

ALSO BY RICHARD BERNSTEIN

*From the Center of the Earth:
The Search for the Truth About China*
(1982)

*Fragile Glory:
A Portrait of France and the French*
(1990)

Dictatorship of Virtue

DICTATORSHIP OF VIRTUE

*Multiculturalism and the
Battle for America's Future*

RICHARD BERNSTEIN



ALFRED A. KNOPF *New York* 1994

THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK
PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

Copyright © 1994 by Richard Bernstein

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Published in the United States by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, and simultaneously in Canada by Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto. Distributed by Random House, Inc., New York.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bernstein, Richard, [date]

Dictatorship of virtue : multiculturalism and the battle for America's future / by Richard Bernstein.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-679-41156-9

1. Multiculturalism—United States. 2. Pluralism (Social sciences)—United States. 3. United States—Race relations. 4. United States—Ethnic relations. I. Title.

E184.A1B.428 1994

305.8'00973—dc20

93-39508

CIP

Manufactured in the United States of America

First Edition

In memory of my father

HERBERT BERNSTEIN

*who told me long ago that if you carry your own
lantern, you need not be afraid of the darkness*

Terror is naught but prompt, severe, inflexible
justice; it is therefore an emanation of virtue.

—MAXIMILIEN DE ROBESPIERRE

Contents

<i>Prologue</i>	Déravage	3
PART I DIVERSITY		
<i>Chapter 1</i>	Elementary Diversity	15
<i>Chapter 2</i>	Places of Memory	39
<i>Chapter 3</i>	Advanced Sensitivity	60
<i>Chapter 4</i>	Notebook	97
PART II REASONS		
<i>Chapter 5</i>	Otherness in Queens	149
<i>Chapter 6</i>	The Search for Sin	183
<i>Chapter 7</i>	The Secret Victory	216
PART III BATTLEFIELDS		
<i>Chapter 8</i>	The Battle of Brookline and Other Struggles over Young Minds	235
<i>Chapter 9</i>	The Battle of Texas	292
<i>Epilogue</i>	The Empty Fortress	343
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	349
	<i>Index</i>	351

Chapter 9

THE BATTLE OF TEXAS

You can't teach a man what he thinks he already knows.

—EPICETETUS

The Phi Gamma Delta fraternity house at the University of Texas in Austin has what, given the prevailing campus ethos of the 1990s, might be seen as an unfortunate resemblance to the manor house of an old Southern plantation. It is a white-columned structure of the sort that mere undergrads at a large state university should not be able to afford. Then again, there's a lot of money in Texas and a lot of money at the University of Texas at Austin, which has rich alumni and owns oil wells on land that was granted to it years ago by the state. The University of Texas at Austin is second to Harvard among American universities in the size of its endowment. It is a vast place, occupying 357 acres of prime land inside the Austin city limits, just a few blocks from the Texas state capitol.

The antebellum grandeur of Phi Gamma Delta seemed to confirm certain unpleasant associations of the past when the fraternity came to the center of an incident that shocked the entire campus. In 1990, during Round Up Week, when fraternities hold receptions for new pledges, some members of the fraternity sold T-shirts that showed the body of basketball player Michael Jordan surmounted by what was described as a "Sambo" head. The Sambo, despite being a racist caricature, had once been the insignia of the fraternity, a throwback

to that era when homeowners all across America blithely placed statues of grinning black coachmen holding lanterns on their front lawns. The Sambo finally fell victim to more enlightened attitudes in 1987, which was late, but it was abandoned. Why it appeared again on that Round Up Week T-shirt is not known, but the fact that it did took on great importance in campus politics.

The Sambo head at Phi Gamma Delta was one of two incidents that were interpreted to show renascent racism at UT. The other took place at another fraternity house, Tau Delta Tau, and was more blatant. A car parked in front of the fraternity house was spray-painted with the words FUCK COONS and FUCK YOU NIGS DIE. It was never established that anybody at Tau Delta Tau was actually responsible for this outrage. Nonetheless, fraternities, especially all-white fraternities, are widely perceived to be the repositories of much that is crude and offensive in university life. They are supposedly the kinds of places where much beer is swilled, where "date rape" occurs most commonly, and where white boys will be most revoltingly white boys. So, not surprisingly perhaps, when reports of the incidents at Phi Gamma Delta and Tau Delta Tau hit the *Daily Texan*, the school newspaper, the conviction arose that old-fashioned racial hatred was again abroad in the land.

The protests were immediate, vigorous, and far-reaching. According to the *Daily Texan*, more than one thousand students and local residents marched on the state supreme court building, which is a few blocks from the campus, and on one of the fraternity houses to protest what the paper called "a recent outbreak of racist activity on campus." "Hey UT, have you heard? This is not Johannesburg," the protesters shouted. The argument was that the incidents were not the isolated work of a few hateful individuals (even though it seems entirely possible that this was the case) but were rather reflections of the deeper currents of racism that they felt ran through the University of Texas and American society. Marcus Brown, the president of the Black Students Alliance, told the rally in front of the supreme court building that his group wanted to protest not just "these two affronts against black people but also the racist environment which we confront on a daily basis." He said: "Individual acts of racism are merely manifestations of institutional racism. In many instances, 'education' in this institution is designed to relegate people of color to a position of subservience."

Anxious to prevent the incidents from causing generalized tur-

moil, UT's president, William Cunningham, suspended both fraternities to await a "thorough review" of the incidents. In a statement published in the *Texan*, he said "acts of racial harassment will not be tolerated at the University of Texas at Austin." Unsatisfied with that, black student leaders criticized Cunningham for having issued "a lot of rhetoric," for paying mere "lip service" to the problem of racism, but doing nothing to eradicate it at its roots or even to punish the offensive fraternities as groups.

A couple of days later, Cunningham was heckled and interrupted as he tried to restate his antiracist position in a speech on what is called the West Mall, a tree-shaded esplanade just below the campus's main administrative tower. As Cunningham spoke, a few students crowded around him and, looking over his shoulder, began to read his prepared text in unison with him, whereupon the president of the university announced that copies of the speech would be distributed from his office, and then he retreated, followed by hundreds of students who continued to shout and heckle.

Decidedly, it is not easy being a university president these days, and the "racial incidents" at UT illustrate the difficulties. Students, having inherited the legacy of protest and the demand for moral perfection that came down to them from the 1960s, go on the offensive with enormous ease. Especially when provided with an emotionally satisfying pretext—and there is no better pretext than a racial incident—they find it relatively easy to transform the university from a place where they sit at the feet of people who, presumably, know more than they do, to a place where they make demands, not only about what kind of place the university should be, but about what they should be taught and by whom. University presidents thus have to deal almost daily with that delicate and combustible substance made up of the wounded feelings of students and the ideological objectives of those members of the faculty and administration who goad the students on.

And so, at Texas, the racial incidents at the two fraternities were exploited to press an old demand, namely for an ambitious program for greater diversity and multiculturalism. The program was called PRIDE, for Proposed Reforms to Institute Diversity in Education. The principle behind it was that by teaching multiculturalism, which meant, specifically, courses in what were later called nondominant cultures and Third World cultures, students would learn to respect difference. Racial hatreds—as well as such other sins as sexism and

prejudice against homosexuals—would be diminished. At the same time, the self-esteem of minority group members, essential to their success in the majority culture, would be enhanced. This demand, remember, was not simply to make available the study of nondominant cultures, which, in any case, was already available. It was to require that students undertake that study.

One report, issued by the American Association of Higher Education, found that as of July 1991 just under half (48 percent to be exact) of four-year colleges had a "multicultural general education requirement." It's worth thinking about that for a minute. Requirements are those things deemed essential in the acquisition of a liberal education. A student should be introduced, say, to a foreign language, to science, math, some American history, and so forth. Now in what some critics have sardonically called a return to compulsory chapel, half the colleges in the country are saying, in effect, that a certain political attitude is also mandatory, since, as we have seen, multiculturalism is not so much a knowledge and appreciation of other cultures as it is an attitude toward the politics of race and gender. More than seven out of ten vice-presidents and deans surveyed in a random sample of 270 colleges and universities said that they "talk about multiculturalism frequently or continually."*

At the University of Wisconsin, for example, an institution with some fifty thousand undergraduates, the only course required of all students is the one that satisfies the multicultural requirement. The University of California at Berkeley was among the first of many major institutions that went beyond the traditional civil rights goal of opening the doors to racial and ethnic minorities; it requires all students to study those minorities by fulfilling an American Cultures Breadth Requirement. This requirement represented no small change at Berkeley. According to the university's explanatory brochure, some 120 new courses in some 30 disciplines were created to "focus upon how American identity and experience have been shaped and continue to be shaped by the diversity of our constituent cultural traditions."

As colleges and schools across the country have responded to the demands of students and faculty that they adopt changes similar to

*Arthur Levine and Jeanette Cureton, "The Quiet Revolution: Eleven Facts About Multiculturalism and the Curriculum," *Change* 24, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 1992), pages 25-29.

those at Berkeley and Wisconsin, conflicts have resulted between what might be called "reformers" on the pro-multiculturalist side, and "traditionalists" on the other. Those labels, in fact, are misleading, since "reformer" contains a progressive connotation and "traditionalist" an establishmentarian flavor that badly reflects the real points of view expressed in this debate. To be opposed to a multicultural requirement is far from being opposed to multiculturalism itself, though that fine distinction is rarely made. Karen Duban, a lawyer and the wife of an English professor who played a key role in the debates on this issue at Texas, argues for the words "politicizer" versus "nonpoliticizer" to represent opposing points of view, since, she argues, the advocates of mandatory multiculturalism are less interested in educating students than they are in using the educational system to make political changes in society. If, she says, there were a movement across the country to modify curricula to discourage abortion, which would also be aimed at achieving political change, the advocates of this movement would not widely be known as reformers.

