

# NORTH HARRIS COUNTY COLLEGE UNITED FACULTY

2700 W. W. THORNE DRIVE • SUITE A-217 • HOUSTON, TEXAS 77073

THE ADVOCATE

NOVEMBER, 1991

---

Edited by Steve Davis

---

## HASTY DECISIONS, FAR REACHING CONSEQUENCES: MUSING ON MYTH

We can learn a lot from legend. Take Oedipus, for instance, Prince of Corinth. He found the troubled need to leave the city he thought he knew well, Corinth, and traveling to Delphi, heard an oracle who said, "Be warned: you are fated to kill your father and marry your mother." Alarmed, he decided to outwit the gods by running away. On a brand new highway he had a brief, nasty altercation with some old guy and his companions but seemed to think little of it at the time. He just quickly killed them and went on his way. Young, courageous, and just a little full of himself, Oedipus was intrigued by the challenge of the Sphinx' riddle: "what walks on four legs, two legs, and three legs?" Quick as a wink, Oedipus answered, "Man!" and POOF! that old Sphinx self-destructed. The people of Thebes, this new city, were wowed. "Be our new king," they said, "but, first, marry this leftover queen we have hanging around the palace. She's a little older than you but a very nice lady. You guys should get along fine." "You bet," said hasty Oedipus: "I'll make a killer king."

By the time Sophocles' Oedipus Rex begins, he seems to be on a roll; ruler of Thebes, father of four children by his old wife, Jocasta, he thinks himself a fine fellow. He introduces himself as "I, Oedipus, who bear the famous name." Even his board members, the Theban elders, consider Oedipus "the man surest in mortal ways and wisest in the ways of God."

The larger picture, however, is very different. Thebes is dying from a pervasive plague that is destroying everything. "The herds are sick, children die unborn, and labor is vain." Oedipus, an essentially good

*"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"*

man, has the flaw the Greeks considered most tragic: Oedipus suffers from hubris. Habitually quick to make up his mind, Oedipus trusts his own judgment too much. He simply will not listen to others.

We learn a lot from legend. It's not surprising that they're still being taught twenty-four hundred years later. Is there a lesson here for NHMCCD?

Pat Gray  
English, North Harris College

### PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

The District is in a state of flux. New leaders are in place, new styles of management are emerging, and new relationships are being established. All of us are interested in the form of governance that will prevail in this new era. We hear a good deal of talk about inclusiveness in decision-making in the future. Inclusiveness would suggest that all groups associated with the District should be offered active, meaningful participation.

I have been reading in Terry O'Banion's Innovations in the Community College (New York, Macmillan, 1989) and found a chapter by Thomas Fryer, Jr., entitled "Governance in the High-Achieving Community College" particularly enlightening. Fryer's 29-year educational experience includes involvement in seven educational institutions--primarily community colleges--as a faculty member, line administrator, campus chief executive, and chancellor (215). Throughout these several experiences, he clearly recognizes the value of union membership, noting, "This author is familiar enough with the history of the American labor movement and has seen enough of college and university administrations, his own and those of others, not only to respect the legitimacy of union organizations, but to join one himself" (232).

Fryer's theories of governance are instructive. He points out what faculty and staff in our District have recognized for years, and that is "...control attempted through formal authority...[and] unilateral action...[reduces] the degree of commitment shown by organizational participants" (216). He adds that, historically, the powers that be in community colleges have preferred secondary or "hierarchal models of governance, while many faculty have strongly preferred university, or collegial, models. ...[T]op heavy, hierarchal governance...can lead to feelings of alienation and powerlessness on the part of many organizational participants" (218).

Participants in true shared governance have responsibilities to uphold in the process, Fryer argues. The Board of Trustees' responsibilities include acknowledging "clearly the legitimacy of all constituencies in the organization" (228) while administration must recognize "the differing and legitimate interests of the multiple institutional constituencies, both internal and external" (230). He insists that

"...unions, too, bear a very real responsibility for creating and sustaining the high commitment, high-achieving institutions" (233). Their responsibilities include collaborating with administration in problem solving, demonstrating "a sense of responsibility for the total institution...[and] commitment to the community" (233). Readers of my column in the last Advocate will recognize the AFT's commitment to this process. We have worked diligently, both behind the scenes and in the public arena, to ensure the good of the total institution without losing sight of our role as an advocate for union members.

Fryer stresses an administrative responsibility to create, through governance, a climate in which employees are committed to making their college high achieving: "...institutional governance should take as its goal the creation of organizational conditions that elicit from workers a desire to do more..." (226). Recently, the administration selected the members of the newly-created Compensation Committee. I knew that some members of the old Step 16 committee, who served with Brenda Steuer as chair, would be asked to serve due to their familiarity with compensation issues, and several are serving. As a member of that former committee, I expressed an interest in serving on the new one, and my name was put forward through the proper channels. However, for some reason, I was not selected. I was not hurt personally by being passed over. As a matter of fact, considering the enormous commitment of time I devoted to the Step 16 committee and the work that will go into the new Compensation Committee, I was somewhat relieved. However, passing over the union president in this instance is perhaps symbolic. Fryer contends that actions send symbolic messages and cites an instance of a union president who refused an invitation of his district chancellor "to join other organizational presidents and trustees on the speaker's platform at an inaugural fall convocation[.] [A] powerful message was telegraphed symbolically that cooperative relations with the union were highly unlikely" (242). Fryer is absolutely correct--passing over the union president on the Compensation Committee telegraphed a message.

