members of various disadvantaged groups, should be removed. What should be used instead are neutral terms. Stereotypes should be eradicated and prejudice and bias rejected through the use of words and expressions that do not carry negative semantic or connotational “baggage”. “Politically correct language” is thus seen as having a civilizing influence on society,³⁴ undoing past injustices.

To show some examples of “politically correct language” and to explain how and why new “politically correct” words are created or changed, we might start by looking briefly at the question of gender, which is one of the areas on which “political correctness” is most focused. Here, in order to achieve gender equity, gender-neutral expressions are preferred. An interesting role is played by the word “man” which, if included in various words, is by the proponents of “politically correct language” seen as not describing reality wholly and appropriately. As an example, we can use the word “mankind”, which, according to those in favor of PC, does not capture reality in its entirety as it stresses the male element – through the word “man” – but neglects females. Therefore, in order to name issues in a neutral way, in this particular case, it would be better to use the term “human race”. Similarly, instead of “chairman”, it is better to use the word “chairperson” etc.

To show another example which might be viewed as a little more radical, we can refer to the term “womyn”. This is a form of the word “women” preferred by some feminist writers, or generally those who aim to show their disapproval of the traditional allegedly male-centered vocabulary. There are also other alternative spellings of the word “women”, for example “wimmin (plural), wom!n, *womban* and *womon* (singular), while *femal* (from *female*) and *humyn* (human)”³⁵. The aim of all these terms is to

³³ Nigel Rees, *The Politically Correct Phrasebook*, 1993, Accessed June 3, 2013 and quoted on: <http://web.tiscali.it/njross/political.htm>.

³⁴ Ben O’Neill, “A Critique of Politically Correct Language,” 279.

³⁵ Neeru Tandon, *Feminism: A Paradigm Shift*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2008, 65.

“remove the perception of gender bias from the English word women”³⁶. In (mainly) feminist writing, the term *womyn* is used in a serious way, but it is not very likely to be found somewhere else than in specialized publications, journals etc.

To look at another area which draws attention of the “politically correct language”, we can look at the question of race. This question is, especially in the United States in relation to blacks, heavily laden with history of oppression, slavery and other concerns. The word “nigger” is probably the most controversial here due to its connotations, emotivity and offensiveness. Seen as a representation of white supremacy and oppression, this word has been effectively taboo for over a century, being also referred to as the “n-word”. Various terms have been used to replace it; the one that is considered most neutral and acceptable now is African-American. In relation to the word “nigger”, however, it might be interesting to note that the word is so “toxic” that even homonyms can cause trouble. A case in point – or, rather, a string of cases – are the controversies related to the word “niggardly”, which means “grudgingly mean about spending or granting.”³⁷ But because the word sounds very similar to “nigger”, various people who used the word “niggardly” in its literal sense, i.e. meaning “stingy” or “penny-pinching”, were accused of racism.³⁸

Another area that attracts a lot of attention in relation to “politically correct language” is the issue of disability. In order to stop “dehumanizing” the disabled people, several linguistic improvements have been proposed. For example the so-called “people-first language”, according to which it is better to say “people with disabilities” rather than “disabled people”, because if the word “people” comes first, it makes it clear that those the expression is referring to are first and foremost people; they should not be “defined” by their disabilities by mentioning the disabilities first.³⁹ Interestingly enough, the “newest version” which ought to be used in these circumstances now, as even the term “disability” tends sometimes to be perceived as a negative word, would be “physically/mentally challenged”.

“Politically correct language” attracts a lot of criticism and questions. The most frequent question is whether there is actually a point in trying to change or replace the

³⁶ Ibid, p. 65.

³⁷ Merriam Webster, “Niggardly,” Accessed July 25, 2013, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/niggardly>.

³⁸ Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 153. The controversy related to the word “nigger” will be further discussed later in this text (in part 3.1.2 b) in relation to the attempts to sanitize Mark Twain’s book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

words which are seen as offensive or inappropriate – is there a chance that the linguistic modifications will really cause the underlying attitudes to change? For example, Barbara Ehrenreich, an American feminist and political activist, says that “verbal uplift is not the revolution;”⁴⁰ her words are confirmed by the concept of “euphemism treadmill.”⁴¹ Given that euphemism and circumlocution, as shown above, are the mechanisms on which the creation of the “politically correct terms” rely the most, it might be useful to explain what “euphemism treadmill” means: if a new expression is created to refer to, for example, mental retardation⁴², the original underlying attitudes do not change as a result, they just shift to the new expression. “[T]he new term gradually enters common circulation, and speakers use it in the same way that they previously used the preceding term.”⁴³

Interestingly enough, however, the proponents of “political correctness” do not seem to be unhappy if the change they create stays on the surface. Feminist linguist Deborah Cameron says that “even the most cynical compliance with anti-sexist norms sets a public example others may take to heart. Changing what counts as acceptable public behaviour is one of the ways you go about changing prevailing attitudes [...]”⁴⁴

The “politically correct terms” also attract attention – and ridicule, as the next part of this text will show – due to their awkwardness and the fact that they sound rather unnatural. However, in the words of Polly Toinbee, a British journalist focusing on social affairs, what counts is that “[t]he politically correct society is the civilised society, however much some may squirm at the more inelegant official circumlocutions designed to avoid offence. Inelegance is better than bile.”⁴⁵

As a response, however, critics sometimes charge that it is not civility, but actually dishonesty which is at the heart of the “PC language” and that this fact is “manifested in the preference for euphemism over literalism, for vagueness over

³⁹ United Spinal Association, *Disability Etiquette: Tips On Interacting With People With Disabilities*, New York: USA, 2011, Accessed July 10, 2013. <http://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf>

⁴⁰ Barbara Ehrenreich quoted in Deborah Cameron, “Words, Words, Words,” In: Sarah Dunant, *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, 23-4.

⁴¹ This is a term coined by Steven Pinker in an op-ed in New York Times in 1994: Steven Pinker, “The Game of the Name,” *The New York Times*, April 5, 1994, Accessed June 27, 2013. http://pinker.wjh.harvard.edu/articles/media/1994_04_03_newyorktimes.pdf.

⁴² The term which is offered as a politically correct alternative to „mentally retarded“ is „differently abled“.

⁴³ Ben O’Neill, “A Critique of Politically Correct Language,” 282.

⁴⁴ Deborah Cameron, “Words, words, words,” In: Sarah Dunant (ed.), *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, 27.

⁴⁵ Ben O’Neill, “A Critique of Politically Correct Language,” 279.

specificity, and for propaganda over honesty.”⁴⁶ An example of such concern can be the aforementioned term “differently abled”, proposed as a politically correct term for both mental and physical disability. “Differently abled”, however, in the view of critics, does not give a listener or reader enough information, it essentially covers up reality. The politically correct society, then, “is not the civilized society, but rather the dishonest society.”⁴⁷

1.5.1 Ironization and Parody

The “inelegance” admitted by Polly Toinbee in the quotation above is indeed sometimes used to achieve comical effect, mocking especially the tendency of politically correct language to use various euphemisms and circumlocutions.

For example, in this line of humour, the word “frog” could be “transcribed” as *amphibian American*, “dishonest” as *ethically disoriented*, “wrong” as *differently logical*, “short” as *vertically challenged* etc.⁴⁸

Politically correct terms and concepts are satirized also because of the fact that they sometimes sound rather bizarre when used in an informal setting, especially when “applied” at well-known concepts – in the *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*, for example, author James Finn Garner states that the Little Red Riding Hood was asked to take food to her grandmother’s house “not because this was womyn’s work, mind you, but because the deed was generous and helped engender a feeling of community.”⁴⁹ Not only does Garner explain Little Red Riding Hood’s actions by using terms and expressions that are rather unexpected in a bedtime story (“engender a feeling of community”), but he also uses the word “womyn”, which does not sound very natural in the given setting either.

PC’s attempts to put all cultures on the same level and not prioritize the manifestations of any one particular culture have also been mocked, for example in the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 291.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 291.

⁴⁸ For more such examples, see for example Beard, Henry, Cerf, Christopher. *The Official Politically Correct Dictionary and Handbook*. New York: Villard books, 1995, or the section “Banned Words” at Political Correctness – the awful truth. “Banned words.” Accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.politicallyincorrect.me.uk/banned.htm>.

⁴⁹ James Finn Garner, “Little Red Riding Hood,” Excerpt from *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories: Modern Tales for Our Life and Times* (London: Macmillan: 1994), Accessed June 30, 2013, http://jamesfinngarner.com/pdf/PCBS_excerpt.pdf.

now notorious Internet hit “Politically Correct Christmas Greeting”, which says: “Best wishes for an environmentally conscious, socially responsible, low stress, non-addictive, gender neutral, winter solstice holiday, practiced within the most joyous traditions of the religious persuasion of your choice, but with respect for the religious persuasion of others who choose to practice their own religion as well as those who choose not to practice a religion at all.”⁵⁰ Again, the tendency to stay neutral and impartial in all circumstances put forward by the proponents of political correctness is taken here (nearly) *ad absurdum* for comic effect.

2. The Debate on P.C. and its Critique: Main Points and General Considerations

Moving on from the “theory” and facts to the contentious points, this chapter will present and analyse some of the – unintended – negative consequences critics of political correctness are concerned about; where applicable, how the the proponents of political correctness “reply” to the charges. Several of these points will later be making appearance also in the “special focus” on education.

2.1 *Inherent Inconsistencies*

Political correctness is often criticized for its alleged internal contradictions and ambivalence. This part will discuss the charge that political correctness amounts to a political orthodoxy imposed by the left on the entire society. It will also look at the question of cultural relativism which is by the critics seen as a point that undermines the logic of the very existence of political correctness.

2.1.1 “Liberal Orthodoxy”

Firstly, according to some commentators, “[t]here is an antithesis at the core of political correctness, since it is liberal in its aims but often illiberal in its practices:

⁵⁰ “A Politically Correct Christmas Greeting,” *Kraftmstr’s Home Page*, Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://kraftmstr.com/christmas/humor/pcgreeting.html>.

hence it generates contradictions like *positive discrimination* and *liberal orthodoxy*.⁵¹ Indeed, the methods PC uses are of concern, as “[f]or many liberals a movement which claimed to be about opening up the culture to allow more voices in it has, instead, only succeeded in alienating voices that were already there. What price more women and black writers in the canon if that means the exclusion of other equally brilliant and historically important white male ones? What price racial and sexual equality if it can only be achieved by the imposition of another set of rules, in some cases amounting to what many see as a direct censorship of speech or behaviour?”⁵²

Indeed, one of the main criticisms leveraged against political correctness is that the efforts subsumed under the heading “PC” amount to an orthodoxy⁵³. Because of the fact that political correctness is seen – and presented by its opponents – as a set of values and definitions which should not be questioned, it can be related to other, earlier examples of “conformity engineered by pressure groups requiring compliance to particular values or definitions”⁵⁴ and politically it can be regarded, in some views, as “a new form of orthodoxy”.⁵⁵

2.1.2 Cultural Relativism

Another issue which attracts criticism is the relation between political correctness and cultural relativism. Cultural relativism holds that “all points of view are equally valid, and any truth is relative. The truth belongs to the individual or his or her culture.”⁵⁶ Political correctness, then, due to its aim of celebrating all cultures equally, believes that “presumptions of cultural relativism are true and should not be discussed.”⁵⁷

The problem, however, surfaces when we look at moral norms – it is important to realise that individual cultures differ also on this level. Cultural relativism popular in the Western culture, however, tends to perceive some norms as given and universal – but these are valid merely in the Western culture and not in all others. Examples of such

⁵¹ Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 4.

⁵² Dunant, *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, Foreword.

⁵³ This is also used by D’Souza in Pam Chamberlain, “The Right v. Higher Education: Change and Continuity,” *Radical Teacher* 77 (Winter 2006): 2.

⁵⁴ Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 23-24.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁶ Barbara Pasamonik, “The Paradoxes of Tolerance,” *The Social Studies* (September/October 2004): 207.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 207.

norms and approaches are individualism, liberalism, tolerance, the concept of human rights and others. These are not inherent to, for example, Eastern societies and cultures, in which values esteemed above all are “authority, hierarchy, subordination of individual rights and interests, and the superiority of the state over society and of society over an individual.”⁵⁸ The most challenging issue related to logic, then, is “moral tolerance for social behaviors that are contradictory to Western values. The real problem is the necessity of choice: We cannot at the same time be faithful to our values and tolerant of the others’ values that contradict ours.”⁵⁹ Critics of political correctness thus charge that there is a logical contradiction at the heart of political correctness.

2.2 PC as an Intolerant Ideological Crusade?

Activist manifestations of political correctness led a number of authors to the opinion that the concept is akin to other representations of religious or ideological zeal in American history. The critics of political correctness sometimes charge that political correctness could be likened to Cultural Marxism, Cultural Revolution, Stalinism, McCarthyism or a “witchhunt” – generally implying that PC can be regarded basically as a sort of a thought police and that the underlying message of PC is the idea that dissent will not be tolerated.⁶⁰

Even President George H. W. Bush weighed in the debate in his speech at the University of Michigan in May 1991 by likening political correctness to other crusades and “Orwellian” attempts at managing conversation. He stated that “although the movement arises from the laudable desire to sweep away the debris of racism and sexism and hatred, it replaces old prejudice with new ones. It declares certain topics off-limits, certain expressions off-limits, even certain gestures off-limits.”⁶¹

Let us consider the charge that political correctness is today’s version of McCarthyism. This view does not come only from conservative critics, it was also heard from a (then-) Marxist⁶² historian Eugene Genovese who concurred with such a view.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 208.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 209.

⁶⁰ Lea, *Political Correctness and Higher Education: British and American Perspectives*, 17.

⁶¹ George Bush, “Remarks at the University of Michigan Commencement Ceremony in Ann Arbor,” *George Bush Presidential Library and Museum*, May 4, 1991, Accessed July 2, 2013, http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2949&year=1991&month=5.

⁶² Genovese, later in his life, abandoned his original Marxist tenets. More in: Lee Harris, “Eric Hobsbawm, Eugene Genovese and the End of History,” *The American*, 5.10.2012, Accessed July 26,

He wrote: "As one who saw his professors fired during the McCarthy era, and who had to fight, as a pro-Communist Marxist, for his right to teach, I fear that our conservative colleagues are today facing a new McCarthyism in some ways more effective and vicious than the old."⁶³ The reason why political correctness is likened to McCarthyism are limitations imposed to the freedom of speech and expression and the idea that calling someone a *racist* or *sexist* today is akin to calling someone a *communist* in the McCarthy era. However, it needs to be acknowledged that this comparison might be regarded as a devaluation of the real meaning of the term McCarthyism: "Under the influence of McCarthyism in the 1950s, large numbers of academics were prevented by the government from teaching and received little or no support from the university administrators. There is no evidence that any academics today have been prevented from teaching or have been dismissed by the administration because of their perceived political views."⁶⁴

Interestingly enough, the same charge, i.e. the accusation of being McCarthyist can be – and often is, as we will see – used against the conservative critics of the “traditional” left-wing political correctness.⁶⁵

Other labels have been applied to political correctness. We can quote British author Doris Lessing, who says that "[p]olitical correctness is the natural continuum of the party line. What we are seeing once again is a self-appointed group of vigilantes imposing their views on others. It is a heritage of communism, but they don't seem to see this."⁶⁶ The same Lessing also referred to PC as to a “mental tyranny.”⁶⁷

However, here, we can refer once again to a report by the British think-tank Centre for Policy Studies, which says that “PC is not an ideology, based on a fixed, written and wide-ranging statement of beliefs in the same way as, say, Marxism. It is

2013, <http://www.american.com/archive/2012/october/eric-hobsbawm-eugene-genovese-and-the-end-of-history/>.