It was against the background of this national debate that the racial incidents at the University of Texas in Austin gave new impetus to the demands for change made by the reformers. But what happened at Texas following those incidents has a special drama. One of the efforts to reform the curriculum, to make it more multicultural and more respectful of difference, provoked a conflict far sharper and more enduring than conflicts at most institutions of higher learning across the country. All of the issues involving the challenge to the traditional American culture came into play at Texas, which can be taken as a kind of national laboratory, a crucible for the battle over the American identity.

Linda Brodkey is a friendly, casual woman in her mid-to-late forties, with large, innocent eyes, a breezy manner, a self-deprecating sense of humor, and an air of reasonableness that would seem to disqualify her for the academic barricades. She was born in Hannibal, Missouri, the birthplace of Mark Twain, and went to Western Illinois University—the only place her working-class parents could afford, she says. She served for two years as an English teacher in Senegal and then got a Ph. D. at the University of New Mexico in English language and literature. Her thesis topic indicates that she was a dutiful student: "Linguistic and Non-linguistic Deixis in Academic Prose." While in

graduate school she got a job as a writing teacher and loved it. So after getting her Ph. D., she embarked on what seemed like a quiet, unspectacular career as a teacher of writing and rhetoric, of the methods of argumentation and clarity of expression, which is what she did at the University of Pennsylvania, before coming to Texas in 1988.

Alan Gribben, who later became Brodkey's major rival at Austin, followed a pattern not all that dissimilar. Gribben too is a friendly, approachable figure, a mild-mannered professorial type with a full mustache and a lengthy list of publications on nineteenth-century American literature. There is some irony in the fact that his special area is Mark Twain, whose hometown was Linda Brodkey's. Gribben, whose hometown is Parsons, Kansas, and who got his B.A. in English at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, came to Texas long before Brodkey, in 1974. He was a campus leftist during his graduate-student days at Berkeley, a mentor to minority students there. He had tenure at UT, where he was a full professor, and he could have taught there for his entire career if that is what he had insisted on doing. The same is true of Brodkey, who was hired with tenure.

But Gribben left UT in 1991 to go to a smaller place than Texas, in Alabama. In well-publicized charges (summarily, though not convincingly, dismissed as mythomaniac by the chairman of the English department at UT), Gribben says that he was hounded from his department, turned into an outcast, a pariah, because he took a stand in opposition to a proposal of Linda Brodkey's (and, as we will see, before Brodkey entered his life, when he opposed an earlier move to make the English department at Texas conform to trendy multiculturalism). He was shunned in the hallways, uninvited to parties, the target of at least one campus demonstration, persistently labeled a "right-winger" in campus publications (and an "ultra-right-winger" by the very chairman of his department, who disputes Gribben's claims of persecution), labels that do not improve one's standing in the academy these days. Once, he told me, a professor in the Texas College of Business Administration left his card under Gribben's door, so Gribben called him up. "I hoped you would call," he said, "so I would have the opportunity to tell you that I consider you to be a bigoted, racist, Nazi Fascist . . ." Gribben says that he hung up in the middle of the stream of epithets. Twice, he told me, somebody blitzed the English department mailboxes with anti-Gribben circulars. There were 92 faculty members in the department and 182 graduate students. Somehow the offensive circular got into the locked

room where the mailboxes are kept—twice. The informal network that made Gribben an outcast extended, he says, to some of the universities that showed great interest in him as a job candidate (his ostracism having convinced him to look for work elsewhere than Texas), but then mysteriously lost interest when word spread of his reputation in Austin.

Brodkey had an easier time of it, even though she, too, she says, had some very upsetting obscene phone calls from strangers and was also held up for criticism in articles on the Texas controversy. No lurid rumors trailed in her wake as she looked for work elsewhere, and she ended up as the head of a prestigious writing program at the University of California at San Diego. Still, Brodkey claims that the persecutory efforts of Gribben and a small number of others at the university, unopposed by a weak and vacillating university administration, destroyed her career as a teacher of writing and rhetoric at Texas, made it impossible for her to continue her chosen profession there, and so she too took her leave.

It is not that Brodkey and Gribben were personal enemies, although they did come to say some very nasty things about each other. Indeed, when the controversy at Texas first broke, they hardly knew each other, and they virtually never exchanged words even as the controversy reached its peak. Indeed, the battle at the University of Texas by no means took place between two people. Brodkey and Gribben were antagonists in the sense that they personified two opposed positions, with most of the department standing on one side and a very small, ironically quite diverse, group on the other, until the positions hardened into stone, wrecking one career and certainly interfering with another.

What happened? The destructive conflict symbolized by Alan Gribben and Linda Brodkey centers around what might seem to be a small and not very significant corner of academic life, nothing more grand or portentous than the course in composition that many UT students are required to take as freshmen. Brodkey was commissioned to revise the course, which was identified in the catalog as E-306. Gribben raised objections to the changes that she proposed, and he managed, in part by appealing to the public outside the university, to arouse enough opposition to the changes to defeat them. That was the bare-bones conflict between the two teachers.

But the issue grew to engulf the entire university. It destroyed friendships and produced a file of documents several feet thick. It

received national press coverage at a time when the newspapers and magazines were first discovering what they called political correctness at the universities. It involved both the Modern Language Association and the American Association of University Professors in investigations into whether the criticisms of the revised course, and an eventual decision by the university not to go ahead with it, were violations of academic freedom. In the counsels of academe, Gribben and Brodkey became famous, either as subjects of contempt and derision (Gribben in particular I heard denounced in the speeches of multicultural advocates as loathsome and contemptible) or of admiration and esteem (and, again, Gribben emerged as a hero to the opponents of the New Consciousness).

Brodkey, as I have said, was charged with the responsibility of revising freshman composition. Why a revision? Many agree that at Texas E-306 was taught without any consistent standard, mostly by graduate students earning money as low-level instructors who devised the courses the way each of them saw fit. "The teaching assistants were not being told how to put together a writing program," Brodkey said. "They were not being helped to understand how they should teach writing."

Brodkey believed that she knew how to teach writing. She had years of theory behind her, theory that says, first of all, that writing is something that can be taught, rather than something involving only innate skill or genius. In order to teach writing, however, you need, as Brodkey put it, "to set up a field, a field of information, a big topic." She told me: "You have to set up a discourse, something that creates a universe of tenets so you know it when you're in it and when you're not in it."

In other words, a writing teacher needs a subject that will inspire students to argue, to use rhetorical methods that were set up in other theories going back to the writings of the Greeks on argumentation. And, she said, while we drank cappuccino at a second-floor café on Guadalupe Street, alongside the UT campus, she wanted a subject that would be unfamiliar enough to students for them to find it challenging, important enough to arouse their interest. That, she said, was how she came up with the new unified subject for E-306, the subject that some at UT found part of an effort by Brodkey and her allies to indoctrinate students in a leftist point of view. The subject

was court decisions on cases of civil rights and discrimination. The reading would consist of the texts of court opinions on key cases, these texts, Brodkey said, being a form of expository writing. Students, she said, "could be taught how to read them, how to tear them apart." The course would be called Writing About Difference.

Brodkey outlined her plans in a memo to the Lower Division English Policy Committee on March 20, 1990. This was a few weeks before the racial incidents at Phi Gamma Delta and Tau Delta Tau, but not before the university had started formal discussions of multicultural change. Already, as Brodkey put it in her memo, the faculty senate and the university council, the two main governing bodies at UT, had begun to discuss "the need to educate students on diversity and related topics." Brodkey reminded the other members of the Lower Division English Policy Committee that Dean Standish Meacham had only shortly before formed a Committee on Multicultural Education. She went on to say, "We can make a substantial contribution to the university's efforts." The new E-306 course, Writing About Difference, she announced, had made Dean Meacham "enthusiastic." Then lapsing into the sort of turgid, pretentious prose one hopes Brodkey would have eradicated if one of her freshmen had committed it, she said that she and the head of Lower Division English, Jim Kinneavy, were working on "a pedagogy based on exploratory discourse, appropriate for examining and generating context dependent arguments."

All along, and despite many accusations that the revisions represented a blatant attempt to turn the curriculum into a tool for political instruction, Brodkey and others in the English department who supported her proposed course argued that there was no thought at all on their part to use freshman composition as a means of insinuating a radical view of American society into the tender minds of Texas freshmen. When I visited her two years later during her last semester at Texas, Brodkey was emphatic on that point. She bridled at the accusation that students would have been judged on the political correctness of their ideas. Who, after all, could say that Supreme Court decisions, which would form the bulk of the readings, were radical documents? The subject matter proposed by Brodkey was interesting, important, vital. Students needed to learn to argue points about such sensitive matters as race and discrimination, but they could formulate whatever opinions they wanted about them, she argued. Her goal was to create an environment in which they could

formulate and express their views in a clear and compelling fashion—that's all.

"I agree that it's very political," she told me during my visit to Texas, "but not in the way people say it is. It doesn't require you to take any particular position. The purpose is to interrogate everything, including your own ideas. That's why we wanted the theme of difference. It was because we wanted a topic that was important to students and we know that students do this at 3:00 a.m., talking to people who are very like-minded. We wanted them to develop a public language for speaking about a set of issues that they will have to deal with."

Still, the minutes of a meeting of the Lower Division English Policy Committee on April 3 show that Brodkey and her supporters were thinking about multiculturalism as well as about writing skills. "The topic and text," Brodkey said, "would serve at least two important educational goals: first, the entire semester would be devoted to an examination of the difference between opinions and arguments; second, the course would contribute to the university-wide effort to integrate multicultural education into the undergraduate curriculum."