Alan Hall

### WISDOM FROM THE PAST

God forbid that we should ever be twenty years without a rebellion. What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that the people preserve the spirit of resistance? The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon and pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.

I believe that there will ultimately be a clash between the oppressed and those who do the oppressing. I believe there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice, and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the system of exploitation. I believe there will be that kind of clash but I



don't believe it will be based on the color of the skin.

If this be treason, then make the most of it.

The preceding is a collection of quotes from Thomas Jefferson, Malcolm X, and Patrick Henry. It is intended as a reminder for those who have forgotten and as a call to action in the '92 election year for those who believe.

Greg Mitchell  
PSRP President  
NHCC Class of '88

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## Tomball College Memorandum

TO: Mr. Steve Davis  
FROM: Melanie Younger et al  
DATE: September 17, 1991  
REGARDING: The September 1991 The Advocate

We have requested that The Advocate no longer be placed in our mailboxes. This request was prompted by the "editorial thoughts" in the September issue. We totally disagree with your editorial comments, especially the assertion that "the enemies of freedom and the enemies of trade unionism are one and the same." Your statement that "our own society is in desperate need of radical internal change" is irresponsible and inflammatory. We greatly resent the implication that The Advocate speaks for us and we hope you will consider changing your masthead. United Faculty implies that you speak for all the faculty of NHCC (NHMCCD), when, in fact, your group represents only a small percentage.

If we had a subscription to The Advocate, we would cancel it. Being unable to do that, we have chosen to disassociate ourselves from any links to the faculty union.

Signed:	Melanie Moore Younger	George Younger
	William Simcik	Hulon Madeley
	Roger L. Jay	David Jensen
	Bill Lawler	Robert Eubank
	Brenda Hartman	Tom Lovell
	Rick Grimes	Sandra Lloyd
		Martha Newsome

pc: Dr. Roy Lazenby  
Brenda Hartman  
Dr. John Pickelman

This remarkable document was received by the editor too late in September for inclusion in the October issue. We now expose it to the light of day for the amusement and edification of our readers.

Certainly, it has contributed to my own education. Now I have some inkling of how Salman Rushdie must have felt in the aftermath of irking the Ayatollah. This kind of response to an "innocent" editorial statement is what Clarence Thomas might in similar circumstances have termed a "low-tech" lynching. Discretion remaining the better part of valor, your beloved editor probably won't be attending any of the regular Friday afternoon sing-a-longs at Tomball College.

So the signers disagree with my contention that union-busters are enemies of freedom? I recommend some holiday reading on the history of Germany in the 1930s or Poland in the 1980s to see how free trade unions fare under totalitarian regimes. I know that some of the signers can compile a suitable bibliography. So America doesn't require radical internal change? Can anyone honestly evaluate the problems the nation faces in areas like health care, education, crime and punishment, race relations, etc. and believe that superficial correctives or free enterprise platitudes can move us beyond this looming crisis? With Louisiana on the verge of electing a supposed ex-Nazi--a man who is building a national fascist movement--as its governor, it's time to recognize that the social order is in serious straits. I can understand that not everyone agrees with my analysis or prescriptions, but to term them "irresponsible and inflammatory"? Lighten up, Mel.

In a way, this exchange is positive. It's good to get periodic confirmation of the interest with which The Advocate is read around the District. Believe me, I've written for a number of publications which didn't generate nearly as much attention. As editor, I intend to continue to write and publish articles which tell the unvarnished truth about the state of NHMCCD and the larger world beyond. Those of us in the AFT don't intend for a moment to let a handful ("a small percentage") of political naysayers deter us from that objective.

P.S. I would like to inform the signers that we are working on a name change for our local. For some time, we've been aware that the current designation no longer reflects the changed composition of our organization--one that admits staff as well as faculty. We'll officially unveil the new label shortly. As for a new logo, I've suggested a clenched fist superimposed over a lamp of knowledge, all emanating from a box (drawn freehand, of course). However, President Hall has vetoed this proposal, feeling it might hurt our current recruitment drive at Tomball College.

Steve Davis

#### HOW ABOUT JOINING AFT?

All faculty and staff can enjoy the benefits of association with other employees committed to making NHMCCD an excellent place to work and teach--and the benefits of strong legal and professional liability protection should you ever need them. Monthly dues rates are \$19.35 for fulltime faculty, \$12.20 for fulltime staff and adjunct faculty, and \$9.10 for part-time staff. Discuss membership with Alan Hall (443-5544, 353-8634), Greg Mitchell (359-1698, 592-1660), or any other of the stalwarts (Cher Brock, Steve Davis, Robert Emerson, Bob Locander, Mel McFadden, Allen Vogt) on the union executive committee.