⁶³ Martin Seymour Lipset, “The Sources of Political Correctness on American Campuses,” In Dickman, Howard (ed.). *The Imperiled Academy* (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 1993), 86.

⁶⁴ John Annette, „The Culture War and the Politics of Higher Education in America,“ In: Sarah Dunant (ed.), *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, 4-5.

⁶⁵ Ziauddin Sardar, “A new McCarthy era dawns in America,” *New Statesman*, November 13, 2006, Accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.newstatesman.com/node/154781>, 28, or Leonard Minsky, “The Politics of Political Correctness,” *The Educational Record* 73 (Winter 1992): 19.

⁶⁶ Doris Lessing quoted in Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 62.

⁶⁷ Doris Lessing quoted in Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 13.

instead an underlying attitude, one that is very difficult to pin down and which moves in mysterious ways.”⁶⁸

2.3 “Victim’s Revolution”

Several fears are present in the debate about political correctness, one of them being what for example Dinesh D’Souza and other critics of PC refer to as “the victim’s revolution.”⁶⁹

When we look back again at the upheavals in the 1960s and 1970s, one of the things the movements of this period brought was a re-evaluation of the legacy of Western civilization; the way history had traditionally been presented was challenged. As the book description of Bruce Bawer’s *The Victim’s Revolution: The Rise of Identity Studies and the Closing of the Liberal Mind* puts it, “[t]he new generation of radical educators sought instead to unmask the West as the perpetrator of global injustice.”⁷⁰

When we present the issue without the emotionally charged terms as used in the description above, the important thing that happened was that other views of history gained more attention and issues such as colonialism or slaveholding were re-addressed, often from the viewpoint of those who were on the “other” side of the events. Social history gained more recognition, and a rise in the so-called identity politics followed. Various new departments were created at universities and new study programs were formed, for example Women’s Studies, African-American Studies, Queer Studies, Chicano Studies and other fields. Critics then claim that, ultimately, “[t]hese movements joined, in an informal way, to generate a common political mood of victimization, moral indignation, and a self-righteous hostility against the common enemy – the white male,”⁷¹ as the white male was up until then the main “character” presented in history classes, at the expense of other racial and sexual groups, who are now seen as having been the victims of oppression by the “white male”. In the view of PC’s critics, then,

⁶⁸ Roger Howard, “Through the Looking Glass. Political correctness, foreign policy and bad decisions,” *Center for Policy Studies*, 6.

⁶⁹ “Victim’s revolution on campus” is the title of the first chapter of D’Souza’s book *Illiberal Education* from the year 1991. There is also a book called *The Victim’s Revolution: The Rise of Identity Studies and the Closing of the Liberal Mind* written by Bruce Bawer in 2012.

⁷⁰ “The Victims’ Revolution: The Rise of Identity Studies and the Closing of the Liberal Mind,” (book description) *Harper Collins*, May 10, 2013, Accessed June 5, 2013. <http://www.harpercollins.com.au/books/Victims-Revolution-Bruce-Bawer/?isbn=9780061807374>.

⁷¹ Martin E. Spencer, “Multiculturalism, ‘Political Correctness,’ and the Politics of Identity,” *Sociological Forum* 4 (1994): 559.

political correctness produces a politics of moral drama, involving the oppressor and the oppressed.⁷² This includes such claims as that “[r]acism and sexism are pervasive in America and fundamentally present in all American institutions;”⁷³ critics are also concerned that some schools teach “white guilt.”^{74 75}

The critics of political correctness then go on to claim that while the reform movements in the 1960s and 1970s were mainly about refusing to be a victim, now being a victim – and therefore in need of a special treatment – is seen as an end in itself. The fear about the “victim culture” created by PC is “the effect it will have: that the cacophony of voices demanding attention will, far from achieving a richer cultural mix, only succeed in breaking apart any notion of a cultural whole.”⁷⁶

2.4 “Political Correctness Run Amok”? Hypersensitivity & The Chilling Effect

No one could probably say that the original intent of political correctness – i.e. the creation of a tolerant and inclusive society – is a bad thing. What is, however, a subject that attracts a lot of criticism, are the effects of political correctness.

The critics charge that political correctness has already reached pathological proportions; the effort “not to insult or offend anyone” which is seen as having reached a state in which even innocuous remarks can be branded as racist, sexist, homophobic etc. Critics claim that political correctness is manufacturing “offense over nonsense,”⁷⁷ thus creating a “hypersensitive” society. An example of this concern could be the so-called “Water buffalo incident,” in which a group of black women claimed they were insulted by being referred to as “water buffalo” perceived as a racial slur, which it was not.⁷⁸ This is also related to the concern that to label a comment as hurtful, it is enough

⁷² Ibid., p. 559.

⁷³ A report from Tulane University, quoted in: John Taylor, “Are You Politically Correct?” *The New York Magazine*, January 21, 1991.

⁷⁴ A feeling of collective guilt which is – or, perhaps, should be – felt by white people because of the fact that whites were oppressing other races in the past.

⁷⁵ Todd Starnes, “Public School Teaches “White Privilege” Class,” *Fox News Radio*, Accessed July 29, 2013, <http://radio.foxnews.com/toddstarnes/top-stories/public-school-teaches-white-privilege-class.html>

⁷⁶ Dunant, *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, xii.

⁷⁷ Sandy Hingston, “A History of Political Correctness: 20 Years After Penn’s ‘Water Buffalo’ Incident,” *Philadelphia Magazine*, May 2013, Accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.phillymag.com/articles/penns-water-buffalo-incident-20-years/>.

⁷⁸ This incident is discussed in part 3.2.3.a) of this work.

if it is perceived as such. Language then essentially loses any communicative function and words' meanings no longer matter.

A "Critique of Politically Correct Language" from *The Independent Review* goes even further and claims that calling the proponents of political correctness "hypersensitive" is actually too generous: "Observe that their attitude consists of an almost pathological touchiness to any remark that has even the most tenuous connection with an insult, a condition that is aggravated when the speaker is not a fellow traveler on the politically correct bandwagon. They make no effort to determine the speaker's intentions and even make an active effort to ignore them, so that they can justify their offense. Perpetual offense is their natural state, and touchiness is their weltanschauung."⁷⁹

This, then, has several consequences. One would be the fact that labeling someone as a racist, sexist, etc. because of comments or actions which were not meant to insult anyone can also be very hurtful and damaging. For example, a Harvard Professor Stephan Thernstrom was accused of being racially insensitive because the materials he was using for his course on race relations did not represent the voices of slaves. Thernstrom claimed that such materials were not available for teaching; the "case" was then taken up by the Committee on Race Relations and the Dean of the college issued a letter warning about racial harassment. "[A] charge of racism, however unsubstantiated, leaves a lasting impression. "It's like being called a Commie in the fifties," Thernstrom says. "Whatever explanation you offer, once accused, you're always suspect."⁸⁰

Therefore, because of fear of being accused of insensitivity, many people choose not to speak about sensitive issues at all. Political correctness is then viewed as the reason why public discourse is silenced and people resort to self-censorship. Diane Ravitch says that "George Orwell and Franz Kafka would have understood this system perfectly; it works best when it permeates one's consciousness and no longer needs to be explained or defended."⁸¹ This, then, can have negative consequences in that the "sensitive" issues, many of which would, arguably, need to be addressed, just become the "elephants in the room" that no one talks about. However, "[i]f we must constantly self-censor any conversation pertaining to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or

⁷⁹ Ben O'Neill, "A Critique of Politically Correct Language," *The Independent Review* 2 (Fall 2011): 284.

⁸⁰ John Taylor, "Are You Politically Correct?," 34.

⁸¹ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 158.

physical ability, then we are doomed to perpetuate the very barriers we say we want to overcome.”⁸²

As conflictual situations and issues are pushed away, commentators have been discussing the impact of such a tendency on society in general and on students in particular. As schools have in many cases embraced the “sensitivity rhetoric” and attitude, avoiding controversies and sanitizing study materials – as will be discussed in chapter 3 of this work – there is the fear that by, essentially, pretending problems and controversies do not exist, children are effectively taught to avoid dealing with reality.⁸³ Allan Bloom also discusses the tendency to push conflictual situations away and he states that “conflict is the evil we most want to avoid, among nations, among individuals and among ourselves”⁸⁴ as “conflict, the condition of creativity for Nietzsche, is for us a cry for therapy.”⁸⁵ Bloom then concludes by saying that “[h]uman nature must not be altered to have a problem-free world.”⁸⁶

These concerns are also related to the charge that political correctness effectively amounts to censorship and stands in contrast to America’s tradition of free speech enshrined in its Constitution. This is discussed for example in relation to various speech regulations some American universities have established, as will be shown in chapter 3 of this work. In relation to society at large, the fear is that some of the consequences of political correctness are effectively chipping away at people’s liberty as “you don’t achieve freedom by being frightened of what you can and can’t say.”⁸⁷

2.5 Counterclaim: PC = Notional Construct Fabricated by the Right

One of the ideas that are present in the debate on political correctness is the view that the entire “problem” of political correctness has only been manufactured by the right as part of its criticism of the left. In this line of reasoning, the bad image political correctness now has was created by the right by picking up various stories related, in

⁸² BJ Gallagher, “The Problem With Political Correctness,” Huffington Post, February 25, 2013, Accessed July 26, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bj-gallagher/the-problem-political-correctness_b_2746663.html.

⁸³ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 165.

⁸⁴ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 228.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 229

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 229

⁸⁷ Dunant, *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, xi-xii.

majority of cases, to fanatics and extremists and then blowing them out of proportion “just to make a point.”⁸⁸

Richard Gott, the literary editor of the *Guardian*, claims that “[PC is] a notional construct put together by the Right to create a non-existent monster on the Left that it can then attack. For although everyone knows the idiocies uttered in the name of PC, it is hard to find anyone who has actually heard them in person or even encountered them seriously in print (except in the darkest corners of the obscurest journals). The American Left has long been conspicuous by its absence.”⁸⁹ He is joined in this view by British Labor Party politician Clare Short: “Political correctness is a concept invented by hard-rightwing forces to defend their right to be racist, to treat women in a degrading way and to be truly vile about gay people. They invent these people who are Politically Correct, with a rigid, monstrous attitude to life so they can attack them. But we have all had to learn to modify our language. That’s all part of being a human being.”⁹⁰

Various – and often bizarre – incidents seen as stemming from the requirements of political correctness also often make news, thus contributing to the sensationalized image PC now has. As noted in the introduction, the whole phenomenon of political correctness seems to have a lot of influence – although this may truly be, at least in some cases, caused merely by the fact that the critics are very loud.

2.6 “The New PC”: Right-wing Political Correctness?

Offering a different view on the role and position of the right in the debate on political correctness is the claim that the “old” political correctness coming from liberal positions and seeking to enforce tolerance and social equality, has in fact now been replaced by a right-wing version of political correctness. This right-wing version is interested in suppressing challenges to the established order,⁹¹ i.e. quite the opposite of what the “old PC” was/is trying to achieve.

⁸⁸ Ibid., xii.

⁸⁹ Richard Gott quoted as reviewing Robert Hughes’ *Culture of Complaint*, in: Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, “The Great Backlash”, in Sarah Dunant, *The War of the Words*, 60.

⁹⁰ Clare Short, *Guardian*, February 18, 1995, quoted in Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 13.

⁹¹ Paul Krugman, “The New Political Correctness,” *The New York Times: The Opinion Pages*, May 26, 2012, Accessed July 15, 2013, <http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/26/the-new-political-correctness/>.

An event which is given as an example of right-wing political correctness is the ostracism of the music band Dixie Chicks. This is because they expressed their disapproval of George W. Bush's decision to start the Iraq War. In 2003, the lead singer said to a crowd: "Just so you know, we're on the good side with y'all. We do not want this war, this violence. And we're ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas."⁹² As a result, Dixie Chicks' music was banned from the radio, their CDs were destroyed by bulldozers and the members received death threats.

Right-wing political correctness also, like its liberal counterpart, is seen as attempting to push through changes in language, but in different topics. For example, "the wealthy" should be referred to as "job creators"; talking about inequality is "class warfare".⁹³

What is seen as right-wing political correctness is also concerned with trying to suppress any representation of the United States which "smacks" of anything negative. Such representation is essentially seen as the result of a left-wing conspiracy, deliberately focusing on the nation's faults, failures, victimology and histories of oppression.⁹⁴ This, however, is seen by the critics of this "right-wing PC" as reaching extreme proportions. For example: the decision of the University of California to teach courses on "Immigration and Ethnicity" and "Environmental History" was presented in a report by the National Association of Scholars as an example of "negativity" and an "opportunity for lament"⁹⁵. This and other similar statements led Erich Rauchway, a Professor of History at University of California in Davis, to conclude that the next course he would teach should perhaps be called "US History: The Awesomeness of Awesome Americans."⁹⁶

The conservative attempts to suppress various ideas and representations of reality will also be addressed in the next chapter of this work on the example of various efforts at banning books or influencing curricula.

⁹² LZ Granderson, "10 years later, Dixie Chicks right all along," *CNN*, March 6, 2013, Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/05/opinion/granderson-dixie-chicks>.

⁹³ Paul Krugman, "The New Political Correctness,"

⁹⁴ „A Crisis of Competence. The Corrupting Effect of Political Activism in the University of California," California Association of Scholars, A Division of the National Association of Scholars, April 2012, Accessed June 15, 2013, http://www.nas.org/images/documents/a_crisis_of_competence.pdf, 46.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹⁶ Eric Rauchway, "My New Course Will Be Titled 'US History: the Awesomeness of Awesome Americans'," *The Chronicle*, May 25, 2012, Accessed July 19, 2013, <http://chronicle.com/blognetwork/edgeofthewest/2012/05/25/my-new-course-will-be-titled-us-history-the-awesomeness-of-awesome-americans/>.

3. Special Focus: The Debate on Political Correctness in Relation to Education

3.1 Primary and Secondary Schools

Even though it was higher education institutions where political correctness started, the influence of the movement, or, rather, idea, is arguably felt also in elementary and secondary education. Here, it manifests itself mainly in the way standards, textbooks and tests are created and generally in what is chosen as suitable educational material.

Having said that, though, it might be useful to note already at the beginning, before reviewing the possible repercussions of “PC” in primary and secondary education today, that the efforts to influence political orientation and content of textbooks in America are not a new occurrence. Instances of such attempts include for example the efforts coming from the right to purge education of communist or socialist ideas. Another example could be the ongoing American debate of creationism versus evolutionism. Still another would refer to how textbook publishers were in the past reluctant to use photographs depicting racially integrated groups of people so as not to “lose” the Southern states and their market etc.