There was an additional element in Brodkey's original proposal that fueled skepticism over her ostensible disavowal of political indoctrination. She proposed to supplement the readings of court cases with a single textbook that would be mandatory in all E-306 classes—and which, indeed, she urged graduate students who would be teaching the class to read over the summer break. The text was *Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study*, by Paula Rothenberg, the head of the same New Jersey Project that we encountered in an earlier chapter. Even a cursory examination of her book would uncover a clear, eccentric, highly negative view of American life, one emphasizing many of the favorite themes of multiculturalist philosophy, especially the relentless victimization of women and people of color by the white-male power structure. Rothenberg begins with trendy definitions of the prevailing sins, especially that one we have seen cropping up in other debates: "racism = prejudice + power." Sexism, she says, "involves the subordination of women by men." Racism and sexism, those twin insignia of the American experience, are often conscious and intentional, of course, but they can more insidiously be unconscious and unintentional. Rothenberg argues, engaged in by people who passionately believe themselves to be neither.

"One assumption of this book," Rothenberg writes, "is that racism and sexism pervade American culture, that they are learned at an early age and reinforced throughout life by a variety of institutions and experiences that are part of growing up and living in the United States." In one section of her book, she introduces the concept of "oppression" to describe "the pervasive nature of sexism and racism." She speaks of "the profoundly comprehensive and personally crippling impact these two phenomena have on people's lives," and she then presents a series of essays that tend to support her assumptions. The first is a 1937 autobiographical sketch called "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," by Richard Wright, which is an evocative and powerful description of growing up black in the South and learning the rules of being a black person.

There are dozens of essays, a few of them excellent and important, like the excerpt from Wright, others tendentious and even badly written. Their cumulative effect, not surprisingly, is to depict America not as a place that has striven over the past few decades to knock down the barriers to equal opportunity and to change the way things were when Wright described them roughly fifty-five years ago, but as a place that wallows in such Stygian and unrelenting oppressiveness that it is hard to understand how the all-powerful white male racists and sexists failed to have Rothenberg's book burned and its author sent to prison, much less failed to prevent her from getting taxpayer funds from the New Jersey state legislature to work for the "integration" of feminist scholarship in the school curricula.

One characteristic essay in the book is "Racist Stereotyping in the English Language," by Robert B. Moore, which starts out with this premise: "If one accepts that our dominant white culture is racist, then one would expect our language—an indispensable transmitter of culture—to be racist as well." Moore goes on to give examples of "racist terminology," particularly in the connotations attached to the word "black," as in "blackguard," "blackball," "blackmail," and others whose origin, the author suggests, is in the negative view the dominant white society has of black people.

The article goes on in this vein and is certainly interesting, but it fails even to consider the possibility that there is an explanation of the phenomenon described other than the one based on racism. It does not deal with what would seem to be a crucial historical fact: that most of the words given as examples to prove the existence of contemporary

American racism predate the existence of contemporary American culture. It does not raise the possibility that the symbolism of "black" versus "white" could be naturalistic in origin, having to do with the dark of night and the light of day, rather than with the existence of racial difference. The Chinese language, for example, which evolved in a society with only one race, has similar connotations as English for the words "black" and "white"—black in particular appearing in such Chinese expressions as "black market," "black hand" (a metaphor for an evil person), and "black society" (a literal translation of the Chinese expression for criminal gang).

Still, despite the evident one-sidedness of these essays and of Rothenberg's accompanying explanations, the Lower Division English Policy Committee held a vote on the use of the Rothenberg text, and it passed 4 to 0, with one abstention.

The abstention was important. It was the first glimmer of resistance to the reform from an English department that would in all likelihood have sleepily approved of Brodkey's revision of E-306 had not a small band of dissidents blocked the way. One member of the committee, James Duban, a professor of nineteenth-century American literature and an experienced writing teacher, wondered in a note to Brodkey about the appropriateness of having a single text. Duban, who came to UT in 1977, is a native of Boston and a graduate of the University of Massachusetts who got his Ph.D. at Cornell in American intellectual and literary history. He is what might be called a classical academic liberal—tolerant, reasonable, cultivated, soft-spoken, deferentially polite but firm in his convictions. In his letter to Brodkey he showed appreciation for the "cordial tone of our discussion," but he contended that the graduate assistants who would teach E-306 should have a "variant text." Duban told Brodkey that another member of the committee, John Ruszkiewicz, who was a specialist in the teaching of writing, was unable to attend the committee meeting, but he also had reservations about the single text.

Ruszkiewicz is that rarest of all things in the Texas English department, a registered Republican who voted for George Bush in the 1988 election—though he says that that has no bearing on the way he teaches his course. He is a pale, courtly man who, when moved to the occasion, mines pure veins of eloquence. Two years after these early exchanges, I met with him in his office at UT and heard him give his reasons for opposing the Brodkey revisions:

This was a syllabus that I couldn't teach. Or, at least, there was nothing in all of these readings that I could teach except in an oppositional way. Students who were in the political center or to the right of center wouldn't find anything in that course that reflected their point of view, except for the Supreme Court dissenting opinions, which were rare. I asked: "Are there any readings in the Rothenberg book that are incompatible with each other?" and John Slatin [the committee deputy chairman and an ally of Brodkey] couldn't find one that was. So the students would have had a book in which all the opinions agreed with each other and a teacher who agreed with the book. What does the student do?

At this point Ruskiewicz shrugged over the obviousness of it all. Rare, he believes, is the eighteen-year-old freshman who would venture into independence in the face of all that authority. For Ruskiewicz there was a blatant absurdity in the situation, especially given the alleged purpose of freshman composition, which is to teach writing skills, not political ideas.

"All of the readings would have come from a single perspective in a course on argumentation and rhetoric!" he said. "They," he continued, meaning Brodkey, Slatin, and the other advocates of the new E-306 syllabus, "were unable, in a course called Writing About Difference, to come up with more than one perspective. They were apparently incapable of doing what they were asking their students to do.

"It was difference without diversity," Ruskiewicz said. "They had managed to take out all the differences with their point of view. This was stunning to me. Why didn't they allow one other book? The graduate students would mostly have chosen *Racism and Sexism* anyway, and they would have won, but they were so arrogant and so sure of themselves that they wouldn't allow a single other textbook."

That is true. In a memo to the Lower Division English Policy Committee, Ruskiewicz complained that "an anthology selected to raise the issue of 'difference' should itself demonstrate an awareness of 'difference.'" It should be a collection of essays "sufficiently diverse to challenge the assumptions of instructors and students alike." This was not the case with the Rothenberg text. Attached to Ruskiewicz's memo was a list of eight other readers that, he felt, "present a range of social/political issues for classroom discussion."

On April 15, a few days after the racial incidents at Phi Delta

Gamma and Tau Delta Tau had taken place, Brodkey responded to Ruskiewicz in a memo of her own. She reiterated that the value of the course lay in part in its contribution to "multicultural education," a need, she argued, that had been "underscored by recent events on campus, though I would hope that we do not require overt acts of racism to justify a course in which students would think, read, and write about civil rights, civil rights law, and civil rights cases." A couple of weeks later, on May 1, in a memo spelling out guidelines for the new E-306, Brodkey linked the study not just of difference but of racism and sexism to the encouragement in students of civility and respect for others.

"If students don't begin exploring racism and sexism in college classrooms, then I can't imagine where else in this country anyone is likely to learn how to broach these complex and critical issues—to say nothing of learning how to read, think and write critically about them," she said.

Actually, there are other places to learn how to deal with these complex and critical issues—by reading the newspapers, by going to work, by living in the world. Moreover, there are no doubt many things that students will most likely learn about only in college classrooms. Brodkey's memos indicated a view of the university as a place for the acquisition of certain perspectives on the world. At times her political agenda shone through her writing like a high-intensity searchlight. Attempting to answer objections to *Racism and Sexism*, she wrote: "I am not compelled by the argument that there are opinions and arguments that would provide a balance to the authors' or that other books would provide 'a wider and more challenging range of opinions.' That's true but moot." She did not choose the Rothenberg text, Brodkey said, because it included every possible point of view but because it was "a way to focus students and teachers on work that has been done on 'difference,' and to give them some time to think about how those who work on and/or live with inequity define, describe and analyze the problems they see."

One of the criticisms of the new theory of composition courses is that it has abandoned such matters as style, grammatical correctness, the poetry of language, on the grounds that such rules serve what is sometimes called a linear, patriarchal logic. And so it is worth noting here that Brodkey, in charge of a program to make better, more precise writers out of University of Texas freshmen, used the verbs "compelled" and "focus" in the dubious ways she did and repeated

the word "argument" within seven words of its first appearance in a sentence. It is strange to see a teacher whose very purpose is to show students ways to acquire rhetorical skills, fomenting a clunker like "those who work on and/or live with inequity." But it is unfair to single out Brodkey in this. She is one of many people at the universities who claim to be liberating us from stale orthodoxies of thought, but whose wooden language indicates that she is on a kind of rhetorical automatic pilot, failing to engage in the freshening self-interrogation she claims to want to encourage in students.

Beyond that, it is tempting to see in Brodkey's clumsy, bureaucratic prose a hint of her real purpose. Surely she had nothing against students becoming better writers. Still, it is interesting to see how little there is in her memos about teaching students the fundamentals of written expression, hardly anything about grammar and structure and the use of words. Perhaps teaching these things was taken for granted, and there was no need for Brodkey to say anything about such matters as usage and style. And yet in her reply to Ruskiewicz, it is the importance of the subject matter that took priority, as she declared that she wanted students to focus on "difference" and on "inequity" to the exclusion of everything else.