## Essay

Barbara Ehrenreich

# Teach Diversity—with a Smile

Something had to replace the threat of communism, and at last a workable substitute is at hand. "Multiculturalism," as the new menace is known, has been denounced in the media recently as the new McCarthyism, the new fundamentalism, even the new totalitarianism—take your choice. According to its critics, who include a flock of tenured conservative scholars, multiculturalism aims to toss out what it sees as the Eurocentric bias in education and replace Plato with Ntozake Shange and traditional math with the Yoruba number system. And that's just the beginning. The Jacobins of the multiculturalist movement, who are described derisively as P.C., or politically correct, are said to have launched a campus reign of terror against those who slip and innocently say "freshman" instead of "freshperson," "Indian" instead of "Native American" or, may the Goddess forgive them, "disabled" instead of "differently abled."

So you can see what is at stake here: freedom of speech, freedom of thought, Western civilization and a great many professorial egos. But before we get carried away by the mounting backlash against multiculturalism, we ought to reflect for a moment on the system that the P.C. people aim to replace. I know all about it; in fact it's just about all I *do* know, since I—along with so many educated white people of my generation—was a victim of monoculturalism.

American history, as it was taught to us, began with Columbus' "discovery" of an apparently unnamed, unpeopled America, and moved on to the Pilgrims serving pumpkin pie to a handful of grateful red-skinned folks. College expanded our horizons with courses called Humanities or sometimes Civ, which introduced us to a line of thought that started with Homer, worked its way through Rabelais and reached a poignant climax in the pensées of Matthew Arnold. Graduate students wrote dissertations on what long-dead men had thought of Chaucer's verse or Shakespeare's dramas; foreign languages meant French or German. If there had been high technology in ancient China, kingdoms in black Africa or women anywhere, at any time, doing anything worth noticing, we did not know it, nor did anyone think to tell us.

Our families and neighborhoods reinforced the dogma of monoculturalism. In our heads, most of us '50s teenagers carried around a social map that was about as useful as the chart that guided Columbus to the "Indies." There were "Negroes," "whites" and "Orientals," the latter meaning Chinese and "Japs." Of religions, only three were known—Protestant, Catholic and Jewish—and not much was known about the last two types. The only remaining human categories were husbands and wives, and that was all the diversity the monocultural world could handle. Gays, lesbians, Buddhists, Muslims, Malaysians, Mormons, etc. were simply off the map.

So I applaud—with one hand, anyway—the multiculturalist goal of preparing us all for a wider world. The other hand is

tapping its fingers impatiently, because the critics are right about one thing: when advocates of multiculturalism adopt the haughty stance of political correctness, they quickly descend to silliness or worse. It's obnoxious, for example, to rely on university administrations to enforce P.C. standards of verbal inoffensiveness. Racist, sexist and homophobic thoughts cannot, alas, be abolished by fiat but only by the time-honored methods of persuasion, education and exposure to the other guy's—or, excuse me, woman's—point of view.

And it's silly to mistake verbal purification for genuine social reform. Even after all women are "Ms." and all people are "he or she," women will still earn only 65¢ for every dollar earned by men. Minorities by any other name, such as "people of color," will still bear a hugely disproportionate burden of poverty and discrimination. Disabilities are not just "different abilities" when there are not enough ramps for wheelchairs, signers for the deaf or special classes for the "specially" endowed. With all due respect for the new politesse, actions still speak louder than fashionable phrases.

But the worst thing about the P.C. people is that they are such poor advocates for the multicultural cause. No one was ever won over to a broader, more inclusive view of life by being bullied or relentlessly "corrected." Tell a 19-year-old white male that he can't say "girl" when he means "teen-age woman," and he will most likely snicker. This may be the reason

why, despite the conservative alarms, P.C.-ness remains a relatively tiny trend. Most campuses have more serious and ancient problems: faculties still top-heavy with white males of the monocultural persuasion; fraternities that harass minorities and women; date rape; alcohol abuse; and tuition that excludes all but the upper fringe of the middle class.

So both sides would be well advised to lighten up. The conservatives ought to realize that criticisms of the great books approach to learning do not amount to totalitarianism. And the advocates of multiculturalism need to regain the sense of humor that enabled their predecessors in the struggle to coin the term P.C. years ago—not in arrogance but in self-mockery.

Beyond that, both sides should realize that the beneficiaries of multiculturalism are not only the "oppressed peoples" on the standard P.C. list (minorities, gays, etc.). The "unenlightened"—the victims of monoculturalism—are oppressed too, or at least deprived. Our educations, whether at Yale or at State U, were narrow and parochial and left us ill-equipped to navigate a society that truly is multicultural and is becoming more so every day. The culture that we studied was, in fact, *one* culture and, from a world perspective, all too limited and ingrown. Diversity is challenging, but those of us who have seen the alternative know it is also richer, livelier and ultimately more fun.