The concerns attributed to the movement of political correctness are of a somewhat different nature. In K-12 education, political correctness manifests itself mainly through concerns about possible bias, stereotyping and the portrayal of various sensitive issues in textbooks and classroom discussions in general.

As outlined in the introduction, this part will first briefly look at how PC influences the general state of textbook publishing in the United States; it will then look at the realm of literature and history and consider also how tests are prepared.

3.1.1 Textbook Publishing Industry

Because textbooks are the backbone of teaching and are believed to have a great influence on children’s minds, textbook publishing has become a contested field because, as the critics of the way textbooks are created and adopted point out, various pressure groups want to influence what should and should not appear in textbooks.

Interestingly enough, the pressures are not coming only from the left, but also from the right; the left is mainly concerned with issues such as inclusiveness, greater openness to groups that were discriminated against in the past and generally with the way people and groups are presented. The right is more concerned about conservative values, moral values, the depiction of the “traditional family” etc. To illustrate, it is possible to refer to the example of a textbook written by historian Gary B. Nash⁹⁷, well-known for his support for social history and multiculturalism who is generally perceived as a “man of the left”. His work, however, was criticized for example by various Indian tribes for misrepresenting their religions, Muslims attacked his work on the same grounds, Chinese Americans complained that Chinese people’s role was marginalized, gays wanted more gay public figures presented as positive role models and an anti-gay coalition claimed the book was anti-Christian.⁹⁸

If textbooks do not comply with some of these groups’ views, a controversy is very likely to ensue. And controversy is the very thing textbook publishing houses most want to avoid – that is because if their products draw or create controversy, they are not likely to be adopted for school curricula. And publishers, naturally, want to make sure their textbooks get chosen – after all, textbook publishing business is a business just like any other; textbook publishers therefore want to make sure they make money. The financial rewards in the textbook industry are significant as the textbook market in the U.S. is very large.

Therefore, in order to prevent controversies and thus ensure the textbooks are approved and bought by the states, publishers have adopted anti-bias and sensitivity guidelines that set the rules on how textbooks should be written so as not to be considered offensive. To illustrate briefly what such codes stipulate on the level of publishing companies, we can look at the example of the so-called *Multicultural Guidelines* developed by the publisher Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley in 1996. The guidelines contain a number of recommendations whose objective is to ensure unbiased and unsterotypical representation of various people and groups. The guidelines, among other things, fight against “ageism”, prohibiting the portrayal of older people in sedentary activities that would suggest that older people are infirm; rather, they are to be portrayed while “gardening, shopping, dancing, attending movies and cultural events,

⁹⁷ This historian will later be quoted also in the discussion about history standards.

⁹⁸ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 101

engaging in active sports...”⁹⁹. The part devoted to disability advises to use the “people first” language¹⁰⁰ and the section on gender requires that women be portrayed in equal numbers with men, the expressions where the word “man” makes an appearance should be replaced by other expressions, gender-specific pronouns should not be used. When representing various cultures, writers are advised to not refer to “primitive cultures” as there is no such thing as a primitive culture; no culture should be presented in a condescending light.¹⁰¹

Ravitch makes a reference to various other guidelines of other publishers, all of which essentially share the same line of thought. No one should be represented in stereotyped roles and settings, such as women should not be portrayed in aprons and men should not be represented doing what is stereotyped as male-dominated activities such as fixing roof; it should be women who fixes roof and men should be wearing aprons. Illustrations also need to be balanced as far as gender, race, age and other characteristics are concerned, various figures representing previously voiceless groups should be given more space. This includes for example the preference for historians studying black experience or for various artists with minority background etc.¹⁰²

The author of this thesis tried to look for similar guidelines that would be valid today. Such guidelines, if existent, are however almost impossible to find. Even Ravitch acknowledged the fact that when she was conducting research for her book, some publishers pretended no such guidelines existed. Leafing through Prentice Hall’s *Literature: Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes*¹⁰³, however, one can see that many of the abovementioned claims are represented – there are images of authors whose work is sampled, many of whom are of other races than white, there are images of men doing work traditionally associated with women such as cleaning rooms, there are many images of African-American and Asian people, people on wheelchairs and so on.

Pearson guidelines on how to write about several topics are accessible online¹⁰⁴, although the website does not make it clear if they are still in use. The guidelines –

⁹⁹ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 36.

¹⁰⁰ This is explained in part 1.5 of this thesis.

¹⁰¹ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 36 – 39.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 40 – 45.

¹⁰³ Kate Kinsella et. al., *Prentice Hall Literature: Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes*, Upper Sadle River: Persson Education, 2005, Accessed July 21, 2013, <http://archive.org/stream/prenticehalllite01kins#page/40/mode/2up>.

¹⁰⁴ Pearson Education, *Avoid Sexist (and Other Insensitive) Language*, Accessed June 10, 2013, http://wps.pearsoncustom.com/pls_1256647969_pwo/217/55693/14257494.cw/index.html.

aiming to make textbook writers “more sensitive to potentially offensive expression”¹⁰⁵ – give advice about how to avoid stereotyping and what language to use – textbook authors should work with the aforementioned “people first” language, avoid “man” in words etc. The websites of other publishers, however, did not offer any help in finding out whether the publishing houses had any such standards.

Getting back to the question of textbook publishing, critics charge that such measures as adopting these guidelines that limit the way writers may express themselves have the effect of textbooks being bland, uninteresting, and sometimes presenting facts in a distorted way. The critics also say that the process of textbook writing essentially amounts to censorship¹⁰⁶, because as the rules were codified, “editors, writers, and illustrators know well in advance what is not acceptable. No one speaks of ‘censoring or banning’ words or topics; they ‘avoid’ them. The effect is the same.”¹⁰⁷

The opposition to such a view works with the idea that sometimes it is also parents who pressure schools to drop books that have already been adopted and approved from classroom use. And this, or so the argument goes, is not censorship, but democracy. Besides, it is often school boards who decide about the adoption of textbooks – and the members of these boards are often elected in public elections. Their selection, just like their activities and decisions, is thus a reflexion of voters’ will.

Nevertheless, the textbook publishers are willing to create the kind of product that has a chance of being accepted, even if it means they have to take this kind of – in critics’ words – “saccharine approach”¹⁰⁸, to ensure that their products are adopted. As a matter of fact, it is not only publishers, but also states, test development companies and various scholarly and professional organizations that have their own sensitivity guidelines, as will be referenced later in the text with concrete examples.

The textbook publishing industry in America today is criticized for being too concentrated as it is dominated and controlled by several major publishing firms.¹⁰⁹ The “big three”, i.e. the three most important players in the field are Pearson, Prentice Hall and McGraw-Hill. These big publishers are successful because they have the resources to bid in the textbook adoption process as participation in the adoption process is very costly for publishers.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ As for example in: Tamin Ansary, “A Textbook Example of What's Wrong with Education,” *Edutopia*, October 11, 2004, Accessed July 30, 2013, <http://www.edutopia.org/muddle-machine?page=3>.

¹⁰⁷ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 158.

¹⁰⁸ James Tracy, “Racing through history,” *Journal of Education* 184 (2003): 67.

The “war” for textbook adoption is most intensively “waged” in Texas, California and Florida because the adoption market is the biggest here. The decisions made in the major textbook adoption states, and among them especially Texas, which spends more, influence also the choice of textbooks in other states; this is because the textbook adoption process is lengthy and expensive and it is therefore easier for smaller states to follow the decisions made in California or Texas as it saves their time and financial resources, rather than performing the process themselves. As a result, the books chosen in California and Texas then often have the capacity of imposing the “agenda” agreed upon in these two states and captured in textbooks, which the critics see as a major argument against the entire textbook adoption process.¹¹⁰ That, however, is already related to the broader question of how education system is organized in the United States, which is not the primary concern of this text.

3.1.2 Literature / English Language Arts

Here, the discussion touches upon several aspects aside from the textbook themselves; this text will look at (a) the way literature is taught in schools, i.e. what is comprised in the national and state English Language Arts standards and then also how textbooks are created, (b) the question of reviewing, sanitizing and/or outright banning of books that could potentially insult someone, focusing in more detail on the most famous case of Huckleberry Finn and also (c) what the English Language Arts tests look like.

3.1.2 a) Literature Teaching: Standards and Textbooks

English language standards draw a lot of attention from the side of the critics of political correctness. First and foremost, critics are worried that the way English language is being taught today according to the standards essentially bars students from building the necessary foundation of cultural knowledge for themselves which is inevitable for successful transfer of American cultural heritage and the elevation of

¹⁰⁹ Tamin Ansary, “A Textbook Example of What's Wrong with Education.”

¹¹⁰ Tamin Ansary, “A Textbook Example of What's Wrong with Education,” and Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 97-111.

young readers' tastes. In the words of Diane Ravitch: "In almost every state, the English language arts standards are about skills. What they are not about is literature, otherwise known as "content," which was once the heart and soul of the field called English."¹¹¹ Interestingly enough, the current discussion about the so-called Common Core standard touches upon the same topic of "disappearing literature". One of the newest directives requires that 70% of the reading material that students encounter are non-fiction "informational texts".¹¹² As a result, teachers "mourn" the "death of literature"¹¹³. Could the preference of teaching text understanding through "informational materials" rather than acquainting students with fiction literature be taken as an example of the fear of "objectionability" being firmly ingrained in the spinal cord of American society in general? This should be regarded more as a question for a discussion rather than an affirmation of a fact, as such a point could only very hardly be successfully proven.

In literature, as in a number of other fields, there is an effort to give space to groups that were not often heard in the past and thus present more perspectives. The "Bias and Sensitivity Review of the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics: Implementation Recommendations Report" created by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in the State of Washington in 2011, for example, advises educators to "[u]se a variety of culturally relevant texts to expand learners' exposure beyond the traditional "classics" typically taught in order to better understand, value and use the craft of authors from different backgrounds and cultures (cultural/ethnic/racial and socioeconomic considerations)."¹¹⁴ The major point is to break – or, to use a less violent word – to challenge or enrich the traditional Western canon¹¹⁵ by the voices of those who in the past had to accept the fact that stories were never presented from their viewpoint. Historian Lisa Jardine observes: "Instead of locating itself in the position of the dominant culture and consigning those who do not recognize themselves there to the position of passive spectators, it [political correctness]

¹¹¹ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 120.

¹¹² „Common Core Nonfiction Reading Standards Mark The End Of Literature, English Teachers Say,” *Huffington Post*, October 12, 2012, Accessed July 14, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/10/common-core-nonfiction-reading-standards_n_2271229.html.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Bias and Sensitivity Review of the Common Core State Standards in English Language and Mathematics: Implementation Recommendations Report*, Washington: Relevant Strategies, 2011, Accessed July 10, 2013, <http://www.k12.wa.us/CoreStandards/pubdocs/ImplementationRecommendationReport.pdf>.

operates inclusively and thickens the texture of the critical exchange by incorporating interactions and countermoves by those not accustomed to being listened to.”¹¹⁶

Thus, moving on from the standards to the textbooks themselves, what critics see as the main point of worry is what results when textbook publishers want to follow this kind of thinking and give space to the groups whose voices were previously unheard. The selections presented in the textbooks are then very large, into which reading samples are often included merely because of racial, ethnic etc. background of their authors rather than the literary quality or accomplishment of the works themselves. “The criteria of acceptance are not to be aesthetic (it is denied that there are such), nor are they even to be considerations of historical importance; the criteria of acceptance are to be political and ideological,”¹¹⁷ says Hugh Mercer Curtler, an emeritus professor of philosophy at Southwest Minnesota State University in his article in the *Modern Age* magazine. It should be noted, though, that this is a conservative magazine and Curtler probably does not seem to be starting from a neutral position. The language of his article elsewhere can also be described as rather tempestuous, when he claims that “the beast of political correctness” which is one of the “abominations of our day” now “threatens to devour much of what is greatest in our literature and forever separate the children of our culture from what is essential to their humanity.”¹¹⁸

Interestingly enough, looking at the “Standards for the English Language Arts” created by the National Council of Teachers of English, the document states that the “content standards [...] should not be an exhaustive, incoherent compendium of every group’s desired content.”¹¹⁹

Still, Ravitch claims that aside from the recognized writers, there are now other names that tend to appear in any literature textbook. The work of these writers is, however, not known to the general public; Ravitch mentions an example of Mexican American writer Sandra Cisneros whose work is nearly in every textbook selection, sometimes at the expense of various other writers such as Herman Melville, Ralph

¹¹⁵ „Western canon” refers to the books and other pieces of art that have been traditionally accepted as having the greatest influence in shaping the Western culture, which is the reason why these books and other pieces of art are taught in schools and seen as important.

¹¹⁶ Lisa Jardine, “Canon to the Left of Them, Canon to the Right of Them,” in: Dunant, *The War of the Words*, 106.

¹¹⁷ Hugh Mercer Curtler, “Political Correctness and the Attack on Great Literature,” *Modern Age* (Summer/Fall 2009): 279.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 272.

¹¹⁹ National Council of Teachers of English, *Standards for the English Language Arts*, Urbana: NCTE, 1996, Accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Books/Sample/StandardsDoc.pdf>.

Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne and others.¹²⁰ The author of this essay decided to check whether this statement still held and found Sandra Cisneros in the first textbook that she consulted (Prentice Hall Literature 8e Grade¹²¹ which was already referenced). Ravitch sums up that “today’s textbooks strain to obscure any sense of literary tradition; they pretend that there is no such tradition.”¹²²

3.1.2 b) Sanitization: Huckleberry Finn and English Language Arts Tests

As noted above, book censorship – or “review” – is of course under no circumstances a new occurrence. Nevertheless, this part will cover such instances of book sanitization which are related to the concept of political correctness. It will mainly work with the example of Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, but will also use the example of English Language Arts Tests.

Books that were banned in American schools in the past include for example the *Bible* as it contains stories of murder and incest, *The Catcher in the Rye* due to its profanity and inclusion of such subjects as prostitution, depression etc., *The Lord of the Flies* because of its portrayal of violence and so on.¹²³ Clearly, in these instances, the impetus to ban a particular book was coming from the right with the view of safeguarding moral values rather than ensuring tolerance, diversity and other goals of “PC”.

The reason why this work is focusing on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in particular is that it is one of the most often challenged and controversial books in American literature¹²⁴ and the current debate about it is very closely related to what political correctness stands for. Also, it is a book written mainly for children, therefore its inclusion in high school curricula seems like a logical step. Equally important, its literary quality has long been celebrated – Ernest Hemingway said that “[a]ll modern American Literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry

¹²⁰ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 128.

¹²¹ Kate Kinsella et. al., *Prentice Hall Literature: Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes*.

¹²² Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 127.

¹²³ „Banned and/or Challenged Books from the Radcliffe Publishing Course Top 100 Novels of the 20th Century,” *American Library Association*, 2013, Accessed July 15, 2013, <http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=bbwlinks&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=136590>.