It should be noted that E-306 at Texas is taken only by the 40 percent of the entering class that fails to score high enough on a writing test to be excused from it. The course, in other words, is basically a remedial one, aimed at teaching students what they should already have learned in high school—namely correct forms of written expression. Freshman composition, in short, would seem to have a kind of second-class-citizen status among course offerings at Texas, not a program of study that would arouse powerful passions.

Why then did it tear the English department apart? This is not an easy question to answer. The first faculty members to oppose the Brodkey E-306 proposal, with its single-textbook, single-subject philosophy, did so not so much on the grounds that the single subject was a bad subject, or that its choice had been ideologically motivated, but that it was the only subject—and that this was, quite simply, not the best way to teach remedial writing. In August, for example, Jim Duban published an article entitled "A Modest Proposal" in the *Daily Texan* that outlined some of his pedagogical objections to the Brodkey proposal.

"I have come to feel," he said, "that the various *topics* that motivate students to write should receive only passing attention from the instructor, whose primary obligation is to offer freshmen intensive feedback about grammar, style, tone, form, cogency, organization and audience." Duban, in other words, felt that the single-subject approach was objectionable for more than political reasons, that any single subject or single text would have been objectionable. "Different students," he wrote, "sometimes feel inspired to do their best work when writing about different topics." Duban's seventeen years of experience in the teaching of writing, he said, led him to "see no value in politicizing freshman English by restricting the range of issues which students may be allowed to address."

In August 1990, Brodkey released a "tentative syllabus" for E-306: Rhetoric and Composition, Writing About Difference. It was a truly flimsy document, objectionable not only on political grounds, though on those grounds as well, but also on the grounds that there was not much in it. The syllabus covered fifteen weeks of activity. It had seven reading assignments, a couple of them ("How to Write a Review" and something called "MLA Documentation") seemingly nonpolitical. Two of the assignments were essays from the feminist-multiculturalist pantheon. One was an essay called "Making All the Difference," by Martha Minow, a leader in the field of feminist legal criticism; the other, "White Privilege and Male Privilege," by Peggy McIntosh, whose workshop on the "five phases of pedagogy" we saw in the previous chapter. There were additional essays on the struggle of blacks for civil rights (Richard Kluber's "The Spurs of Texas Are Upon You"), on disabled people (Richard Scotch, "Disability as the Basis for a Social Movement"), and on homosexuality (Donna I. Dennis and Ruth E. Harlow, "Gay Yourth [*sic*] and the Right to Education"), the latter two drawn from academic journals and, no doubt, not easy reading for the bottom two-fifths of the Texas freshman class. In addition, there were readings on court cases involving discrimination and civil rights. That was all—seven readings in fifteen weeks. As for writing, there were ten "script assignments," in which students were asked to write a fragment of an argument, to define a term, or to summarize a point in the readings, in fifty or one hundred words. Two of these script assignments concerned Minow; one, McIntosh; six had to do with the court cases. Finally, there were six "writing assignments," involving longer essays—three of them on Minow, one of them a book review, and two on cases of discrimination. There is

not a single word in this syllabus, not one, about problems in writing. It all has to do with the subjects about which the students will write.

In September, offering a "different approach" to E-306, Duban circulated, as a possible basis for an alternative to the Brodkey proposal, a thirteen-page syllabus that he had developed and used during his years as a writing teacher. It asked students to write "persuasive essays about topics of interest to you" or "about topics that I make available for your convenience." Different classes were given over to different techniques and problems involved in writing, like variety in sentences, excessive coordination, passive versus active voice, dangling modifiers, parallelism, wordiness, metaphors, stereotypes, triteness, and others. The class would read various essays, by writers such as Daniel Boorstin, Isaiah Berlin, Arthur Schlesinger, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Joan Kelly, both as examples of good writing and subjects of discussion, even as students wrote their essays and then revised them in light of comments Duban made on their first drafts. Duban's credentials to submit this syllabus were unassailable. In 1981, he had won a five-thousand-dollar President's Associates Teaching Excellence Award for the teaching of composition.

Duban and Ruskiewicz were not the only faculty members qualified to comment on the Brodkey proposal. Another member of the department with long experience and special knowledge as a composition teacher was Maxine Hairston, who was the coauthor with Ruskiewicz of a major textbook on writing. Hairston, unlike Ruskiewicz, was known as a liberal, and she was in favor of multicultural education, including a two-course requirement in what she called "cultural difference." But instruction in multiculturalism was not the purpose of freshman writing, she believed. Indeed, she said, it would be pedagogically harmful if made the center of composition.

Freshmen, Hairston argued in a letter to Meacham, the liberal-arts dean, are too concerned about their grades to express "thoughtful or honest" opinions on such matters as race and discrimination, "particularly if they believe the teacher would disagree with them." She felt that focusing on those subjects would also make minority students uncomfortable in class. They would, she wrote, "not relish having their lives and experiences written and talked about by other students whom they find naive and uninformed." The issues that Brodkey wanted to make the sole concern of the entire course are "extraordinarily complex social and psychological issues," Hairston wrote, and few English department faculty have had the time to develop "well

thought out presentations of the material." In short, helping students to become "independent thinkers and confident writers" cannot happen "in classrooms that are politically charged and intimidating to students new to the University."

Comparing the Duban syllabus and the tentative Brodkey syllabus is like comparing a bottle of aged first-growth Bordeaux with some acidic brew served in a plastic container. The fact that the departmental majority preferred that their students drink the latter rather than the former in itself suggests the all too common link between politicization and lowered academic quality. But the alternatives to the Brodkey syllabus were not merely rejected. The reaction against the reaction against Brodkey was, as we will see, one of nail-spitting fury, of an explosion of ad hominem attacks and of paranoid accusations about some vast right-wing conspiracy financed by the reactionary American establishment. It was, in short, a reaction utterly disproportionate to the arguments being made by the opponents of the Brodkey proposal. Why?

Initially, Duban, Ruskiewicz, and Hairston were arguing from the standpoint of pedagogy. And yet, the controversy over freshman composition stemmed from a deeper difference. At its root, the conflict involved a struggle between two intellectual universes at Texas that had been growing too big for each other for years. One of these universes, represented in large part by the younger faculty members and supported by the chairman of the department, was composed of new ideas that would challenge the status quo, which is characterized by what Rothenberg herself calls the "comprehensive systems of oppression" that operate in American life. In this universe, teaching students to write had become part and parcel of the New Consciousness, of the effort to visualize American society differently than before, to remake the American identity by removing the legitimacy of customary ideas about the country and its history.

As long as the ideas of the younger generation had been restricted to individual classrooms, to papers in the scholarly journals, and to symposia at the regional conferences of the Modern Language Association, the more traditional professors really didn't mind. There is no record that Duban, Ruskiewicz, Hairston, or Gribben, who, as we will see, was weighing in on the controversy in a more public way, ever opposed the feminist perspectives, the encouragement of cultural diversity, deconstruction, the New Historicism, or any of the other trends sweeping the MLA. Even when Brodkey and company

seemed to seize on freshman composition as a way of making their challenge to the status quo a standardized part of the curriculum, her opponents saw the issue as E-306 and E-306 alone. It was only slowly that some of them began to realize that something more than a single course was at stake and to understand that Brodkey, in fact, was a kind of emissary from a different world, which forced her opponents to constitute themselves as a universe in their own right.

It was the pro-Brodkey forces, including some in the English department and a few howling supporters outside of it, who saw in the Duban-Ruszkiewicz-Hairston-Gribben challenge something vastly more important than the fate of a single course. What happened was that the theretofore quiet, almost invisible, effort of the true believers to impose a tendentious political vision on the university was exposed to public view. And, put most simply, they responded, not by answering the pedagogical objections of their detractors, but by trundling out the multiculturalist art of warfare, whose first proposition is to win by portraying the enemy as the face of evil.

The scene was a panel discussion at the enormous convention of the Modern Language Association in San Francisco at the end of 1991. The panel, the second installment of a two-part series of panels, brought together perhaps fifty teachers of composition for a general discussion about many of the questions at issue at UT and elsewhere. Linda Brodkey, having gained fame from the controversy at Texas, was one of the panelists, but neither she nor any other member of the panel spoke a word during the two-hour session. The members of the audience spoke, prompted when one of them told the story of a homophobic paper he had received from one of his students.

The man who raised the issue announced that he was a homosexual and therefore personally affected by the student's offensive remarks. The question was: What to do in such a situation? Should the matter be brought up privately with the student? Should the paper be read in class for comment?

Various members of the audience at the MLA had different reactions to the problem of dealing with homophobic prejudice and hatred in the classroom. As the conversation wore on, however, a striking absence became (to borrow a rhetorical device quite trendy in the academy) present. While there was much said about combating racism, sexism, and homophobia, one thing that almost never came up

during the entire panel discussion was student writing and how to make it better. In his "Modest Proposal," Duban had warned that by focusing on writing topics, rather than the techniques of writing, the teachers of writing would fail to impart to their students the lessons that they really needed to succeed in life. The conversation at the MLA panel never touched on such matters as the poor writing of many college freshmen or ways to impart to students some sense of the beauty and power of language, of how to turn to advantage that remarkable instrument called English, enriched and refined over the course of centuries. All of the talk centered on politics—on how to combat the evils of society in writing classes.

