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## Targeting campus speech codes

David Limbaugh ([archive](#))

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Hallelujah! Someone in authority is finally fighting back against political correctness. The Bush Administration has warned campus thought-control bullies that it is monitoring their imperious tactics.

The Washington Times' George Archibald reports that Gerald A. Reynolds, assistant secretary for civil rights has sent a long overdue brush-back letter to college and university officials concerning their odious and oppressive campus speech codes.

These codes, which are as un-American as they sound, prohibit certain kinds of "offensive" speech, such as "any language that may be deemed sexist, racist or homophobic, or may be found offensive by any minority group." Some have estimated that as many as 90 percent of American universities have adopted such codes in one form or another.

The stated purpose of these regulations is to foster a peaceful educational environment by preventing "harassment" of certain protected groups. But this phony rationale is no longer going to fly under the Bush Administration.

In his letter to university officials, Secretary Reynolds stated that universities would not be allowed "to regulate the content of speech" under the guise of preventing "harassment." Speech, said Reynolds, does not constitute "harassment" just because it offends someone. "In order to establish a hostile environment, harassment must be sufficiently serious (i.e., severe, persistent or pervasive) as to limit or deny a student's ability to participate in or benefit from an educational program," wrote Reynolds.

Reynolds couldn't be more correct. In reality speech codes are merely an excuse to justify censorship of certain disfavored student speech. The Times' Archibald quotes Wendy McElroy, a research fellow for the Independent Institute of Oakland, California as saying, "University campuses are strongholds of left-liberalism where constitutionally protected rights, such as freedom of speech and religion, are routinely violated." Most victims, McElroy points out, are "students who are male, white, conservative, openly Christian or from affluent families."

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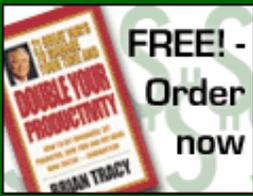
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And Erich J. Wasserman, Executive Director for the Philadelphia-based Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), observes that "Speech codes are tools that administrators use to quash speech they do not agree with, and to punish students and faculty members for expressions they do not agree with."

Some campus codes are more draconian than others. One at Tufts University contained the usual buzzwords, prohibiting "demeaning or derogatory slurs, name-calling and using words or negative images associated with a group on signs to create a publicly hostile environment."

But the Tufts code included an additional provision that prohibited "attributing objections to any of the above to the 'hypersensitivity' of others who feel hurt." This clause was aimed at creating a separate offense for criticizing alleged victims for their hypersensitivity. In other words, certain speech wasn't the only fundamental right that was obliterated, but also the right to defend oneself against these charges.

What could be more hostile to civil liberties than to forbid a student from offering mitigating evidence in his own defense, such as that he didn't intend anything offensive and that the victim might be overreacting? But if you go that route at Tufts, you risk compounding your offense.

It is extremely gratifying that the administration has decided to contradict the politically correct dogma and to stand up against the tyranny of certain megalomaniacal liberal professors. Many of them are unreconstructed Sixties radicals who went from protesting on campuses, as outsiders, to controlling them, as insiders.

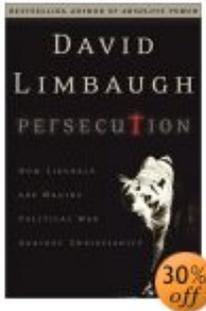
Many of them protested with an unprecedented degree of self-righteous sanctimony and have never been taken to task for their behavior or some of its deleterious consequences. To the contrary, society has glorified them and showered them with unceasing accolades. Now, as adults, they harbor the same degree of moral certainty and the same lack of moral foundation.

As the establishment they are even more dangerous than they were as radicals because their power has corrupted them. They are like spoiled children -- who were never reprimanded (and were even praised) for their misconduct -- who have finally grown up. They are misfits with badges of authority. In their closed world they interact mainly with likeminded peers who teach from likeminded texts and permit no dissent or original thinking from their students who are objects of their indoctrination. They can protest indignantly that their aim is to prevent bullying, but they are the ones who are administering the real bullying and the students are their victims.

Perhaps this little missive from Secretary Reynolds will not get much fanfare, but it should, because it's a significant first step toward breaking the liberal stranglehold on American campuses.

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