¹²⁴ According to “Banned in the USA”, it is the second most often banned - right after Harry Potter.

Finn...There was nothing before. There has been nothing good since.”¹²⁵ It does, however, look like even this particular book itself “is not here” anymore – or at least does not make a frequent appearance in American classrooms. This thesis will look at the polemic about Huckleberry Finn in more detail.

The main reason why Huckleberry Finn is criticized today is the view that the book is racist due to its frequent use of the word “nigger”. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, it was subject to criticism on different grounds, mainly the fact that its language was deemed vulgar and inappropriate for young readers.¹²⁶ Huck’s lack of respect for authority played a role, too, as the book did not sufficiently offer the educational value that books were expected to offer first and foremost.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) criticized the book too, but not, at first, because of the “n-word”. The NAACP was first, in the fifties, concerned about the way Jim, the runaway slave, was portrayed – the Association did not like that he was presented as an equal to a child even though he was an adult.¹²⁷ Because of these strands of criticism, the novel was banned for the first time in 1957 by the New York City Board of Education.¹²⁸

The discussion about Twain’s use of the word “nigger”, which appears in the novel more than 200 times, started in the 1970s. Past attempts to sanitize Twain’s novel include replacing the controversial “n-word” by “servant” or “slave” or cutting out the contested passages completely.¹²⁹

One of the arguments that are put forward in support of the continuing use of Huckleberry Finn in American classrooms – in its original version, i.e. with the word “nigger” in it – is that Twain used this particular word in order to capture the vernacular language of 19th century in the Mississippi River area, just like the social attitudes of the time and place. In the words of a noted American literary critic Lionel Trilling:

¹²⁵ From: David L. Ulin, “Celebrating the genius of 'Huckleberry Finn',” *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 2010, Accessed July 12, 2013,

<http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/14/entertainment/la-ca-mark-twain-20101114>

¹²⁶ Rebecca Morgan in her thesis „Censorship in American Public Schools; Two Examples: The Catcher in the Rye and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” (*University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Department of Education*, Chattanooga, 2002) shows that objections were raised against the book because Huck „sweated“ instead of „perspired“ and he „scratched“ rather than „itched“.

¹²⁷ Rebecca Morgan, “Censorship in American Public Schools; Two Examples: The Catcher in the Rye and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,” 24-25.

¹²⁸ Phillip Rawls, “Huck Finn: Controversy over removing the ‘N word’ from Mark Twain novel,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 5, 2011, Accessed July 15, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Books/Latest-News-Wires/2011/0105/Huck-Finn-Controversy-over-removing-the-N-word-from-Mark-Twain-novel>.

“This is the only word for a Negro that a boy like Huck would know in his place and time – that is, an ignorant boy in the South before the Civil War. ... The fact that offensive words were once freely used ought not to be suppressed. For it is a fact that forms part of our national history, and a national history is not made up of pleasant and creditable things only ... it is something to be confronted and dealt with, not evaded or forgotten.”¹³⁰

However, this argument is not persuasive enough for Allen Carey-Webb, an Associate Professor of English Education and Postcolonial Studies at Western Michigan University, who says in his 1993 article “Racism and ‘Huckleberry Finn’: Censorship, Dialogue, and Change” that “[t]eachers make a mistake when they excuse Twain’s use of the term on the grounds that it was accepted in his time.”¹³¹ Carey-Webb goes on to quote professor David E. Smith as saying that “[e]ven when Twain was writing his book, ‘nigger’ was universally recognized as an insulting, demeaning word.”¹³² The main conclusion of Carey-Webb’s text is, then, the view that Huckleberry Finn might be making black students uncomfortable and is therefore better avoided which is a tendency typical for PC.

Carey-Webb’s text closes with a quotation from Julius Lester, a children’s book author and university professor, in which he essentially suggests a reconceptualization of what is or should be viewed as a classic: “The fact that the novel is regarded as a classic tells us much about the psyche of the white American male, because the novel is a powerful evocation of puer, the eternal boy for whom growth, maturity, and responsibility are enemies.”¹³³ Plus, the text also suggests that there are other problems with Huckleberry Finn due to which its use in classrooms should be reconsidered, like the treatment of women and its influence on Women’s Studies for example. Again, critics of this view could charge that women truly were in general treated differently in the 19th century than they are today. The question is then whether such facts should be presented to schoolchildren or whether it is better to withhold it from them.

If one accepts the view that Huckleberry Finn still has a place in American classrooms of our days, but nevertheless sees the “n-word” as too much of a problem,

¹²⁹ Morgan, Rebecca. “Censorship in American Public Schools; Two Examples: The Catcher in the Rye and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,” 26.

¹³⁰ Lionel Trilling quoted in Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 152.

¹³¹ Allen Carey-Webb, “Racism and ‘Huckleberry Finn’: Censorship, Dialogue, and Change,” *The English Journal* (November 1993): 31.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 33.

there is also another way of approaching the novel. It is the removal and replacement of the contested term which is what one of the most recent attempts to make *Huckleberry Finn* fit for “the new classroom” is doing.

In 2011, a new sanitized version of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was published by NewSouth Books. Editor Alan Gribben, a professor of English at the Auburn University at Montgomery in Alabama and an acclaimed Twain scholar, decided to replace the controversial “n-word” with “slave”. He explains his motives as follows: “For nearly forty years I have led college classes, bookstore forums, and library reading groups in detailed discussions of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn in California, Texas, New York, and Alabama, and I always recoiled from uttering the racial slurs spoken by numerous characters, including Tom and Huck. I invariably substituted the word “slave” for Twain’s ubiquitous n-word whenever I read any passages aloud. Students and audience members seemed to prefer this expedient, and I could detect a visible sense of relief each time, as though a nagging problem with the text had been addressed.”¹³⁴

Gribben’s main aim, in his own words, was to “introduce the book to a wider readership than it can currently enjoy.”¹³⁵ Similarly minded commentators say that even though the word “nigger” is removed, the cruelty and abjectness of the institution of slavery are still perfectly visible. One simple change would not destroy the entire book, and if it helps to bring *Huckleberry Finn* to readers who would otherwise not find their way to this novel, it is only commendable; or so the argumentation goes.

Interestingly enough, Gribben uses neither the word “nigger” nor “injun” – another word he changed in his double edition of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* – even in the introduction to his edition where he explains why he replaced “the two racial slurs” with other expressions. This leads critics to ask whether such an approach does not give these words “more power than [they] deserve by not saying it?”¹³⁶ Besides, looking in particular at the word “nigger” which is used copiously by rap artists and can therefore be heard often and from a number of sources, one could ask whether eliminating it from classrooms and effectively pretending that it does not exist would do

¹³⁴ Alan Gribben, “An Excerpt from the editor’s introduction to Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn: The NewSouth Edition*,” *NewSouth Books*, 2011, Accessed June 23, 2013, <http://www.newsouthbooks.com/twain/introduction-alan-gribben-mark-twain-tom-sawyer-huckleberry-finn-newsouth-books.html>.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ “‘Huckleberry Finn’ and the N-word debate,” *CBS News*, June 12, 2011, Accessed July 19, 2013, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18560_162-20066924.html?pageNum=2.

any service to the students and the book alike. At the same time, it might be useful to note that the word “nigger” is most often used by black rappers and in such a situation it is accepted, but is generally seen as insulting when used by whites, which might make its appearance in racially mixed classrooms difficult.

As for (possible) reasons for keeping Huckleberry Finn in the curricula, some have already been mentioned – for example its literary quality or the view that the use of the word “nigger” only captures the social reality of 19th century America. In the words of Norma Walrath, an English teacher from Connecticut: “To deny that some use the term 'nigger' and that slaves were treated cruelly is to deny history. We cannot romanticize the evils of the world.”¹³⁷

The debate about “bowdlerization”¹³⁸ concerns also samples from various books that are used in English Language Arts tests. A significant role in the debate was played, in 2002, by a parent named Jeanne Heifetz whose child had to participate in the Regents English exam¹³⁹. Heifetz noticed that in the exam several words were missing in an excerpt from a book she knew. She did not devote much attention to it at first, but when it kept recurring, she decided to look into the matter and examine more of the test questions. What she found surprised her; subsequently it made news through a New York Times story¹⁴⁰, and opened a discussion on how these tests are composed.

Heifetz found out that a number of works used in the tests were sanitized and various references to race, ethnicity, sex or alcohol were removed; also, words deemed objectionable were replaced. For example, in the work of the Jewish author Isaac Bashevis Singer which was used in the tests, the “reference to “Most Jewish women” becomes “Most women” on the Regents, and “even the Polish schools were closed” becomes “even the schools were closed”.”¹⁴¹ Removing objectionable words, in a passage from Ernesto Galarza, “a “gringo lady” becomes an “American lady.” A boy

¹³⁷ From „Rationales for Commonly Challenged Taught Books” as quoted in Morgan, Rebecca. “Censorship in American Public Schools; Two Examples: The Catcher in the Rye and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,” 31.

¹³⁸ Dr. Thomas Bowdler and his sister Henrietta Maria Bowdler the verb “to bowdlerize” was formed from their surname to refer to sanitization of books. In early 19th century, the Bowlders published for example *Family Shakespeare*, a sanitized version of Shakespeare’s works.

¹³⁹ This is a statewide standardized examination in the state of New York. It is required for the so-called Regents Diploma.

¹⁴⁰ N.R. Kleinfeld, “The Elderly Man and the Sea? Test Sanitizes Literary Texts,” *The New York Times*, June 2, 2002, Accessed May 25, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/02/nyregion/the-elderly-man-and-the-sea-test-sanitizes-literary-texts.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

described as "skinny" became "thin," while another boy who was "fat" became "heavy," thus using adjectives the state deemed less insulting."¹⁴²

The tests were prepared by the State Education Department, which said the excerpts were modified in order to make sure that they are "suitable for testing situations" and comply with the department's sensitivity review guidelines. Such review was used because the Department "did not want any student to feel ill at ease while taking the test."¹⁴³

Interestingly enough, the tests did not use ellipses indicating that changes have taken place – only once, Heifetz found, did the test acknowledge that a reading passage was altered. After receiving a complaint from an author whose work was modified for the test, however, the Department agreed to mark any changes in future exams. Apparently, however, authors were not notified that alterations to their texts were planned; Heifetz contacted the authors and publishers to inform them about the results of her research and found out that none of them approved of the changes – as a matter of fact, they were not even notified that their work was going to be used.

The practice led to an outcry not only from authors or publishers. Cathy Popkin, a humanities professor at Columbia, called the practice "censorship" and said that "[i]t is dishonest. It is dangerous. It is an embarrassment. It is the practice of fools."¹⁴⁴

3.1.3 History

The discussion on history and historiography is, again, not a new one and the fights about how to present the past have been going on for a long time. What will be used in this part of this text to present the discussion about teaching history in relation to political correctness will, again, as in the part on literature, start with looking at the standards, then move on to the question of history textbooks and conclude by looking at the present debate and its main focus.

To introduce the PC-related debate on history standards, it might be interesting to start with looking at the discussion that was going on in the middle of the 1990s about the National History Standards, which was a document formulated by the the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA, released in 1994.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

This document was harshly criticized by a number of commentators from both sides of the political spectrum. One of the most controversial points was found in the first part of the standards called “Three Worlds Meet” which aimed to compare American, Western European and African civilizations and their interaction in the 16th and 17th centuries. What caused a lot of controversy was the fact that this part, among other things, wanted American students to “analyze the achievements and grandeur of Mansa Musa's court, and the social customs and wealth of the kingdom of Mali.”¹⁴⁵ The point of the entire part was to present the beginnings of American civilization as the blending of the three aforementioned civilizations, going, therefore, against the usual interpretation which traced American origins to the European experience. With the National Standards, a new view was being introduced – a view which extends more to the south from Europe. In general, the Standards worked with the multiculturalist view and chose to present American historical developments through the so-called social history.

The controversy caused by the way the Standards were treating history essentially sparked a culture war and was so intense that it later led to the Standards being revised; the references to Mali, seen as an example of extravagant multiculturalism, for example, were altogether removed. Nevertheless, the debate that was sparked by the Standards is very interesting to look at, as it reveals quite a lot about the concept of PC and the debate about this concept.

The critics – including, for example, the then-chairperson of the National Endowment for the Humanities Lynne Cheney – charged that the Standards were a “politically correct” version of American past which put too much emphasis on multiculturalism but did not give enough space to the nation’s heroes.¹⁴⁶ Generally, critics were worried that the multiculturalist approach that the Standards were taking would, through the multiple perspectives that it relies on, cause the loss of coherence. When many different groups are to be represented, what results, in the view of the critics, is fragmentation and superficiality, which is an argument that appears also in the discussion about the state of history textbooks: “[I]n order to meet demands for scope, diversity and readability, world history textbooks abandon narrative and complexity . . . Western antiquity, Judaism and Christianity, and the rise of modern democratic

¹⁴⁵ Lynne Cheney, "The End of History," *Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 1994, Accessed July 15, 2013, <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mlassite/discussions261/cheney.html>.

government, reviewers complain, are lost in a procession of trivia designed to satisfy competing demands for inclusion, diversity and multiple perspectives. What should be central topics and themes are compressed to make room for new topical material, some of it ideologically loaded."¹⁴⁷ This, however, is probably best taken with a grain of salt because the report itself from which the quotation comes might be regarded as “ideologically loaded”, too. Elsewhere, the author, a controversial Florida Atlantic University professor, says: “They [publishers] know from decades of experience that these groups [Native Americans, blacks, Hispanics, feminists, Christians, Jews, and Islamists] are zealous and quick to use history content to advance itself politically and culturally.”¹⁴⁸

Nevertheless, getting back to the question of the National Standards, American historian Gary Nash wrote in support of them, trying to address the concerns about the lack of coherence voiced above:

“[I]t needs to be remembered that the old coherence and the old overarching themes were those derived from studying mostly the experiences of much less than the whole of the American people and from grounding the megahistorical constructs nearly exclusively in the Western experience. The contribution of social history is to show that the overarching themes and grand syntheses promulgated by past historians will not hold up when we broaden our perspectives to include the history of all the people who constituted American society. If the rise of women's history or African American history or labor history has created a crisis, we must ask "whose crisis"! The crisis, in fact, is in the minds of those whose monopolistic hold on the property of history has been shattered.”¹⁴⁹

Those who therefore put forward the views and interpretations seen as “PC” see themselves merely as revisionist historians, who want to open the debate on history and look at both sides of historical controversies. This should be going against what they see as the version of history monopolized by the “elites” who formed the historical narrative

¹⁴⁶ Linda Symcox, *Whose History?: The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), 10.

¹⁴⁷ James Tracy, “Racing through history,” *Journal of Education* 184 (2003): 65.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁴⁹ Gary B. Nash, “Reflecions on the National History Standards,” *National Forum* 3 (1977).

in the past. “Official”, agreed-upon history, Gary Nash also notes, is after all to be found only in totalitarian regimes, which America is not.