What I had stumbled on, I learned later, was a meeting of the members of the club of what is sometimes called critical literacy. This accident led me to a new discovery when, a few weeks later, I arrived at the University of Texas to look into the battle over freshman composition. I realized that Linda Brodkey and her E-306 accomplices were in a sense a branch of a larger national movement implanted in Austin, one of whose major goals is to transform writing teachers into proselytes of the New Consciousness. What the composition teachers did was apply the social theories, mass-produced at places like the MLA, to the teaching of writing. Whereas in the good old days of freshman composition you learned classical form, organization, the hazards of dangling clauses, of mixed metaphors and malapropisms, of hackneyed phrases, of clichés, and of the need to use words like "compel" and "focus" correctly, now you would learn how writing itself is implicated in the struggle for power.

The operative term, "critical literacy"—a counterpart to what is called critical legal studies, which is very big at the Harvard Law School and other prestigious institutions—is a part of critical theory in general, that word "critical" another of the many code words adopted by the multiculturalist movement. Actually, "critical" means heavily influenced by the economic determinism of Karl Marx. The main notion of critical legal studies is that the law, while appearing to be a neutral and impartial set of rules, actually functions to help maintain the domination of society by the dominant group. Critical literacy holds that reading and writing do pretty much the same thing. Or as C. H. Knoblauch, a professor of English at the State University of New York at Albany, put it: it demonstrates "the extent to which people with authority to name the world dominate others whose voices they have been able to suppress."

Critical literacy was what some of the members of the Texas English department, previously so innocent of all of this, discovered once, propelled by the conflict over E-306 to go to the library to do academic combat, they started reading up on the main journals in the field of composition, *College English*, *Rhetoric Review*, *College Composition and Communication*. Nobody should be condemned to reading much of this stuff, which is turgid, repetitive, and extremely self-satisfied, but both John Ruskiewicz and Maxine Hairston, one a conservative, the other a liberal, eager to learn more about the new currents of thought wafting about their field, read through reams of it, each of them producing papers on the way the teaching of writing had been captured by politics. Ruskiewicz's is entitled "Critical Literacy and the New Forcers of Conscience." Hairston's is "Diversity, Ideology and Teaching Writing." Both mined many characteristic and incriminating nuggets from the literature in the field:

The context of writing is inescapably interactional and finally power structured or political.—Carolyn Ericksen Hill, Associate Professor of English and Director of the Center for the Teaching and Study of Writing, Towson State University, Maryland

The pursuit of self-evident and unquestioned goals in the composing process parallels the pursuit of self-evident and unquestioned profit-making goals in the corporate marketplace.—James Berlin, Professor of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

[We have to teach] an expanded notion of rhetoric that understands language as the site of struggle over socially produced meaning.—Lester Faigley, Director, Division of Rhetoric and Composition, University of Texas—Austin

All teaching supposes ideology; there simply is no value free pedagogy. For these reasons, my paradigm of composition is changing to one of critical literacy, a literacy of political consciousness and social action.—James Laditka, Instructor in Writing, Mohawk Valley Community College, Utica, New York

[Standard English is] an instrument of domination by the privileged.—James Sledd, Professor Emeritus, Department of English, University of Texas—Austin

It is of course reasonable—if that is what we believe—to try to inculcate into our students the conviction that the dominant order is repressive, that they should feel angered by the injustices

done to others, that an emancipatory vision should be formulated, and that its praxis should be exercised.—Charles Paine, Graduate Student, Department of English, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina

[Those of us] who try to make a pluralistic study of difference into a curriculum are calling students to the service of some higher good which we do not have the courage to name.—Patricia Bizzell, Professor of English and Director of the Writing Program, College of the Holy Cross

We can affirm the freedom to dissent radically in the classroom by refusing equal time to ruling powers.—James R. Bennett, Professor of English, University of Arkansas—Fayetteville

Those who occupy the best positions a discourse has to offer would have a vested interest in maintaining the illusion of speaking rather than being spoken by discourse.—Linda Brodkey

There is much plain boilerplate in this. These are the phrases that fill up the pages of Modern Language Association writing these days like boulders in a ditch. Fancy and specialized as the writing is, however, critical literacy is not very complicated. It means that language is not a neutral something that is available in equal measure to everybody, or even that it is consciously used and shaped by an author to reflect reality. Language is a creation of society that serves the holders of power, enabling them to maintain that power by controlling the very way in which thought and ideas are expressed—even while, of course, giving the impression that the way things are, the status quo, is entirely rational, inevitable. Thus, for example, the rules and regulations in writing that have traditionally been taught mirror the rules and regulations of a society dominated by white men. The grammar of language mirrors the grammar of political hierarchy. As Ruskiewicz summed it up: "Traditional writing instruction can only reproduce the status quo." It inhibits change, keeps women and minorities in their inferior places, favors that "linear, patriarchal logic," which is really only the logic of the dominant class, race, and gender.

The idea seems ridiculous on the face of it, since the great historic challenges to power and authority have been based on the same mastery of language and rhetoric that, the critical theorists hold, perpetrates the power of the dominant culture. One of the reasons for the triumph of Martin Luther King, Jr., is that he was a better

rhetorician than his opponents. Still, all you have to do is leaf through the pages of the journals in the field of writing and you will see the critical literacy argument everywhere. Open, for example, to the first article in the first *College English* of 1990, and you will see "The Sublime and the Vulgar," by Karen Swann, identified in the article as an assistant professor of English at Williams College. Swann has clearly mastered the standard MLA prose style, whose purpose, in my somewhat-jaundiced view, is to show the writer's profundity by the use of a very complex and elusive jargon, sentences like: "But the discourse on the sublime promotes an anti-critical, affective mode of engagement with power which turns a perception of the arbitrariness of things to the advantage of at least certain representational forms, as the subject becomes oriented to the shape or figure for its own sake, in the register of aesthetics." Swann, I think, is saying that the ruling class uses the idea of standards as a way of maintaining their power against what they see as the vulgar masses—the masses these days being, says Swann, "the feminists, minorities and Marxists."

In the next volume of the journal, a piece on black women writers reminds us of an article of faith: even if black women writers sometimes portray black men as violent, as rapists, as criminals, we should all remember that "the ultimate source of black women's oppression is white racism, which also victimizes black men." That may be true, but what is it doing in *College English*? A regular section of the journal is called "NCTE to You," NCTE being the National Council of Teachers of English, which publishes *College English*. The notes in the first issue of 1991 are devoted to excerpts from speeches at an NCTE conference in Baltimore, held in November 1989.

The first speech excerpted is by Anne E. Berthoff of the University of Massachusetts, her subject being "Paulo Freire's Liberation Pedagogy." Here is a brief spark from a large flame. Freire, a Brazilian campaigner for peasant literacy who was once exiled from his country for fourteen years by the military government, is the author of a book called *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which serves as a cult classic for the advocates of critical literacy. Freire believed, as Berthoff points out, that it was not enough to teach oppressed peasants to read, because if they merely read the discourses of the dominant culture, they would be unable to liberate themselves from their oppressed position. They had, as Berthoff puts it, to be taught "words directly connected to peasants' everyday survival concerns." By doing so,

Freire "involved them in talking and thinking about their situation—acts which led them to discover that their misery was not God's Will."

Berthoff is explicit in her belief, which seems, judging from NCTE, to be widely accepted, that writing teachers in the United States should, as she puts it, "adapt Paulo Freire's theory and practice to our own courses," there being, it would seem, no qualitative difference in the condition of feminists, minorities, and Marxists in American society and the oppressed peasantry of South America. Berthoff says: "We have ways of transforming our society which are neither violent nor millennial." The important thing in this work of transformation is "To see to it that cultural literacy is not equated with lists of facts." No, "liberation pedagogy," she says, means "reading the world and reading the word." It means that literacy must be united with a "consciousness of consciousness," meaning, it would seem, an awareness of oppression and the need to do something about it.

Other speeches: the poet June Jordan tells the conferees that the universities are places that reflect the "national power structure" and are, as *College English* summarizes it, "out of touch with the needs of a racially and culturally diversifying citizenry." Jordan is quoted as saying that universities were deemed to be good insofar as they were unicultural. "The more people your standards of admission could reject, the more people of cultures . . . other than your own that you could exclude from your core curriculum or patronize, the better the school," she says. Having a good education meant knowing *King Lear* but nothing about "the prayers, chants . . . the unified perspectives of Native Americans." But, she confirms, times are changing, since "some of us have looked into the future, and we have seen that the future will not be white, or spoken or written in standard English."

A lot of this, both the speeches and the scholarly articles, involves a kind of applied Marxism, the creation of a connection between what Marx called the structure and the superstructure. The structure in this case is the power of the white race and the male sex; the superstructure is the language, the grammar, the rhetorical methods used to maintain that power. This is true. The analysis of the use of language as an instrument of social order is not far-fetched; nor is it original. Incorrect grammar excludes people just as bad manners do. It was not an accident (as the Marxists, including current Marxists, love to say) that slaves were prevented from learning to read and write. George Orwell's Newspeak is a language of totalitarian control, and

so is the language of China's *People's Daily*, and so too was the use of Latin rather than the vernacular as the language of literature in medieval Europe. Newspeak and the *People's Daily* channel thought, limit consciousness, anesthetize the brain. Medieval Latin limited access to knowledge, kept it in the hands of the reigning theocrats.

What is actually kind of funny is the failure of the critical theorists to see the extent to which they are the ones now captured by a thought-channeling jargon, how their corrugated-iron constructions imprison them in petrified dogma, utterly unattached to any actual experience of the world. Still, it is not difficult to see the simplistic appeal of the theories of critical literacy in contemporary America. They provide an explanation, a startling vision of the world for those who feel that they have been excluded from the full benefits of American life, or who feel that they have suffered from prejudice. The problem with the theory of critical literacy is not that it is entirely wrong and useless. The problem is that, like so much of the multiculturalist thrust, far too much is made of a few useful insights. They are stretched too thin, stated with exaggeration, immoderation, proclaimed to explain everything, and brought into the service of an eccentric, certainly disputable, vision of the nature of American life whose main premise, only modestly caricatured here, is that there is little to distinguish late-twentieth-century America from eleventh-century theocracy.

