

Is Political Correctness Correct?



Gabriel D. Decker

University of Arkansas
Little Rock

C. Harris

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The phrase "political correctness" has been around a lot longer than most people realize. Today the phrase is applied in everything we do, say, or act upon. In 1793, the phrase was used in the US Supreme Court "to describe something that was not literally accurate, but correct in the political field."¹ The definition was changed in the 1970s to include political incorrectness. In 1991, George Bush senior famously defined political correctness as "a tendency to declare certain topics off-limits, certain expressions off-limits, even certain gestures off-limits."² The 1991 definition has been taken to extremes today. Today, many people use the phrase to refer to anything they feel offended by hearing. The real irony is that people who throw the phrase around loosely use it as a crutch to strike out against other people through name calling.

In order to be politically correct is to slavishly adhere to language that is neutral of any sexist, racist, ageist, or any other "ist" connotations.³ The correct speech is very specific, and to fail to use it is to be a bigot.⁴ A white person is incorrect, but Caucasian is the correct word today. This does not mean it will be the correct word tomorrow. The irony here is calling someone a bigot for being politically incorrect. In other words, if you do not adhere to these rules, we are going to call you a politically incorrect name. People are expected to be robots and speak only in neutral terminology. There lies the real secret. What is neutral terminology and who decides?

People said what they meant years ago. If a person was a criminal he/she was called a criminal. In Mississippi the prisoners want to be classified as inmates. This does not mean all people in all prisons

¹ Regeneration and Renewal. "It's Political correctness gone mad!" *Regeneration and Renewal* (2007): 1 - 3. Document. 19 October 2012.

² Regeneration and Renewal. "It's Political correctness gone mad!"

³ Bauer, Winifred. "A Linguist's View of Correctness." *HeinOnline* 191 (2011): 187 - 200. Citation. 19 October 2012.

⁴ Wetering, John E. "Political Correctness The Insult and the Injury." *Vital Speeches of the Day* (1991): 100 - 103.

want to be classified as inmates, just in Mississippi. People must understand a murderer is sensitive about what he/she is called and we would not want to offend them. We wear our sensitivity on our sleeves and worry about offending anyone and everyone. Today, "political correctness can mean racism, discrimination, cultural insensitivity, or many other things."⁵

Have Americans gone too far by abusing the phrase, giving it more meaning than originally intended? In short, if someone is offended by anything said, then, the speaker is deemed politically incorrect. Everything must be said and done to not offend anyone at any time. Keeping a room of 25 students happy is hard enough. Now, we are expected to keep 10million people happy! If someone wants to discredit a well thought out argument all he/she has to do is claim the argument is offensive and not politically correct. No matter how logical an argument for or against something is it will be discarded and thought of as prejudice.

Today, many people with hidden agendas use the phrase to rid the world of any idea or thought they do not like, or are against. A huge problem is the prejudice is flowing into our literature of today, and more importantly, of the past. A book written sixty years ago might use words many people feel are offensive today. Authors such as T.S. Eliot have been considered wonderful authors of great literature for years. These books are written in the style that is correct for their era. The books are treated as if they are politically incorrect in today's society. Therefore, some people want them banned from schools, libraries, literature classes, college classes, book stores, and other public places. Now, people are against the past and say the past is politically incorrect. How can the past respond? It is done and gone.

⁵ Reinelt, Janellee. "The Performance of Political Correctness." *Theatre Research Internation* 36.02 (2011): 134 - 147. Journal. 19 October 2012. <http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0307883311000216>.

Great literature is not necessarily nice; it provokes thought and destroys preconceptions."... It stirs the mud of our prejudices and forces us to reconsider and reflect, and it does so in a language that stings and delights and exhibits for us the human imagination at full stretch." ⁶ Literature is not philosophy. The truth of literature and history can be lost in a pretentious world of words with no real meaning. The truth can be lost forever in a jumble of jargon if people are not careful what they wish for. The past can be dark and disturbing, but hiding it in flowery words will not change the past. The flowery words will make the past harder to read and understand. What right does anyone have to rewrite an author's work because he/she is offended? Many people feel since the authors of these works are dead and cannot put up a fight it is acceptable to destroy what they created. Have people gotten that self-centered and conceited? Yes, people hide the conceit in politically correct words such as translation and rewriting of literary fame. ⁷

America is a land of immigrants from all over the world. The great thing about America is our freedom to believe and write different things. I am talking about America's First Amendment:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." ⁸

I believe there is some merit to being politically correct, but there is a fine line. Where we draw the line claiming what is and is not politically correct is the real question. We all need to remember this is this is the land of freedom. The thing most people forget is we are ALL free to choose different ideas.

⁶ Curtler, Hugh Mercer. "Political Correctness and the Attack on Great Literature." *Modern Age* (2009): 272 - 279. Document. 19 October 2012.

⁷ Berrin Aksoy, Ph. D. "Translation as Rewriting: The Concept and Its Implications on the Emergence of a National Literature." *Translation Journal* 5.3 (2001): 1 - 10. Journal. 02 November 2012.

⁸ National Archives. *Bill of Rights*. 1 October 2012. Web Site. 30 October 2012. http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html>.

The movie industry does not have to follow these same rules. A movie can use discriminating terms, make fun of racial profiling, and poke fun at people with disabilities. The movies are classified as comedies. "Blazing Saddles," "There's Something About Mary," "Bad Santa," and "Airplane!" are examples of politically incorrect comedy movies that were very successful at the box office. A movie classified as politically incorrect can be a good thing for the box office. The more offensive the movie, the better it does at the box office. Does this mean that people want to really act this way? If these things are offensive in everyday life, should it be considered politically incorrect to go to the theatre to watch these movies? When the movies are released to DVD format, should the stores selling them be classified as politically incorrect? I feel there is a double standard. Why are movies different than literature and speech?

Even if I try to remain politically correct with my speech, how long will it last? About a month ago I was watching the news and found out the term disabled is politically incorrect. I have disabilities and did not know I was supposed to be offended by the terminology used here at UALR to describe my condition. I am supposed to be offended if someone says I am disabled. Instead, people are to address my situation as; "I am a person with disabilities." Who sets these rules anyway? I was not consulted about these new changes. Why, are my disabilities not significant? Where is the discussion board for such changes, and do they have regular meetings? The language today is malleable to what someone wants it to become.

People are not robots. Why are we expected to speak in such a way? There needs to be a sense of checks and balances before things get out of control. If a group of people does not follow the definition of political correctness, they are considered "bigots"⁹ or worse. The maturity of name calling is considered politically incorrect. I am offended if someone considers me a bigot. People do not have

⁹ Reinelt, Janellee. "The Performance of Political Correctness." *Theatre Research Internation* 36.02 (2011):

to be politically correct, instead people just need to have manners and know how to be polite. Opening doors, standing when a lady comes into a room, the words “please” and “thank you” were once commonplace. Now, if you say something that offends me, you are a bigot. Which system works better for you?

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