To conclude the National Standards debate, Nash also notes that what should be taken into consideration also is the fact that the discussion about the Standards was unfolding in and around 1994 which was the year of a number of Republican victories, making the discussion perhaps a little more polarized and heated than could otherwise be expected. Equally important, he emphasizes the cutting edge scholarship the Standards relied on; Ravitch also claims that the Standards “promoted rigorous history.”¹⁵⁰

Nevertheless, moving on from the year 1994 into the 21st century, what commentators now see as a problem is the fact that because many textbooks want to show equal respect to all cultures, they as a result do not criticize anything, even the things which should be identified as wrong, in Ravitch’s view, such as the Islamic law of Sharia.¹⁵¹ Glossing over and distorting facts are therefore issues of major concern.

The conservative Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an educational policy think tank, found in its 2011 study of the state of history standards that most states’ standards are “mediocre-to-awful.”¹⁵² In its report, it criticizes “the miasma of social studies”, which it calls an “anti-historical “field””¹⁵³ and expresses the concern that “social studies practitioners often openly reject the notion of core curricular substance in history,”¹⁵⁴ thus supporting the view that the themes that should be central in history teaching are getting diluted in various different narratives.

It might, however, be useful to note here again that the pressures dealing with “suitable” textbook content are coming not only from the left, but also from the right side of the political spectrum. This point is well illustrated by a Texas textbook controversy from just three years ago which dealt with the issue that “the curriculum plays down the role of Thomas Jefferson among the founding fathers, questions the separation of church and state, and claims that the U.S. government was infiltrated by

¹⁵⁰ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 137.

¹⁵¹ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 146.

¹⁵² Sheldon M. Stern, Jeremy A. Stern, *The State of State U.S. History Standards 2011 (Executive Summary)*, Dayton: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2011. Accessed June 20, 2013. http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2011/20110216_SOSHS/SOSS_USHistory_ExecutiveSummary.pdf

¹⁵³ Sheldon M. Stern, Jeremy A. Stern, “The State of State U.S. History Standards 2011,” *Thomas B. Fordham Institute*, Dayton: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2011, Accessed June 20, 2013, http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2011/20110216_SOSHS/SOSS_USHistory_ExecutiveSummary.pdf, 11.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

Communists during the Cold War.”¹⁵⁵ This could be regarded as an example supporting the claim referenced in the previous chapter that a “new version” of PC is now “operating” in America and the possible distortions it causes are just as disquieting as some of the criticized examples of the “original version” of political correctness.

3.1.4 Testing

Seeing from the *New Your Times* story about the findings of Jeanne Heifetz, it is not only textbooks where the contested field lies, but also the sphere of testing; and that includes not only English Language arts test, but any subject.

As referenced already with the textbook publishers’ guidelines, the testing companies tried to eliminate any possibility of “objectionable material”; as an interesting example, we might mention the National Evaluation Systems guidelines from 1991, because they straightforwardly stated that their goal is to portray an “ideal toward which society is striving.”¹⁵⁶ Indeed, if we refer back to the goals of multiculturalism discussed in the first chapter of this text, they also state that its goals are in fact “ideals that teachers and administrators should constantly strive to achieve”¹⁵⁷. In critics’ view, then, this creates a distorted and unrealistic picture of a society which does not exist, and „[t]he result of all this relentless purging is dishonesty, a purposeful shielding of children from anything challenging, controversial, or just plain interesting.“¹⁵⁸ This finding again refers back to what was discussed in part 1.5 of this work dedicated to the “politically correct language”.

The author of this thesis tried to verify the current situation in the field of tests, because, as pointed out already earlier, *The Language Police* is a decade old now and public discourse has been changing and developing since then. Interestingly enough, a document entitled “Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Bias and Sensitivity Review” put together by the Educational Testing Service states that “[a]n overly zealous interpretation of the Guidelines can be as harmful as an overly lax interpretation”¹⁵⁹ and

¹⁵⁵ Michael Birnbaum, “Historians speak out against proposed Texas textbook changes,” *The Washington Post*, March 18, 2010, Accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/17/AR2010031700560.html>.

¹⁵⁶ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 58.

¹⁵⁷ James A. Banks, “Multicultural Education: Goals and Dimensions.”

¹⁵⁸ Ravitch, *The Language Police*, 30.

¹⁵⁹ Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines*, April 16, 2012, Accessed June 30, 2013.

it even refers to Ravitch specifically: “Critics have responded very negatively to what they consider the excesses of some bias and sensitivity reviews. For example, with respect to what she considered rampant over-generalizations of bias and sensitivity guidelines, Diane Ravitch (2003, p. 4) wrote, “What began with admirable intentions has evolved into an increasingly broad and increasingly bizarre policy of censorship that has gone far beyond its original scope.”¹⁶⁰

From such an introduction, it seems that these guidelines make a conscious effort to not go too far, realize that any topic could be objectionable and also say that their recommendations ought not to be overextended because that unnecessarily limits the content of tests.¹⁶¹

Looking at the rules themselves, however, makes one realize that no extreme overextension is needed in a number of instances to make the recommendations look rather far-fetched. For example, topics that should be avoided include “pregnancy of human beings”, “deportation of immigrants”, also references to birthdays should be limited, because “[n]ot all test takers celebrate birthdays,” the portrayal of dance is also to be limited: “Allow all forms of dance except couples social dancing, which is the type most likely to draw criticism from some groups.” The guidelines also say how tests in mathematics need to be constructed while remembering the need to be sensitive, which, again, respects the logic of PC: „Avoid depicting expenditures that most people would consider excessive. For example, in a math item, do not have a man purchase three suits at \$1500 per suit.“

Images, as usual, should depict diversity, stereotypes are to be avoided and the “people first” language is also recommended. However: “Historical or literary material important for the measurement of the Common Core State Standards is acceptable even if it uses outmoded terms and nonparallel language for women and men.”¹⁶²

To illustrate the points and recommendations, the guidelines contain also a part dedicated to explaining why certain test questions are or are not suitable and acceptable. This question, for example, is unacceptable: “The ancient Romans played handball and engaged in other sports while nude in the public baths.“ The reason why it is unacceptable is this: “Though unintended, “engaged in other sports while nude” could

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/TaskItemSpecifications/Guidelines/BiasandSensitivity/BiasandSensitivityGuidelines.pdf>, 7.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 7.

be taken as sexual innuendo.”¹⁶³ As a result, students should probably never learn about the fact that Romans engaged in sports while nude.

Another interesting example is a mathematics test question about a “Sarah” who tidies up her bedroom in 30 minutes. “She cleans her bedroom once a week. How many hours would Sarah spend cleaning her bedroom in one year?” This question would be acceptable if it was “combined with questions showing women doing nontraditional work”, otherwise, if there were other questions with females “doing what was traditionally considered “woman’s work,” [...] the test would reinforce a stereotype and be unfair.”¹⁶⁴

Judging from these examples, the “Smarter Balanced” guidelines seem to confirm what critics fear – rather than truly providing for “smarter” and “balanced” test questions, the guidelines go quite far in their anti-bias efforts, veering dangerously to the possibility of being too restrictive and shielding information from students.

3.2 Universities

The debate on political correctness is closely related to American campuses not only because it started there in the 1980s, but also because American universities are seen as the place where political correctness has first “tried its hand” – and is still trying it – with the view of bringing about the social change it strives for.

The important thing to emphasize is the role of education’s conservative critics. Political correctness essentially became part of the broader conservative critique of higher education – mainly the realm of humanities – which the conservatives think is in crisis; after all, the debate on political correctness in the milieu of American universities is sometimes referred to as “campus culture wars.”

Conservatives – and not only them – are very much concerned about what is going on the nation’s campuses and what students are taught because this may have serious consequences not only for the students’ future lives, but also for the country as a whole. Universities, however, are seen as a “social laboratory”, the “birthplace and testing ground for [an] enterprise in social transformation”¹⁶⁵ and the revolution from

¹⁶² Ibid., 18.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 26.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶⁵ D’Souza, *Illiberal Education*, 13.

the 1960s which never became successful in society is believed to have “taken hold in our colleges and universities.”¹⁶⁶ In the view of the critics, political correctness is a sort of an unofficial ideology of the university, and they fear that this might not bode well for the future of the American nation.

This is also important because American universities are highly regarded and play a big role in society. While they are “advertised” as havens of free thinking, intellectualism etc., critics say they are in fact being decomposed from inside, chipping away at students’ freedom of speech and conscience. The debate is then related also to the question of the broader meaning, mission and goal of universities.

In order to pinpoint the main areas that the critics of political correctness in higher education were – and still are – discussing, we might refer to a 1991 Chicago Tribune article writing about a “warning” on political correctness from Lynne Cheney, the former chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities who has made an appearance also in the previously discussed National History Standards controversy. The Chicago Tribune article said that “[t]he term “political correctness” is used – especially by conservatives – to refer to a liberal orthodoxy that includes support for affirmative action programs, outlawing of hate speech and downplaying European and male influence on Western civilization.”¹⁶⁷

Therefore, in order to address the main points, this part of this thesis will open by briefly examining the relation between political correctness and affirmative action and the main points of criticism of these policies. The next section will focus on the so-called “liberal orthodoxy”. After that, curricula, where the “downplaying of European and male influence on Western civilization” allegedly happens, will be examined, with campus life being the last area reviewed.

3.2.1 Political Correctness and University Admissions: The Criticism of Affirmative Action

As noted above in the description of Lynne Cheney’s concerns, support for affirmative action came to be viewed as part of political correctness on American

166 David Yamane, *Student Movement for Multiculturalism: Challenging the Curricular Color Line in Higher Education* (The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 136.

167 Michael Kilian, “Warning on Political Correctness,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 31, 1991, Accessed July 23, 2013, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-07-31/news/9103240473_1_humanities-endowment-chairman-lynne-cheney-liberal

campuses as the goals of political correctness and affirmative action – ensuring equality of opportunities or, rather, results and promoting diversity – are essentially identical. Affirmative action does, of course, precede the birth of political correctness, but these two phenomena are nevertheless understood to be related.

The issue of affirmative action is very broad and does not manifest itself only on the level of university admissions; after all, its origins are connected more with the realm of employment and procurement of government contracts. This thesis is, however, not concerned with affirmative action primarily, therefore it will not review the history and development of this phenomenon in its entirety. What will be examined briefly is merely the connection of affirmative action in university admissions and political correctness with respect to the debate about university education and its problems.

Just as political correctness as a whole is – as a legacy of various 1960s movements for social justice – defined by its focus on marginalized *groups*, aiming to improve the representation of such groups in society – so is affirmative action. This is where one of the major criticisms of affirmative action steps in. While “rewarding” underrepresented *groups* – with the view of promoting diversity –, affirmative action is seen as institutionalizing double standards, disregarding individual rights and going against one of America’s dearest principles of reward based on individual merit rather than the sole – and unearned – membership in the “right” group. It might be useful to remind here that double standards are a problem in the debate on political correctness in general as well as it puts up a lot of effort to not insult members of disadvantaged groups, while white people are seen as not deserving of any such protection. White people can, however, quickly be labeled as racist if they touch the sensitivities of others.

In the debate on affirmative action, the question of double standards is seen as a great problem as the students who are given preferential points because of their race and are admitted to demanding universities even though their academic results would otherwise not be sufficient to qualify, are said to often be unable to cope with the study requirements at those universities.¹⁶⁸ We might refer here to Roger Kimball’s words, who said that “political correctness [...] encourages a kind of intellectual sentimentality that makes it difficult to acknowledge certain unpalatable realities – the reality, for

¹⁶⁸ This is discussed for example in Sander, Richard H. and Taylor, Stuart, *Mismatch: How Affirmative Action Hurts Students it’s Supposed to Help And Why Universities Won’t Admit It* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

example, that not all cultures, or indeed all individuals, are equal in terms of potential or accomplishment. ... The consequence [...] is a species of educational "romanticism" that may be motivated by good intentions but has disastrous results."¹⁶⁹

As noted above, the broader issue that the debate on political correctness is part of is the question of the meaning and mission of universities. In relation to affirmative action, this question is concerned primarily with the contrast between university serving the broader society or serving the individual. To explain: on the one hand, there is the idea, consistent with the view that American universities are a "testing ground for social change", i.e. the aim of PC, that universities should be interested in promoting diversity on their campuses in order to give minorities the chance to acquire higher education and then assume important roles in society. This is because the representation of minority groups and diversity is seen as a benefit for the society as a whole. On the other hand stands the idea that university education is a personal good, a benefit for each student individually, and universities should thus in their admission process focus solely on the abilities of individual applicants and award them their individually by granting them admission, without any broader considerations.¹⁷⁰

The debate on the meaning and mission of universities develops also in other respects, as we will see in the next sections of this work. Here, the debate is more concerned with the question of what contents universities should offer and what competences they should teach.

3.2.2 Political Orientation of Professors; Politicization.

One of the greatest problems of higher education in America in the eyes of its conservative critics is that majority of American professors are liberal. This fact is not really disputable – studies from the past couple of decades have been consistently proving this point.¹⁷¹ Where views differ, however, is the purported influence and repercussions of this situation.

¹⁶⁹ Kimball, "Introduction: What Was a Liberal Education," 6.

¹⁷⁰ This is discussed for example in: Sandel, Michael. *Justice. What is the Right Thing to Do?* New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2010.

¹⁷¹ For example in: Office of Institutional Research. „FACULTY TRENDS: HERI Survey Results, 1995-2004.“ *Montclair State University*. May 2006. Accessed July 29, 2013. <https://www.montclair.edu/media/montclair.edu/oit/institutionalresearch/surveyresearch/HERI-Trends-2004-05.pdf>, or Gary A. Tobin and Aryeh K. Weinberg, "A Profile in American College Faculty, Volume

The right often claims that there is support for all sorts of diversity on American campus, such as racial, sexual, ethnic, gender diversity etc. – in compliance with the requirements of political correctness –, but there does not seem to be enough place for the diversity of thought¹⁷². The critics of the composition of American universities dislike the fact that the universities do not reflect the real distribution of political views in society¹⁷³ to which liberals reply with a counter-question: Why stop at political orientation? How about religion for example? There are many Jews among faculty, even though they are but a minority in American society at large?¹⁷⁴ Besides, a number of national institutions like the Pentagon or the US Congress cannot be said to be representative of American society either.

Nevertheless, the real problem is that, in the critics' view, there is now a "liberal bias" in higher education and a "leftist, politically correct" environment¹⁷⁵ which does not want to allow such points of view that are not in step with PC. "The charge is that liberals, as the dominant political persuasion on campus, have created their own totalitarian fiefdoms, where dissent from orthodoxy is verboten, an accusation bolstered by the worst abuses of the tenure system, or political-correctness gone overboard."¹⁷⁶ For example, Lynne Cheney complained that "too many college faculty members today believe that liberal views are the only "correct" ones and that anyone who bucks the "liberal orthodoxy" is branded as racist or a sexist, among other things."¹⁷⁷

The "liberal orthodoxy" Cheney mentioned is a reference to the "agenda" of political correctness, as discussed in part 2.1.1 of this work. Indeed, the view of the conservative critics of American higher education – as summarized by Conservapedia – is that "[a]t American universities, liberals began imposing **political correctness** to

1: Political Beliefs and Behavior," *Institute for Jewish and Community Research*, 2006, Accessed July 24, 2013, http://www.jewishresearch.org/PDFs2/FacultySurvey_Web.pdf.