No doubt, the students in the bottom two-fifths of the class at Texas need help writing with greater power, with more imagination, with more accuracy. Anyone who has seen freshman writing might assume that freshmen need help with the basics—bad grammar, incorrect word usage, wordiness, clumsiness of expression, prefabricated jargon that substitutes for thought itself—more than with some radical vision of American society. They also, frankly, need to know why it is more helpful, especially when time is limited and choices have to be made, to know *King Lear* than Native American chants. To assure them that their nonstandard English is just as good as standard English is to doom them to a cruel fate, because once they get out of college, they will find that it is not as good—even if the tenured, salaried, retirement-pensioned, and medically insured teachers who inculcated them with that nonsense still have their positions at the university.

"I and other professors across campus see an inconsistency be-

tween imbuing students with a hope for economic and political equality of opportunities while denying these students a foundation of writing skills essential for success," Duban wrote in his "Modest Proposal."

Put another way, students need to be taught the tools of success to rise up in the lousy patriarchal hierarchy of American life if they are to avoid continuing to be its victims. Anybody who wants to empower them will teach them how to outdo the patriarchy at its own game. That is how the excluded have always succeeded in American life, by slugging it out in the ring of achievement, and prevailing over an establishment too decadent, too complacent, too well fed for the fight. To tell students that the key to empowerment is to demand respect from the dominant culture is to deceive them.

In May 1990, months before the debates about E-306 became public, a bombshell landed in the middle of the Texas English department. It was in the form of an article in *Texas Monthly* by Gregory Curtis, who is now the magazine's editor, in which he asked, "Did you hear about the party with the flag burning?"

Curtis explained, by way of background, that the English department is one of the largest and most powerful at UT precisely because students from all departments have to take courses in it to graduate. He reviewed its recent history, its division into two groups—one made up of "older and more established professors who believe in traditional literature and traditional teaching," the other comprising younger people "who see in literature a 'tool of oppression,' as a typical phrase goes, and teaching as a way of proselytizing for their gender, their race, or their radical—most often specifically Marxist—political beliefs."

The younger members of the faculty, Curtis wrote, had a party at the end of the previous spring term at which each person was supposed to bring something Texan to burn. In the background of this was the emotional debate then taking place on the Supreme Court's decision affirming the constitutionality of flag burning. Indeed, here and there across the country American flags were being burned in celebration of the Court's action. And so at that junior faculty party, a fire was started around midnight on the street outside the home of the host. Texas road maps were thrown into the fire. Some graduate

students contributed papers by professors they did not like. Finally, as Curtis described it, "in went a Texas flag, which, despite some determined but comical efforts, would not burn completely."

The flag burning was only one incident that Curtis cited in an article not intended to portray the English department radicals in a favorable light. The attitude that led faculty members to engage in acts of anti-Texas symbolism governed classroom teaching as well, he wrote. He reported on one student known to him who signed up for a sophomore survey of literature, another UT requirement, to find the professor announcing that the students in her section of the course would "read only the works of women from developing countries." Then, describing an incident that had aroused much talk in the English department, he mentioned the Hispanic professor who, as a member of the English department executive committee, tried to have his own sister, getting her Ph.D. at Texas, hired for a full-time job on the Texas English faculty. The University of Texas does not hire its own graduate students, so the sister was rejected, whereupon the Hispanic professor claimed that the refusal had been made for political and ideological reasons. A special meeting of the entire department was held "to try to avert any charges of racism."

It was into this harmonious environment that Alan Gribben entered the nascent controversy about E-306. Indeed, in his article, Curtis seemed to have had Gribben in mind when he described "an intense whisper campaign that has now spread outside the University of Texas to other schools" centering on a professor, unnamed by Curtis, "who is hardly racist or sexist in any rational meaning of those words."

A couple of years earlier, Gribben had been the only faculty member to vote against the proposed creation of a master's program in ethnic and Third World literatures, an ideological crime that had unleashed the first accusations of his alleged sexism and racism. Up to that point, Gribben, who was forty-nine years old in 1990, had had an entirely solid and respectable academic career. In a world where publishing in scholarly reviews is the most important criterion for success, he had clearly done well. His list of books, articles, and conference papers is a closely spaced six and a half pages. He is the author of the two-volume *Mark Twain's Library: A Reconstruction*, along with thirty-six scholarly articles and twenty-four book reviews, many of them on Twain. In the two years leading up to his political problems in the department, Gribben, as he put it in a letter to his

chairman, "earned a 92 percentile rating in the College exit surveys of students." It seems hard to believe that members of a major department of the humanities where, supposedly, the values of tolerance and respect for difference are being taught would embark on a campaign of innuendo and ostracism over a simple negative vote regarding a new M.A. program, but that is exactly what Gribben says happened.

Minutes of the meetings on the Third World course indicate that Gribben wanted to have two votes, one on the Ph.D., which he favored, and one on the M.A., which he opposed. His argument was that the master's degree was too low a level for that degree of specialization. Students, he argued, should be better grounded in the American and European canon before venturing down less explored paths. He also thought, as he once wrote to me, that the pairing of "Third World" with American "ethnic" literature was "amateurish." Certainly that combination, though almost universally accepted, is more a political demand that all of the "oppressed" forms of expression be put into the same category, than a conclusion regarding some essential commonality between the two.

In any case, thoughtful as Gribben's objections to the course were, some of those dwelling in the superheated atmosphere of the UT English department saw them as nothing less than a right-winger's fury at the invasion of the New Consciousness, at the audacity of putting ethnic and Third World literature on the same plane as the classics of European and American books. But there is no indication that the scholar of Mark Twain (he who remarked "Soap and education are not as sudden as a massacre, but they are more deadly in the long run") held to such outmoded views. And, in any case, as Gribben well knew it would be, the entire proposal, including the M.A., was adopted by a vote of 41 to 1. (As Huck Finn might have put it: "Hain't we got all the fools in town on our side? and ain't that a big enough majority in any town?")

What happened as a result of Gribben's sole negative vote is a matter of one person's word against another's. Gribben says that his ostracism began. It was then that anonymous pieces of hate mail appeared in all of the 274 mailboxes in the English department. His salary increases for two years were 0.75 percent a year. His graduate students, he says, were pressured into dropping him as their dissertation adviser. Some of Gribben's faculty colleagues, like Duban and Ruskiewicz, confirm that Gribben was indeed shunned, that many people became frightened even to be seen talking to him in the

corridors of the English department. After about a year, Gribben decided to appeal to his colleagues for an end to his pariahdom, and he begged for mercy at a meeting of the Graduate Studies Committee, of which he was a member. Immediately afterward, he and his wife, a Chinese-American named Irene Wong, and his two children all went to the Christmas-season holiday buffet. "It was like walking into an iceberg," Gribben said. "Irene saw how people stepped back from me and turned away. We laid our plates down and walked out, and as we did so, the crowd opened up to make way for us, as though we were lepers."

"I don't know if you've ever seen anybody cut out from the herd," Gribben told me. "You can take it for a few weeks, but after a while, you just can't take it anymore."

Perhaps if Gribben really was a conservative, his treatment would have pained him less. The fact that he viewed himself as a liberal, as someone repelled by the very idea of the right wing, made his punishment even harder to bear. And so in plaintive memos of five, six, or more pages, each written to the dean, Standish Meacham, and to Joseph Kruppa, the English department chairman, Gribben catalogs the injustices being done, asks for redress, recounts his liberal history.

"Believe it or not," he writes in one memo, he was arrested during an incident he refers to as the "Third World Strike" at Berkeley when he was a graduate student there in the 1960s. At Berkeley too he was chosen to "mentor" the new African-American teaching assistants, "owing to my reputation as someone unusually sympathetic to their needs." And now, he says, "here I sit, as the 1990's dawn, with my departmental and community image in shreds, cast as a supposed enemy of the very causes and people I have championed." In another letter, he recounts how one student "came to me in tears and reported that she was 'under so much pressure' from graduate students and faculty members that she would have to replace me as her Ph.D. dissertation supervisor." He says that his reputation as a sexist and a racist, built up through innuendo and rumor, pursued him when, finding his ostracism at Texas intolerable, he began to look for employment elsewhere. "Numerous schools," he said, put him on a short list of candidates "and then mysteriously dropped my candidacy at the point of inquiring among my present colleagues about my departmental reputation." At one midwestern school, he reports, following tele-

phone calls to Texas, some female members of the department threatened to quit if Gribben was hired.

Kruppa, when I visited him in Austin, gave me a prepared statement on Gribben portraying his claims of persecution as unfounded. Kruppa addressed the claim that Gribben's graduate students had been pressured into abandoning him. He didn't have many graduate students in the first place, no more before his negative vote than after, Kruppa said. The department chairman's statement is a three-page typewritten manuscript with an additional three pages of supporting documents (principally an account of Gribben's teaching load from 1983 to 1991, showing that his academic duties continued more or less as they had been before the famous vote) attached. There is nothing in it about rumors and innuendo, about low salary increases, about charges of racism and sexism or being shunned in the hallways. Gribben, Kruppa said, tried to "elevate one person's skewed vision of the world into a general principle, into an evaluation of a complex and varied English department." Along the way he "has tarnished the reputation of a fine department and the hardworking individuals within it."