¹⁷² This argument is found in *Illiberal Education*, or also *The Politically Correct University*.

¹⁷³ Robert Maranto et al., *The Politically Correct University: Problems, Scope, and Reforms* (Washington: The AEI Press, 2009).

¹⁷⁴ Russel Jacoby, "The New PC: Crybaby Conservatives," *The Nation*, April 4, 2005, Accessed July 2, 2013, <http://www.thenation.com/article/new-pc#axzz2ZgVoMJrp>.

¹⁷⁵ Robert Maranto et al., *The Politically Correct University: Problems, Scope, and Reforms*, . 3.

¹⁷⁶ John Warner, "Liberal Brainwashing/Brainwashing Liberally," *Inside Higher Ed*, August 12, 2012, Accessed July 23, 2013, <http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/education-oronite-churm/liberal-brainwashing-brainwashing-liberally>.

¹⁷⁷ Diane Haithman, "Endowment Official Hits Campus 'McCarthyism'," *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 1991. Accessed July 20, 2013. http://articles.latimes.com/1991-11-13/local/me-1376_1_political-correctness.

prevent recognition of differences among gender, religion, belief system, sexual orientation and nationality (emphasis from the original).”¹⁷⁸

The critics’ view is then that there is some sort of left-wing conspiracy¹⁷⁹ among liberal faculty and practically each liberal professor wants to push through the agenda of political correctness and force students to adopt it. Cheney’s fear is that “too many” college faculty members were enforcing the “liberal orthodoxy”, without, however, offering concrete numbers, examples and proofs, which, as we will see, is often the way similar fears are presented. Nevertheless, the view that liberal professors politically indoctrinate their students – with the agenda of PC – is “an article of faith among conservative critics of American universities.”¹⁸⁰

Taking the discussion further, the main threat in the eyes of critics, then, is that „the lack of diversity in academia limits the questions we ask and the phenomena we study, retarding our pursuit of knowledge and our ability to serve society.“¹⁸¹ Allan Bloom also wrote that “[t]he questions are all there. They only need to be addressed continuously and seriously for liberal learning to exist; for it does not consist so much in answers as in the permanent dialogue.”¹⁸² Liberal faculty, however, are seen by the right as limiting the discussion by imposing their views on the students.

In general, therefore, the critics claim that education is politicized,¹⁸³ departures from the politically correct norms and views are not allowed¹⁸⁴ and disinterested scholarship is not possible. American students are not really educated, but indoctrinated, they are getting “an education in closed-mindedness and intolerance, which is to say, illiberal education.”¹⁸⁵ Conservative students therefore, critics say, feel isolated from the campus atmosphere¹⁸⁶ and are harassed.¹⁸⁷ This then shows quite an interesting argumentative twist when conservatives are presenting themselves as victims, which is

¹⁷⁸ Conservapedia, „Politically Correct,“ *Conservapedia*, June 11, 2013, Accessed July 26, 2013. http://conservapedia.com/Political_correctness.

¹⁷⁹ Paul Krugman, “The New Political Correctness.”

¹⁸⁰ Patricia Cohen, “Professors’ Liberalism Contagious? Maybe Not,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 2008, Accessed July 22, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/03/books/03infl.html?_r=0.

¹⁸¹ Robert Maranto et al., *The Politically Correct University: Problems, Scope, and Reforms*, 5.

¹⁸² Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 380.

¹⁸³ Kimball, “Introduction: What Was a Liberal Education,” 6.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Maranto et al., *The Politically Correct University: Problems, Scope, and Reforms*, 3.

¹⁸⁵ D’Souza, *Illiberal Education*, 229.

¹⁸⁶ Robert Maranto et al., *The Politically Correct University: Problems, Scope, and Reforms*, 3.

¹⁸⁷ Russel Jacoby, “The New PC: Crybaby Conservatives,” 13.

what they normally see as one of the greatest problems created by political correctness.¹⁸⁸

Getting back to the conservative critique, an important point in the debate and the main source of worry for these critics is that the conduct of liberals is essentially un-American, amounting to “ideologically motivated assaults on the intellectual and moral substance of our culture” representing “a concerted effort to attack the very foundations”¹⁸⁹ of the free American society. Quoting Roger Kimball, it might be interesting to refer back to the main assumption of his book *Tenured Radicals*, where he wrote about the “radicals” from 1960s assuming important roles in academic hierarchy in and around the 1980s: “(I)nstead of disrupting classes, they are teaching them; instead of attempting to destroy our educational institutions physically, they are subverting them from within.”¹⁹⁰

The response from the left, however, claims that the fact that professors are voting Democratic does not mean they are going to proselytize students¹⁹¹ and that there is “strong support for academic freedom and no evidence of political intolerance in the group [of liberal faculty].”¹⁹² Plus, according to a recent study, “[t]here is no evidence that an instructor’s views instigate political change among students.”¹⁹³

To look at the evidence brought by the critics of an alleged liberal bias in academia, we might want to consult for example a recent report presented by the National Association of Scholars. The report, entitled “A Crisis of Competence” dealt with “the corrupting effect of political activism in the University of California” and offered several students’ accounts of biased and one-sided conduct of their professors. These included stories about teachers who inserted their political views in classes unrelated to politics or presented ideas that the students found anti-capitalist and focused on the faults of the United States. It also included a student’s description of a

¹⁸⁸ The victim culture was already discussed in part 2.3 of this work.

¹⁸⁹ Kimball quoted in: Roger Rosenblatt, “The Universities under Attack,” *The New York Times*, April 22, 1990, Accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/22/books/the-universities-under-attack.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

¹⁹⁰ Carl Horowitz, “Taming Political Correctness: 1st Amendment Rights Coming Back On Campus,” *Investor’s Business Daily*, May 16, 1994, Accessed May 20, 2013, <http://jwhowardattorneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/InvestorsBusinessDaily.pdf>.

¹⁹¹ Russel Jacoby, “The New PC: Crybaby Conservatives,” 13.

¹⁹² Simmons Solon, “Ascriptive Justice: The Prevalence, Distribution, and Consequences of Political Correctness in the Academy,” abstract.

¹⁹³ Cohen, Patricia. “Professors’ Liberalism Contagious? Maybe Not.”

teacher who lectured that “the United States is nothing beyond a despicable and hypocritical country that continues to oppress minorities and the disadvantaged.”¹⁹⁴

Commentators, however, responded to this report by saying that other than presenting several self-selected anecdotes, there was no quantification of the scope of the purported problem and although the examples presented above are alarming, it does not prove the point that politicization in academia is as widespread and standard-debasing as the title of the report suggests.¹⁹⁵

To consult a more radical example, we might mention a book written by David Horowitz in 2006 called ‘*The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*’. David Horowitz is a conservative commentator and activist, and the founder of an organization called Students for Academic Freedom, whose aim is “to end the political abuse of the university and to restore integrity to the academic mission as a disinterested pursuit of knowledge.”¹⁹⁶ The book cover of “The Professors” claims that “Horowitz exposes 101 academics – representative of thousands of radicals who teach our young people – who also happen to be alleged ex-terrorists, racists, murderers, sexual deviants, anti-Semites, and Al-Qaeda supporters.”¹⁹⁷

Horowitz’s book received various reviews. Commentators from the left generally questioned his methodology, pointed out his dubious work with sources, frequent misrepresentations¹⁹⁸ and surprising choices¹⁹⁹ as the book profiled also such academics as Noam Chomsky or the noted historian Howard Zinn.²⁰⁰ Commentators have also asserted that Horowitz’s work is reminiscent of the activities of Senator Joseph McCarthy and his attacks on Communists.²⁰¹

To conclude the responses to the conservative critique of higher education, a report for *The Forum* states that “conservative reformers have work to do if they would

¹⁹⁴ „A Crisis of Competence. The Corrupting Effect of Political Activism in the University of California,” California Association of Scholars, A Division of the National Association of Scholars, 39.

¹⁹⁵ “Little evidence of UC ‘crisis,’” Los Angeles Times, April 7, 2012, Accessed July 25, 2013, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/apr/07/opinion/la-ed-uc-liberal-professors-20120407>.

¹⁹⁶ “About SAF,” *Students for Academic Freedom*, May 22, 2006, Accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org/about/>.

¹⁹⁷ The back cover of: Horowitz, David. *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*. Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2007.

¹⁹⁸ For example, one of the reviewed professors, Eric Foner, says: „Mr. Horowitz's 'chapter' on me is full of errors, beginning with the long quote with which he opens, which was written by someone else, not me.“ (In: Alec Magnet, “Nine Professors At Columbia Are Deemed ‘Dangerous,’” *The New York Sun*, February 21, 2006, Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://www.nysun.com/new-york/nine-professors-at-columbia-are-deemed-dangerous/27850/>.)

¹⁹⁹ Ziauddin Sardar, “A new McCarthy era dawns in America,” *New Statesman*, November 13, 2006, Accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.newstatesman.com/node/154781>, 28.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

raise this fact alone [i.e. the significant presence of liberal faculty] as the key piece of evidence that academic political correctness is a specter haunting America.”²⁰²

The “leftists” themselves, however, see the conservative critique as a dangerous force in that the right is essentially encouraging students to “report” on their professors. Examples of organizations focused on monitoring professors’ conduct include the aforementioned Students for Academic Freedom or the website Campus Watch²⁰³. As a result, the left is worried that the effect this might have on liberal professors is that the professors would become claustrophobic, unwilling to use any kind of controversial or unusual material in the classroom, which would make assignments blander.²⁰⁴ According to an article in *The Nation*, a leftist magazine, such virtual shift of control over courses to students marks “the emergence of the thought police on skateboards.”²⁰⁵ This comment points to an interesting turning point in the debate on political correctness referenced above already – the “new” right-wing political correctness²⁰⁶, whose “weapons” are to a considerable extent similar to what the right is usually criticising. For example: while the critics of the “traditional” political correctness coming from the left and its attempts at creating sensitive environment complain that even innocuous remarks can be branded as “racist”, “sexist” etc., which might have a negative influence on the utterer’s career and prospects, the right is not too dissimilar in this, using, as Horowitz’s work shows, terms such as “extremists”, “bigots” etc. to describe those who are not really extremists, but who just do not agree with conservative viewpoints.

3.2.2 Curricula

As discussed already in the section dedicated to K-12 education, the requirements of political correctness – and multiculturalism – and the way they shape the selection of study material and teaching methods are criticized mainly because they have diluted the traditional core curriculum “in the great works of Western civilization” in order to “make room for new course requirements stressing non-Western cultures,

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Simmons Solon, “Ascriptive Justice: The Prevalence, Distribution, and Consequences of Political Correctness in the Academy,” 1.

²⁰³ <http://www.campus-watch.org/>

²⁰⁴ Russel Jacoby, “The New PC: Crybaby Conservatives,” 15

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 16.

Afro-American studies and Women's studies."²⁰⁷ This is then seen as a subversion of "the tradition of high culture embodied in the classics of Western art and thought."²⁰⁸

The requirements of PC are seen as "stigmatizing established cultural norms and "the canon" as Eurocentric, outdated, elitist, and chauvinist."²⁰⁹ Instead of continuing in traditional teaching, PC is politicizing humanities by pushing through its own agenda of diversity, tolerance, openness and multiculturalism, in line with the victim's revolution.

The critics claim, however, that the idea that the curriculum should be "converted to any partisan purposes is a perversion of the ideal of the university. The objective of converting the curriculum into an instrument of social transformation (leftist, rightist, centrist, or whatever) is the very opposite of higher education."²¹⁰ Instead, universities should create conditions for disinterested scholarship with the aim of preserving and transmitting knowledge.

The changes in curricula that are trying to make space for other cultures and viewpoints than the traditional Western are sometimes seen to be essentially self-defeating for America, undermining democracy and decomposing and ignoring the common heritage that keeps society together. In the words of Allan Bloom, the fashionable support for openness in education "pays no attention to natural rights or the historical origins of our regime, which are now thought to have been essentially flawed and regressive. It is progressive and forward-looking. ... There is no enemy other than the man who is not open to everything. But when there are no shared goals or vision of the public good, is the social contract any longer possible?"²¹¹ Universities are thus "failing America" by not focusing enough on "American history, America's founding documents, and America's continuing struggle" as this is important to "extend and defend the principles on which it [America] was founded. [...] What is not taught will be forgotten, and what is forgotten cannot be defended."²¹² ²¹³ Interestingly enough, proponents of multicultural education in fact state that democracy – and putting

²⁰⁶ Paul Krugman, "The New Political Correctness."

²⁰⁷ D'Souza, *Illiberal Education*, 10.

²⁰⁸ Kimball quoted in Mathias Hildebrandt, *Multikulturalismus Und Political Correctness in Den USA* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005): 371.

²⁰⁹ Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 24.

²¹⁰ John Searle quoted in Kimball, "Introduction: What Was a Liberal Education, 4.

²¹¹ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 27.

²¹² Jerry L. Martin, Anne D. Neal, "Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It," *Defense of Civilization Fund and American Council of Trustees and Alumni*, February 2002, Accessed July 25, 2013, <http://firgoa.usc.es/drupal/files/defciv.pdf>, 8.

America's very own motto into practice – are at the heart of their efforts: “Multicultural education seeks to actualize the idea of *e pluribus unum*, i.e. to create a society that recognizes and respects the cultures of its diverse peoples united within a framework of democratic values that are shared by all.”²¹⁴

Nevertheless, the line of reasoning claiming that PC/multicultural education runs contrary to what America needs then effectively continues by saying that not only does the multicultural curriculum undermine democracy and America's position as such, but it is essentially anti-American in itself due to the fact that it makes a deliberate effort to highlight America's failures. Here, we might want to make a reference to the “focus on negatives” which was already discussed in this work on the example of courses on immigration and environmental history being seen as a presentation of negatives. The supporters of political correctness, however, usually respond that those things which are presented as “negatives” are not attempts to blacken the name of America, but representations of reality; besides, focusing on victories solely does not offer the complete picture. Also, by pretending there were no problems in American past and not discussing them, the nation effectively robs itself of the possibility to solve such problems.

Another moment which also attracts a lot of criticism are the various new departments created in and after the 1960s focusing on the study of previously marginalized groups, i.e. women, African-Americans, homosexuals etc. D'Souza claims these “studies”²¹⁵ departments are not even diverse: “What transpires in the “race and gender” curriculum is anything but “diverse”. [...] [T]ypically these programs promulgate rigid political views about civil rights, feminism, homosexual rights and other issues pressed by the activists who got these departments set up in the first place.”²¹⁶ D'Souza then goes on to assert that these programs exist so that the “affirmative action students” would have something to study as they in a number of cases have problems following the “white” curriculum.

As far as the response to these accusations goes, the left often claims that the conservative critique, through stressing the need to keep the traditional curriculum and

²¹³ It might be interesting to note here that this text comes from the year 2002 and reacts to the attacks of September 11, stressing the necessity to create a solid base of Americanness at a time when America is endangered by external forces and enemies.

²¹⁴ James A Banks, “Multicultural Education: Goals and Dimensions.”

²¹⁵ This is because the programs these departments offer are called “Women Studies”, “Gender Studies”, “Queer Studies” etc.

²¹⁶ D'Souza, *Illiberal Education*, 247.

Western canon intact, is merely redirecting attention from the historical reasons of changes in curricula. The 1960s truly brought the liberation of a number of previously silenced groups and their voices should be heard. Besides, Western Culture is by definition pluralist and should be therefore able and willing to give these voices space. The supporters of multiculturalism conclude that “multiculturalism has not destroyed the humanities, it has revitalized them, bringing new questions and new approaches to traditional books, as well as discovering works often overlooked in the past.”²¹⁷ At the same time, the supporters claim that the conservative fear that Western canon is undermined is not based on reality. According to a research performed by Montclair State University, in 1995-1996, i.e. nearly a decade after the beginning of the debate on political correctness, 58.9% of American faculty believed that “Western civilization and culture should be the foundation of the undergraduate curriculum”²¹⁸. It might be interesting to note here that the numbers then went down a little – in 2004-2005 it was 51.1%.²¹⁹

Getting back to the question of the “studies” departments, American sociologist and a New Left activist from the 1960s Todd Gitlin also admits that there are certain problems associated with these departments. In his words, “the left in recent years has had trouble going beyond what has come to be called “identity politics”—a politics that is rooted more in group self-assertion than in attempts to create broad alliances.”²²⁰ The left now views political correctness and the existence of the new department as an end in itself, resulting in unnecessary emphasis on difference and a loss of universalism with the only unifying force remaining the existence of a common enemy, the White Male. This is then interesting in the respect that it is now actually the right that is using the language of communality and unifying principles, emphasizing the importance of merit, reason and individual rights.

3.2.3 Campus Life

²¹⁷ John K. Wilson, *The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education*, United States of America: Duke University Press, 1995, 88.

²¹⁸ Office of Institutional Research, „FACULTY TRENDS: HERI Survey Results, 1995-2004,“ *Montclair State University*, May 2006. Accessed July 29, 2013. <https://www.montclair.edu/media/montclair.edu/oit/institutionalresearch/surveyresearch/HERI-Trends-2004-05.pdf>.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

The way campus life is organized and what considerations play a role in students' lives and activities is an issue which also draws a lot of criticism. Various rules and university policies which are seen as connected with the aims of political correctness are criticized as assaults on students' liberty.

As already outlined, this part will look at the example of campus speech codes and regulations; it will also consider sensitivity trainings and diversity coordination.

3.2.3 a) Speech Codes and Speech Regulations

The concern that political correctness constitutes an assault on free speech is in university environment most closely connected with the existence of the so-called speech codes that aim to regulate what speech on campus is acceptable and what kind of speech students should avoid. In the view of critics, this is unconstitutional in principle, because it interferes with students' First Amendment rights. Also, what plays a role in the debate is that at least public universities are required by law to protect students' rights to free speech, but it is not happening, critics claim.

Interestingly enough, the rationale for the creation of the codes was also concerned with freedom, albeit from a different direction. Such codes came into existence to create a welcoming climate – as is the aim of political correctness – in which members of previously marginalized groups could study *freely*, without being demeaned or silenced and thus “secondarily” marginalized.²²¹

The conflict then essentially plays out as a disagreement between those who want to uphold the traditional notion of academic freedom, connected with the importance of free speech, and those who would be willing to sacrifice some of it in the name of equity.²²²

Nevertheless, looking at the standing of speech codes, one might come across the view that the most extreme examples of very limiting codes have already been struck down in the 1980s and 1990s when the debate on political correctness was most intense. According to Greg Lukianoff, the president of FIRE – The Foundation of

²²⁰ Todd Gitlin, “The Left, Lost in the Politics of Identity,” *Harper's Magazine*, September 1993, Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://harpers.org/archive/1993/09/the-left-lost-in-the-politics-of-identity/>.

²²¹ Fred Wilson, “In Defence of Speech Codes,” *Interchange* 2 (1996): 125.

²²² *Ibid.*, 125.

Individual Rights in Education, however, there are now more speech codes now than there were in the eighties or nineties,²²³ albeit “hidden”²²⁴ in most cases.

These codes are not titled “speech codes” – they were generally not called like that even in the 1980s or 1990s – and they definitely do not feature the expression “political correctness” due to the negative charge of these terms, as already discussed. Various speech regulations are usually included in student handbooks under headings such as “sexual / racial etc. harassment policy”, “code of student conduct”, in internet usage policies etc.

In critics’ view, the regulations’ wording is often very vague and broad with the result that many utterances can be regarded as falling into the punishable speech category, even if it is constitutionally protected speech.²²⁵ The codes themselves, critics claim, are abused²²⁶, and contribute to the creation of an illiberal environment at campuses. To illustrate, we can use the database of the FIRE, which, to show an example of an overly broad code, refers for example to a regulation at Troy University. This University prohibits “any comments or conduct consisting of words or actions that are unwelcome or offensive to a person in relation to sex, race, age, religion, national origin, color, marital status, pregnancy, or disability or veteran's status.”²²⁷ Such a rule is believed to have the potential to lead to unnecessary criminalisation of speech that should be protected under the First Amendment.

To illustrate the codes’ application, we might want to refer to the aforementioned “Water Buffalo Incident”, an emblematic case of the debate on PC. The incident happened exactly two decades ago, in the year 1993, at the University of Pennsylvania.

A student, Eden Jacobowitz, working on a paper in his dorm late at night, heard several black women, sorority sisters, shouting and yelling below his window. As he could not concentrate on his work because of them, he shouted at them: “Shut up, you

²²³ Marty Klein, “Free Speech Aflame: The Humanist Interview with Greg Lukianoff,” *The Humanist*, May/June 2013, Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://thehumanist.org/may-june-2013/free-speech-aflame-the-humanist-interview-with-greg-lukianoff/>.

²²⁴ Greg Lukianoff, *Unlearning Liberty: Campus Censorship and the End of American Debate* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012), 2.2 (numbering: author).

²²⁵ “FIRE’s Speech Codes of the Month,” Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, 2013, Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://thefire.org/spotlight/scotm>.

²²⁶ Greg Lukianoff, *Unlearning Liberty: Campus Censorship and the End of American Debate*.

²²⁷ “FIRE’s Speech Codes of the Month,” Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, 2013, Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://thefire.org/spotlight/scotm>. At the web of Troy University itself: Troy University, *Troy University Policy on Harrassment and Discrimination*, Accessed July 26, 2013. http://www.troy.edu/forms/catalogs/1112undergrad/18U_appendices.html.

water buffalo!” The women perceived the comment as a racial epithet and claimed they felt hurt and harassed; Jacobowitz was then charged with racial harassment under the university’s Code of Conduct.

The University offered him to drop the charges if he admitted that he had insulted the women, which he declined to do.²²⁸ He maintained that the word was not a racial epithet but that his remark was based on the Hebrew word *behema*, which means “ox of water”. It comes from Hebrew slang and Jews – Jacobowitz is a Jew – use it for rowdy, unruly, loud people. Despite the fact that Jacobowitz presented various witnesses who confirmed this explanation, the University did not drop the charges at first, not even after the case was widely reported in the press. It did that only after the sorority sisters who initiated the prosecution asked the university to stop it as they felt they would not be likely to get a fair hearing because of all the media attention.

This incident shows what the critics are worried about – that speech which was not intended as hurtful could be, due to the broad wording of speech codes, interpreted as such, and then prosecuted. One problem is the “victim’s revolution” referenced above, when speech which is merely *perceived* as insulting is prosecuted. Another problem is the aforementioned lack of academic freedom and freedom of speech – universities are therefore teaching the idea “that debates are best conducted not by rational and civil exchange of ideas, but by accusation, intimidation, and official prosecution.”²²⁹ The criminalisation and labeling as “harassment” of a very wide scope of speech is also seen as a danger in that it essentially devalues the concept of harassment. The cases that truly require attention might then get lost in the breadth of the discussion about examples of “harassment” which is not really harassment.²³⁰

Therefore, to avoid insulting someone, students often choose to socialize and speak only with those they already agree and share views with, which causes groupthink, echo-chambers and polarization.²³¹ Students’ views are not challenged; the liberal university as the “marketplace of ideas” has failed.²³²

²²⁸ At this point, Jacobowitz decided to change his advisor in the case. The new advisor was Alan Charles Kors, a history professor who later wrote *The Shadow University* and founded The FIRE.

²²⁹ D’Souza, *Illiberal education*, 229.

²³⁰ Greg Lukianoff, “Clear campus rules needed on ‘harassment,’” *The Washington Post: Opinions*, January 5, 2012, Accessed July 15, 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-01-05/opinions/35441491_1_speech-codes-free-speech-college-campuses_

²³¹ Greg Lukianoff, *Unlearning Liberty: Campus Censorship and the End of American Debate*.

²³² This argument can be found for example in: D’Souza, *Illiberal Education*, Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* etc.

To give some space also to the defenders of possible speech regulations, Lukianoff claims that the defenders say that if the speech codes are only “on the books”, not really enforced, it does not matter. But that stands to argument, as he says, because such rules nevertheless have a “chilling effect” on the openness of debate on university grounds.²³³

To approach the question from a different perspective, we can refer to the view that the speech codes do indeed have a place in modern university because freedom of speech and expression should not be absolute anyway²³⁴. Jonah Goldberg, a columnist for *The National Review*, who, interestingly enough, is a conservative, says that he would also ban some speech – such as insulting professors for example. Regulations of student conduct have always been enacted after all, albeit perhaps in different forms, such as honor codes.

Goldberg continues by saying that the focus on free speech as a principle is not an effective approach to the question, because it is absurd to argue that universities do not have the right to regulate speech on their campuses. What he does find unacceptable is that the codes ban “inconvenient” speech – inconvenient from the viewpoint of the university administration – but still, he sees the realm of curricula as a more pressing problem that conservatives should be discussing rather than attacking speech codes in general.²³⁵

To move from theoretical discussion to the current situation at American campuses, we might look at an assessment of the standing of speech codes nationwide created by the aforementioned FIRE. The foundation rated universities’ codes and regulations and found out that 62.1% of reviewed institutions have “red light” rating. This means that such institutions have at least one policy which – according to the FIRE – substantially restricts freedom of speech. A map showing the “distribution of freedom” – or, rather, lack of freedom in FIRE’s view – follows:

²³³ Greg Lukianoff, *Unlearning Liberty: Campus Censorship and the End of American Debate*.

²³⁴ As argued for example in: Fish, Stanley. *There is no such thing as free speech – and it’s a good thing too*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

²³⁵ Jonah Goldberg, “In Defence of Campus Speech Codes,” *The National Review*, November 27, 2002. Accessed July 22, 2013. <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/57465/defense-campus-speech-codes/jonah-goldberg>.

PERCENTAGE OF RED LIGHT INSTITUTIONS OF TOTAL INSTITUTIONS RANKED

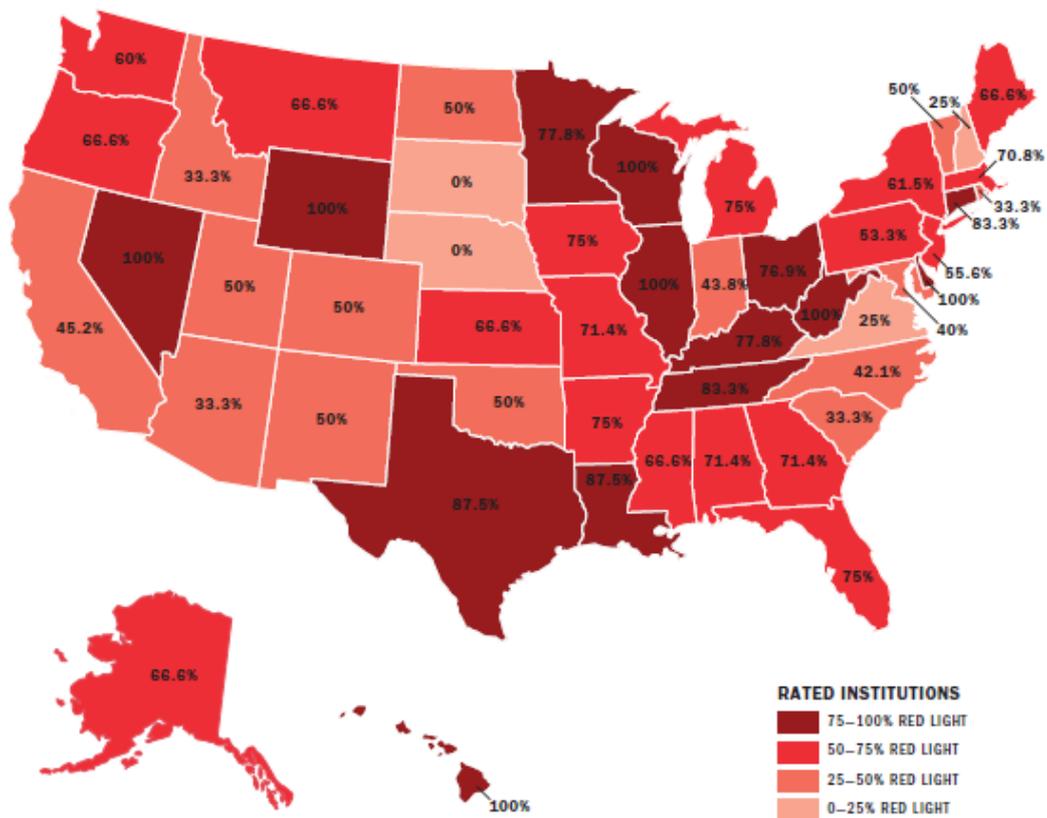


Figure 1: Percentage of „red light“ institutions according to the FIRE. Source: Spotlight on Speech Codes 2013. The State of Free Speech on Our Nation’s Campuses. *The FIRE*. Accessed June 10, 2013. http://thefire.org/public/pdfs/Spotlight_on_Speech_Codes_2013.pdf?direct

In order to find out what the real situation at American campus felt like, the author of this thesis contacted an acquaintance who teaches English at Arizona State University with the question of whether or not political correctness was influencing his work. He answered: “I try to be politically correct in my ENG 102 (First-Year Composition) classes. I don't stand for ignorant or insensitive statements from my students. I charge them with thinking before they speak, but I don't know how the University feels about it or whether or not there is an official policy on the subject...”²³⁶

The author later checked the standing of Arizona State University at the website of the FIRE and found out this university had a “green light” rating and even made it into the so-called “Lucky Seven”, i.e. a list of seven universities where free speech is unrestricted.²³⁷

It might perhaps be then interesting to look at an example that the FIRE rated as a “red light” university to see how speech is – or might be – curtailed at such institutions. Because the FIRE prepares also a list of the worst universities for free speech, the author of this text decided to have a look at the University of Syracuse which is 2011’s “winner” and is featured also in the 2012 list.