Kruppa's arguments notwithstanding, it is certainly a little odd that a scholar could have an untroubled tenure in a department for fifteen or sixteen years and then suddenly, with a single vote, run into serious trouble. But as the *Texas Monthly* pointed out, Gribben was living in a rapidly changing environment, during which time what might be called the MLA liberation army was sending its cadres out to the hinterlands to spread the message of poststructuralism, of feminist scholarship in its several varieties, of the new historicism, social constructionism, gay and lesbian studies, Marxism, ethnic and Third World studies—in short, all of the various regiments in the army of ideological multiculturalism. The new Ph.D.'s coming up in the best universities tended to be in these new fields, so the hiring at Texas was decidedly in the direction of the New Consciousness.

Since 1985, twenty-four new faculty members were hired in the English department. Nineteen of them, by one insider's analysis, belong to one or another of the schools of thought in what might be called the MLA cult. "If you go out to the best graduate schools and hire the candidates that most people are after, they're going to be working on the cutting edge, not on the things I was working on in graduate school, which would be anachronisms now," Kruppa told

me, adding that when he was in graduate school in the 1960s doing a dissertation on John Donne, he had never heard of deconstruction, didn't know that there was such a thing as feminist criticism or other "new critical approaches." The field, he said, is much more exciting now. There has been "a very healthy transformation of the profession." He is heartened by the "different voices being heard now," by the "discourses that we simply didn't hear when I was in graduate school." But it would be a mistake, he said, to characterize the Texas English department as leftist. "The department is famous for its diversity in the fullest sense of the word," he said. "There are some people on the extreme left and a few on the extreme right, but most of the faculty falls into the large middle," Kruppa said. "I think the nature of the department has been seriously misrepresented by the opponents of E-306, especially by one person," he concluded.

That "one person" was Gribben, who, having learned of the new proposed E-306, and not concurring with Kruppa about the great "diversity" of the Texas English department, saw in it a politically motivated assault on the humanities in the making. His eye, like others, caught on the title of that single textbook recommended by Linda Brodkey, *Racism and Sexism*. Gribben was also concerned that the new course, which was a university-wide requirement, was being rushed through by the English department without the usual scrutiny by the curriculum committees or the creation of trial sections that, in his experience, accompanied even lesser changes than the one being proposed for E-306.

Important in this is that in May, a month or so after Brodkey's original memo, Kruppa and Brodkey had put out a press release to the local Texas media announcing the new course and its philosophy. Even though E-306 was a university-wide requirement, there had, at this point, not even been a vote on the course by the entire English department faculty, much less the full faculty senate. Nonetheless, there were Brodkey and her chairman already announcing publicly that from now on students in E-306 "will read and write about landmark court decisions on civil rights and affirmative action." The Rothenberg text will provide "supplementary readings" in order, Brodkey was quoted as saying, "to steady students with respect to the topic of difference."

In the past, the press release said, students might read George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" one week, and then "write a persuasive essay on colonialism"; another week they might read Ralph Waldo

Emerson's "Gifts" and then write an essay on the author's "literary technique." The problem with that old approach, the press release said, was that the various essays had "no thematic relation." The new course will have a common theme, Kruppa announced in the press release, but the change is also a "side effect" of "the ever-increasing necessity for Americans to understand the social implications of differences in race, ethnic background, age, gender, sexual preference and religion."

Kruppa and Brodkey seemed aware of some criticisms that might be leveled at the new course, in particular that it might, as they put it in the press release, be seen as "an indoctrination to the liberal point of view" and that students will lose something in the removal of those classic essays that used to make up the readings in the course. In fact, in proclaiming the "side effect" element in their proposed revision, Kruppa and Brodkey implied that "the liberal point of view" certainly did guide the proposed change. Still, they hastened to deny what they had just implied. There would be no indoctrination, said Brodkey. "The question that will be addressed in this class is not 'What is your position on racism or sexism?' but 'What do you have to support your argument?'" And as for the classic old essays, she contended, nothing will be lost. "I don't think anybody's going to miss those old saws at all," she was quoted as saying, presumably referring to such "old saws" as "Shooting an Elephant" (my own point of view on this is that every paragraph of "Shooting an Elephant" is worth vastly more than the collected works of Paula Rothenberg).*

An obvious question could certainly be raised at this point, namely: What could be more important than showing students in a writing course just how good writing can be? What could be better than inspiring them with a few great examples of argumentation and style? Brodkey's casual dismissal of the likes of Orwell and Emerson and her apparent preference for academic cant shows her to have a certain tin ear when it comes to literature. Still, while it is hard to see any value in her position on the "old saws," she does hit upon a truth with regard to indoctrination. After all, even eighteen-year-olds, while perhaps not very knowledgeable about the major civil rights decisions of the Supreme Court, are not tabulae rasae on which any extremist ideology can be inscribed at will. Students are pretty savvy at detecting efforts at indoctrination. Brodkey herself makes

*Is it belaboring a point to note that a "saw" refers to a proverb, a piece of conventional wisdom, not to a classic essay like "Shooting an Elephant"?

this point. Talking with me in 1992, she said, "It's naive to think that people twelve years of age or older believe anything just because you say it to them."

The fact remains, however, that a student's ability to resist indoctrination does not justify your effort to go ahead and try to indoctrinate anyway. All the freshmen in Brodkey's E-306 would have had to support their arguments was the stuff in Paula Rothenberg's putative sociology text along with, presumably, the unbiased opinions of the acolytes of critical literacy who volunteered to teach the new course. Students were not going to be freely expressing themselves on Sunday afternoon football or Communist oppression but on racism and sexism. Beyond that, as one law professor at Texas, Douglas Laycock, who reviewed the cases included in Brodkey's syllabus, noted: "If the reading materials and the instructor are entitled to a particular view, it is illusory to say that the bottom half of our freshman class will be able to create good arguments for a different view."

Gribben noted all of this about E-306, but he acknowledges that his decision to step into the debate was also accompanied by a hope: that by calling attention to the way things were being done in the English department with E-306, he might get senior administrators to see that that was the way things had been done to him after his vote on the Ethnic and Third World Literatures program and maybe to use their power and influence either to end his ostracism or to transfer him to another UT campus. And so, on June 18, 1990, he took a fateful step. He had a short, three-paragraph letter published in the *Daily Texan* in which he declared that "without even pausing for a vote," the English department "will start explaining to presumed benighted UT students how they ought to feel about issues of ethnicity and feminism."

"After I wrote the letter to the *Texan*, I really thought they would say 'Let's talk,'" Gribben told me—"they" being Kruppa and other administrators who, up to that point, had ignored his pleas for help. "I really had the sense that it might open things up," he said, his tone that of a man who now recognizes the foolishness of his optimism. "I thought it might bring them to the point of saying, 'Let's talk about your situation. Let's talk about the department.' But it didn't."

And when it didn't, Gribben decided a week later to send a second letter, this one to the local newspaper, the *Austin American-Statesman*, which in May had run an article on the new E-306 based on the Kruppa-Brodkey press release and had followed that up with

an editorial praising the new course. "The largest required course at the University of Texas at Austin—English E-306, rhetoric and composition—has now fallen prey to the current mania for converting every academic subject into a politicized study of race, class and gender," he wrote. He mentioned Rothenberg's "slanted sociology textbook." And he reported that students "will begin having their social attitudes as well as their essays graded by English Department instructors in what has to be the most massive effort at thought-control ever attempted on the campus."

It is fair to say that from this point on and for the next year or so the English department at UT became a battleground. One element intensifying the conflict was the national press coverage that freshman composition got at UT. The *New York Times* ran a stringer's piece in its weekly "Campus Talk" section that gave a straightforward account of the controversy. In September, the nationally syndicated columnist George Will lambasted E-306 as an illustration of a nationwide phenomenon—"political indoctrination supplanting education." Along the way, there were sarcastic articles about E-306 by John Leo in *U.S. News and World Report* and by Jonathan Yardley in the *Washington Post*, Yardley praising Gribben for his "courage" and terming Brodkey's plan for E-306 "a consciousness-raising indoctrination in politically correct attitudes toward racism and sexism and any other ism that might happen along."

Well before this national press attention, several developments came in rapid succession at UT. First, the Rothenberg text was dropped. Kruppa explained the decision to the press this way: "A lot of people had trouble with the book because it had weak material and we were only going to use a small part of it." In her conversations with me, Brodkey explained matters differently: "We dropped the Rothenberg book because of the difficulty of coordinating the readings with the court cases," she said. Kruppa told the press that a new syllabus would be developed for E-306 that would retain the Writing About Difference idea. There would, he said, be a packet of materials, including court cases, a few essays from the Rothenberg book, and some other, as yet unspecified readings.

Whatever the reason for dropping Rothenberg, the fact is that by then other faculty in other parts of the university (whose students would also have had to take the revised E-306) were letting senior administration officials know that they saw the course as biased. And so dropping the Rothenberg text, which happened at the end of June,

was a way of chopping off the most blatantly political branch of the proposed composition program without really changing its essential political thrust. Still, in mid-July, fifty-six members of the UT faculty published a petition in the *Texan* complaining that the proposed E-306, even with the Rothenberg textbook taken out, "distorts the fundamental purpose of a composition class." Some of the departments unhappy about the new course let it be known that they would teach their own writing classes rather than have students attend what they saw as mandatory political-sensitivity training in E-306.

On July 24, 1990, Dean Meacham, responding to these pressures, announced that the new E-306 would be postponed for one year to allow more time for debate. Meacham had earlier been a supporter of the course, though he supported it in principle and had not actually known of its precise contents. He announced his decision after a meeting at which the university's president, William Cunningham, was also present, along with Joseph Kruppa. One person at the meeting said that the president made it clear that the senior administration at Texas was not ready to do battle with an aroused public, skeptical alumni, and a dubious faculty on that particular issue.