While the selection of this university’s speech policies offered by the FIRE includes only one policy seen as illiberal,²³⁸ the main reason why this university is criticized is its acting against its own student because of the contents of one of his Facebook statuses. The student, Matthew Werenczak, complained on Facebook about a comment made by a black community leader. Werenczak, who is Caucasian, was volunteering as a student-teacher at a high school and the community leader in question remarked that the school should be hiring more teachers from historically black colleges. Werenczak saw this as racially insulting and complained about it on his own Facebook profile. This was seen by his University as unprofessional and racially insensitive and effectively expelled him. He was given a chance of re-admission

²³⁶ From a message to the author of this thesis. The teacher in question is Fernando Perez, *Arizona State University*, Accessed July 15, 2013, <https://webapp4.asu.edu/directory/person/898733>.

²³⁷ Greg. Lukianoff, “The Seven Best Colleges For Free Speech,” *Huffington Post*, May 23, 2011, Accessed July 20, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/greg-lukianoff/the-seven-best-colleges-f_b_865744.html#s282103title=Arizona_State_University.

²³⁸ It is the „Computing and Electronic Communication Policy“ which defines harassment as: „Harassing others by sending annoying, abusive, profane, threatening, defamatory or offensive messages is prohibited. Some examples include: obscene, threatening, or repeated unnecessary messages; sexually, ethnically, racially, or religiously offensive messages; continuing to send messages after a request to stop; and procedures that hinder a computer session.“ Source: “Syracuse University.” *The Fire*. 2013. Accessed July 11, 2013. <http://thefire.org/spotlight/codes/1143.html>.

if he completes a diversity training, which he did, but the school did not take him back; it did so only after the FIRE publicised the case.

To conclude, what the critics see as the main problem of speech codes, regulations and control is the threat that instead of limiting examples of real racism, sexism or other sorts of insensitivity, practically any remark – including posts on private Facebook walls – can be taken up, misinterpreted and labeled as insensitive. Such conditions of excessive criminalizing are seen as chipping away at student’s liberty of speech and conscience.

3.2.3 b) Sensitivity Trainings and Diversity Coordination

Various so-called “sensitivity trainings” are among the most notorious examples of the efforts of university administrations to ensure a smooth functioning of their campus – or so would be their explanation. The critics, however, see this as another example of curtailing the liberty of university students and their right to freedom of speech and conscience. Universities, mainly in order to satisfy the various sensitivities resulting from diversity and differences, are establishing trainings to “ideologically reeducate”²³⁹ their students, critics say.

To present a case in point: University of Delaware had a program for its freshmen residing at University’s halls of residence run by its Residence Life organization. The program sought to teach students “competences” related to “social identities”, “oppression” and “sustainability”. The part on oppression claimed, for example, that “[c]itizens capable of contributing to the development of a sustainable society must first develop empathy. This empathy will be developed through an advanced awareness of oppression and inequity that exists at a local and national level.”²⁴⁰ Aside from group training sessions, the program included also one-on-one meetings between students and their Residence Assistants. At the meetings, the FIRE

²³⁹ “University of Delaware Requires Students to Undergo Ideological Reeducation,” *Foundation for Individual Rights in Education*, October 30, 2007, Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://thefire.org/article/8555.html>.

²⁴⁰ University of Delaware, *Residence Life Competencies*, Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://thefire.org/public/pdfs/a58dfd910795a7266a223281977847d.pdf?direct>.

claims, the assistants would ask the students questions such as “When did you discover your sexual identity?”²⁴¹

The program has been referred to as “thought control” or “ideological reeducation” by the FIRE.²⁴² VDARE.com called it a “personality-destruction program” whose aim was to uniformize opinions on social and political matters.²⁴³

When thinking about the real standing and impact of this program, however, it is probably necessary to take the statements from the FIRE and especially VDARE with a grain of salt, not least because VDARE has been designated as a hate group, providing a platform for various figures from the radical right; a look at the tone and direction of VDARE’s articles also suggests that the ground from which it speaks is not entirely neutral.

Nevertheless, the Residence Life program at the University of Delaware was terminated in 2007 after 4 years of existence, mainly because of pressure from the FIRE.

Thinking about these programs and trainings in general, this is where the question of the goal and meaning of universities comes into play again. The existence of these trainings and seminars is, in critics’ view, “an affront to the values that institutions of higher education should hold dear. Universities should aspire to give students the intellectual skills and information to discuss issues and refute arguments, not shelter them from the kinds of ideas and expressions that roam free outside campus walls.”²⁴⁴

Another issue which also attracts attention is the amount of various coordinators and specialists campuses employ in order to adequately manage diversity and address potentially sensitive issues. Lukianoff looks at the University of Pennsylvania, where a student who feels she has been sexually harassed, can contact “the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Programs; the African-American Resource Center; the Penn Behavioral Health Employee Assistance Program; the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Center; the Division of Human Resources of the Office of Labor Relations;

²⁴¹ “University of Delaware Requires Students to Undergo Ideological Reeducation,” *Foundation for Individual Rights in Education*.

²⁴² “University of Delaware: Students Required to Undergo Ideological Reeducation,” *Foundation for Individual Rights in Education*, 2013, Accessed July 29, 2013, <http://thefire.org/case/752.html>.

²⁴³ John Derbyshire, “Diversity Boot Camp Closed at the University of Delaware – But Big Brother Is Still Going Strong,” *Vdare*, November 19, 2007, Accessed July 15, 2013, <http://www.vdare.com/articles/diversity-boot-camp-closed-at-the-university-of-delaware-but-big-brother-is-still-going-str>.

²⁴⁴ Unam Sanctam, “More Campus Thought Police,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, December 18, 2006, Accessed July 26, 2013, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1755209/posts>.

the Office of the Ombudsman; the Division of Human Resources of the Office of Staff Relations; the Division of Public Safety, Special Services; Penn's Women's Center; Student Health Services; Counseling and Psychological Services; and the Office of the Vice Provost for University Life.”²⁴⁵ Lukianoff then concludes by saying it is no wonder the school is as expensive as it is, thus voicing the concerns of critics who claim that an entire industry has been built around the question of sensitivity and its management and that this is not truly necessary.

Conclusion

Political correctness, as this work has shown, is a convoluted phenomenon which defies clear categorisation. The debate about PC is just as complex, pertaining to a number of seemingly unrelated issues and touching various old and new concerns.

PC, starting as an effort to improve society, create an inclusive environment, remove stereotypes, “forget” the injustices of the past and offer equal conditions to everyone, either through cleaning language from the “discriminatory semantic baggage” or through various policies, has come to be a highly divisive issue and a problem itself; a sort of an ideal that backfired, as the hypothesis of this work held.

The main problem in the view of PC's critics is that even though the aims of political correctness are highly commendable, they often have unintended negative “side effects” and consequences, mainly due to the fact that the entire “movement” of political correctness has reached pathological proportions and is overzealously pushed far beyond the point of necessity. Among these negative consequences is for example the fact that while political correctness is liberal in its nature, or, rather, aims, it might often prove to be illiberal in the way it works, essentially imposing its view of society and the world on everyone, without truly considering the context and the outcomes. An example would be the requirement that university students take various sensitivity trainings, seen by the critics as “ideological reeducation”, “thought police” and such like, through which the students are forced to adopt the “agenda” of political correctness, perhaps even despite their will.

²⁴⁵ Sandy Hingston, “A History of Political Correctness: 20 Years After Penn's ‘Water Buffalo’ Incident.”

Equally important, the aim of the “politically correct” to make sure that no one – aside, perhaps, from the white male – is insulted, leads to the so-called “hypersensitivity” of society, which promotes the so-called “victim culture” and in which even inoffensive remarks can be regarded as offensive. As a result, public discourse is essentially silenced, because people are afraid to say anything, as they are worried they could insult someone or hurt someone’s sensitivities, even without wanting to. Many questions that would desperately need to be addressed are thus rather avoided, making the underlying realities perhaps even worse.

This is related to the view that political correctness essentially amounts to censorship, as documented for example in the controversies related to K-12 education. Critics say that the way the considerations of PC are reflected in education materials causes distortions of history and reality in general, covering up issues seen as “inappropriate” and limiting students’ perspectives. Sanitization leaves textbooks bland and lifeless and the efforts to include a plethora of previously unheard voices in teaching materials result in the loss of any coherence; plus, such efforts obscure the view of overarching key themes and traditions, both in history and literature, critics say.

Responding to the charges about the negative consequences of sanitization, proponents of such interventions claim that the positive outcomes brought as a result of sanitization are what we should focus on – for example, like in the Huckleberry Finn case – making the books available for classroom use even despite their perceived controversiality and making people comfortable with reading such books.

Moving on to the changes in curricula, on the K-12 level, critics claim that political correctness dilutes the standards of the Western canon, while the proponents of PC say that by bringing the previously unheard voices to the fore, political correctness does not devastate the values education should bring; rather, it actually enriches students’ learning experience and provides a more complete picture of society. Critics then usually reply that the problem with this approach is that many of those “newly empowered” unheard voices are only brought to the fore because of what groups they represent and not because of the quality of their work, thus compromising textbook quality.

Focusing on the realm of history in K-12 education, “the politically correct” say that if there is any crisis, as their opponents claim there is, it is solely in the minds of those whose preferred version of history is now being challenged – after all, as we have seen, the efforts to influence the way history is presented come from various sides, not

only the “politically correct”. What is truly happening with history, in the view of PC’s proponents, is that history is being opened up and enriched by new perspectives in order to, essentially, tell the whole story, giving space to both sides in various historical controversies.

On the university level, then, there is the “traditionalist” view, claiming that universities are now defeating themselves and disregarding what their own meaning should be by – in step with political correctness – diluting their core curricula, restricting students’ freedom of speech and conscience, forgetting about the importance of such values as individual merit and reasoned open discussion, indoctrinating instead of teaching and generally making a mockery of the idea of what universities should stand for.

On the other hand is the belief that there are historical reasons for changes in curricula and that freedom of speech should not, after all, be absolute. The reason why limitations and recommendations related to students’ conduct were introduced was to stop the perpetuation of hate and intolerance. The aim is not to chip away at the freedom of individuals, but to secure freedom for everyone.

The debate on both levels of education shows that there are essentially two main views that differ in principle. Each of them starts from a different position and is interested in different results and values; the probability of finding middle ground, then – or even the willingness to find it – seems to be rather low.

The discussion is truly complex, complicated and contradictory; making some sense of it feels almost like navigating in a minefield full of sensitive issues like racism, sexism, history of oppression, etc. – and equally sensitive principled viewpoints that refuse to listen to the other side’s arguments. Interestingly enough, both sides – conservative and liberal – share some characteristics and “war tactics” – they both, for example, tend to label the “other side” as extremist, sometimes blowing individual points in the argument and incidents related to political correctness out of proportion. They also both like to use the same charge against each other where they see fit and claim that the sole motivation of “the other side” is to silence opposition. Equally important, they sometimes resort to fighting for their causes just out of principle – as discussed in the question of freedom of speech for the conservative side, and identity politics for the liberal side.

What is rather interesting, the traditionalist, conservative side sometimes tends to work with unsubstantiated, in some cases almost hysterical claims and fears that are,

however, consistently contradicted by research²⁴⁶; the “progressive” side, for its part, sometimes shows a disquieting tendency to become too eager in its efforts, resulting in more damage than improvement. At the same time, it might be useful to note that in a number of cases, it is probably rather the interpretation that matters and reality does not have to be as bad as the critics – coming from whichever side – say it is.

To conclude, what, then, does the “PC debate” show and why is it interesting? Firstly, naturally, it shows that commendable aims might sometimes have unexpected consequences. Even though political correctness “means well”, one could say that – in some instances at least – it truly becomes “too much of a good thing”. Nevertheless, as such, it might be regarded as a positive force in that America – and not only America – can learn more about how to manage its diversity and which policies work.

Secondly, the entire debate uncovers a seeming chasm in American society as far as cultural affairs are concerned, exposing another issue where a sort of an American “house divided” of our times makes an appearance. It will definitely be interesting to see how the discussion develops and what lessons America draws for itself concerning the “management” of the diverse fabric it is made of – while at the same time keeping a common base and culture. Is that even possible? Also, keeping in mind the claim put forward by some commentators that the times of the “old”, i.e. “leftist” PC are now over and it is actually “right-wing PC” which is “reigning” in America – it might be interesting to follow the debate to see whether this could, if it is true, be expected to shape public discourse and America’s attitudes to itself in the future.

Resumé

Predkladaná diplomová práca sa zaoberá otázkou politickej korektnosti, resp. debaty o tomto fenoméne. Zaujíma sa o to, prečo je fenomén politickej korektnosti kritizovaný a prečo na seba viaž pozornosť.

Politická korektnosť je rozsiahly a ťažko uchopiteľný fenomén. Debata o ňom je tiež pomerne zložitá; rozvíja sa v rôznych oblastiach a týka sa veľkého množstva citlivých otázok ako je oblasť rasy, pohlavia, sexuálnej orientácie a tak ďalej.

Zo snahy o „zlepšenie spoločnosti“, odstránenia diskriminácie, vytvorenia rovných podmienok pre všetkých členov spoločnosti a zbavenia sa stereotypov sa však

²⁴⁶ Like the view that liberal faculty proselytize students.

politická korektnosť sama stala problémom, ktorý vyvoláva intenzívnu diskusiu. Kritika sa rozvíja najmä z toho dôvodu, že politická korektnosť má napriek svojim dobným úmyslom rôzne nezamýšľané negatívne dôsledky.

Hlavným dôvodom, prečo kritici vidia v politickej korektnosti problém, je fakt, že snahy v rámci politickej korektnosti získali patologický rozmer. Jedným z následkov je to, že sa z politickej korektnosti stala akási „liberálna ortodoxia“ v tom, že – minimálne v očiach kritikov – politická korektnosť nepripúšťa dissent a svoje predstavy považuje za jediné správne.

Problémom je i súvislosť medzi politickou korektnosťou a slobodou prejavu, pretože, minimálne v pohľade kritikov, má vyžadovanie dodržiavanie „PC“ noriem dopad v tom, že obmedzuje jednotlivcov.

„Hypersenzitivita“ podporovaná politickou korektnosťou spôsobuje potom to, že sa ľudia boja vyjadrovať ku kontroverzným témam, čím sa umŕtvuje verejná debata.

O politickej korektnosti kritici hovoria i to, že funguje ako cenzúra, alebo minimálne auto-cenzúra. V oblasti škôl sa rôzne snahy o „dezinfikovanie“ učebníc tiež stretli s veľkým odporom.

Veľa sa hovorí i o zmenách školských osnov a o tom, že univerzity si politickou korektnosťou podkopávajú vlastnú pozíciu, pretože limitujú slobodu svedomia svojich študentov.

Obecne sa dá zhrnúť, že v debata proti sebe stoja dva pohľady, ktoré začínajú z rôznych pozícií a sú pre nich dôležité rôzne veci. PC debata tak okrem toho, že dobré úmysly môžu zle dopadnúť, ukazuje i to, ako je americká spoločnosť polarizovaná.

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