But the postponement—which was seen at the time as exactly that, a postponement, not a cancellation—hardly put the E-306 matter to rest. Indeed, Brodkey was still the chairperson of the Lower Division English Policy Committee, and she continued to work on her revisions. She produced her proposed syllabus for the course even after Meacham's decision, figuring that it would be put into effect the following year. The English department itself was still powerfully influenced by the advocates of the New Consciousness, and just as equally as ever distrusted by the traditionalists. Meacham's interference with the English department's autonomy to decide the content of its own courses was highly unusual. It was to be the basis for the counterattack by the supporters of E-306, who began soon to contend that a vicious, well-financed conspiracy by the extreme right had intimidated the university administration into capitulating to the critics of E-306, thereby violating standard academic procedures and posing a threat to academic freedom. Indeed, the fact is that the most intense and outrageous part of the battle was about to begin.

For some months in the fall and winter of 1990 a small cutout of a paid advertisement in the *Daily Texan* was kept on display in a glass

case outside the English department office. It was a petition published in the newspaper and signed by forty members of the English department faculty, including Chairman Kruppa. The first paragraph of this document, entitled "A Statement of Academic Concern," reads as follows:

WE, the undersigned members of the English faculty, protest the continuing attacks on the professional integrity of Professor Linda Brodkey and other members of the Lower Division English Policy Committee. We take particularly strong exception to Geoff Henley's ungrounded speculations (*Daily Texan* 10/10/90) about Professor Brodkey and the Committee's motives in proposing the revised syllabus for English 306. We deplore and condemn ad hominem attacks and misrepresentation at the expense of genuine intellectual debate.

This collective response to a student journalist's article in the *Texan* is certainly a strange document—strange not only because of the last sentence, which does not actually mean what the forty professors of English apparently want to say. More important, here is roughly half of the faculty of a major academic department not only bothering to defend a colleague against a student's attack and to chastise the student for what they regard as an intemperate expression of opinion, but then displaying that chastisement for months in a glass case, as though it were a copy of the university's treasured Gutenberg Bible. It happens that a couple of months earlier, James Duban, the American literature specialist who was among the first to protest the Brodkey revisions, was embroiled in a scandal that helps to put the faculty's response to Henley in perspective.

Duban, who struck me as a mild, polite, entirely temperate person, happily married to Karen Duban and the devoted father of their three children, was accused by a female faculty member of sexual harassment. It happened this way: Duban had seen a petition that was being circulated in the English department in which the signers, again including Kruppa, had deplored the "unprofessional manner" in which opponents of Writing About Difference had "misrepresented the substance and aims of the course." Duban was upset over those words "unprofessional" and "misrepresented," which he felt, as an opponent of the new course, made him out to be both lacking in dignity and a liar. The document was, he understood, being circulated

for signatures, and so he tried to call its sponsors to let them know of his concern. He left a message on Ramon Saldivar's answering machine, Saldivar being one of the people circulating the petition.

Duban waited to hear from Saldivar, but when he had not done so by around ten-thirty or eleven o'clock that night, he called the home of a married couple, both of whom were on the English faculty and both of whom were also involved in the petition. This was Kurt and Susan Heinzelman, enthusiastic backers of the new E-306. Duban says that he apologized for the lateness of the call and asked if he could speak to both of them on the phone at the same time, but Susan Heinzelman replied that her husband was not feeling well and could not come to the phone. Duban and Ms. Heinzelman then talked for some minutes and Duban warned her that if the petition as it then read was published, he would consider it defamatory and libelous and would take whatever steps he could to protect his reputation. Then a couple of weeks later, Susan Heinzelman was quoted in the *Texan* accusing Duban of sexual harassment. Heinzelman's argument: "When a full professor calls up an untenured lecturer who's a woman at 11 o'clock on a Friday night and threatens her with a libel suit, that's sexual harassment."

When I asked Susan Heinzelman about this accusation, she said that the *Daily Texan* reporter, who also called her up rather late at night, had misquoted her. She had said "harassment," not "sexual harassment," she told me, arguing that when a full tenured professor threatens a junior nontenured professor with a lawsuit, harassment is taking place. She added that her being a woman did have something to do with the charge. "I felt that gender played a part in it," she said. "Harassment is in part constituted by the difference in power between one gender and another."

Heinzelman, who made no public effort to rectify the misquotation at the time, seems to be saying that what Duban did was indeed sexual harassment; it's just that she did not call it that. In any case, I asked others about the sexual harassment charge, and the argument in general was that since Duban outranked Heinzelman and could thus cause her damage in her career at Texas, the accusation of sexual harassment was justified. Duban was creating a "hostile environment" for a woman, and according to one of the criteria established by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, that alone supports the accusation of sexual harassment. This, for example, was the way Brodkey explained the matter when I raised it with her. So did

Kruppa. Neither of them seemed to have been informed of the fact that Heinzelman had been misquoted in the newspaper and had not made a sexual harassment charge at all.

The incident, which upset Duban greatly, came across to me as a standard element in the English department's response to the critics of the revised E-306. Here after all was Duban with seventeen years of experience teaching composition and the author of "A Modest Proposal," which had politely questioned the proposed new course for its pedagogical inadequacies—and what was the response of his colleagues? Rather than reply to his arguments, they seized an opportunity to let fly one of those charges of sinfulness that have the same effect on campuses these days as charges of being a Communist or a fellow traveler had two generations ago. In short, they smeared him. And, of course, that is what forty members of the English department did with Geoff Henley also, though instead of accusing him of sexual harassment, they labeled him as the purveyor of a more general sort of sleaze.

I asked Kruppa: If Duban was guilty of sexual harassment against Heinzelman, what kind of harassment was involved when forty professors publicly and in print and over a period of several months attacked a mere undergraduate?

Kruppa's answer was twofold. First, he said, a full professor has more power over a lecturer than a group of professors has over an undergraduate. This, I agree, is technically true. The undergraduate is not seeking a salary increase or tenure. Still, I am not sure how many twenty-year-olds would be entirely unfazed by the mass attack of the better part of an entire department. It did seem to me that Henley might have felt the English department to be a hostile environment.* Then Kruppa, a stylish, trim man in his fifties, with longish hair and a graying upside-down "U" of a mustache, said that to understand the faculty's response to Henley you merely needed to see how nasty his articles were. "Read his pieces," Kruppa told me. "They are not argumentative pieces. They are vicious personal attacks. The ones on me I didn't respond to because they were so scummy."

Well, I did read the Henley piece that elicited the faculty's petition against him. It begins with a summary of the Nigerian playwright

*Henley, it so happens, was unfazed. I met him for lunch at a student hangout, and he generally laughed off the English department members. I told him that Kruppa had assured me that the department had great "diversity." Henley's reply: "Oh, yeah, they're very diverse. They've got Marxists, deconstructionists, five varieties of feminists, new historicists, ethnic studies, and Third World studies types—very diverse!"

Wole Soyinka's *Play of Giants* (a nice multicultural touch, I thought), in which Soyinka parodies African dictators for wanting to place a giant statue of themselves at the entrance to the United Nations and then brutalizing "those who do not support their cause or admire their statue." Soyinka might have had Brodkey and her restructuring of E-306 in mind, Henley says, given that she "is imposing her own image to glorify the efforts of marginal factions." Brodkey, Henley writes, has waged "a campaign transcending dishonesty." Given the "incredibly biased nature of the readings," a student would have to be "incredibly brave" to dissent from the views presented in the course, he says. "No one would want to risk being labeled a racist or misogynist."

Whether or not this article was "vicious" and "scummy" is perhaps a matter of opinion, though I must say that I found it to be a pretty good piece of rhetorical expression. In fact, Henley's article represented something of a minority point of view in the student press, which was generally critical, not of Brodkey, Kruppa, and their supporters, but of Gribben, Duban, and Ruszkiewicz. During the summer, Gribben had been denounced at a campus rally called by the president of the student body to protest his opposition to the new E-306. According to the *Texan*, one member of the faculty, Kim Emory, spoke at the rally about "Gribben and company's hyperbolic and hypocritical attacks" on E-306. Another member of the English department, Barbara Harlow, said: "We need to recognize that there are academic death squads operating on our campus." It should be noted that Harlow signed the anti-Henley petition, a document that called for "genuine intellectual debate."

That was only the beginning of the assault on Gribben and company's integrity, motives, and professionalism. A student publication, *The Polemicist*, published a lengthy account of the E-306 affair called "Chronicle of a Smear Campaign: How the New Right Attacks Diversity," in which Gribben and others are accused of "hysteria," of perpetrating "diatribes," of being "wild-eyed," et cetera, none of which moved any of the English department defenders of "genuine intellectual debate" to complain about ad hominem attacks against some of their own. The faculty members who engaged in the debate on the side of E-306 gave some good examples of viciousness and scumminess of their own. In an article in the *Daily Texan*, a philosophy professor, Douglas Kellner, wrote an attack on the attackers of E-306, the first two paragraphs of which contain these phrases: "the reactionary right," "a well-orchestrated right-wing offensive," "a few conservative

English professors," and "a national right-wing group." The epithets "right wing" and "reactionary right," applied to people who, in an America of Patrick Buchanan, David Duke, and the Moral Majority, could be considered right wing only in the context of a university, appeared thirteen times in an article of nineteen short paragraphs. So did the phrase "McCarthyist tactics" and "thought police," a manner of expression that was deemed "vicious" when it appeared as "thought control" in one of Alan Gribben's letters. When the original plan to implement a new E-306 was postponed by the UT dean, Brodkey darkly suggested that if some students took the move as an example of institutional racism at Texas that would be pretty understandable. "I'm afraid of the message it's going to send out to the minority students," she told the *Daily Texan*. "I'm afraid that the message may be that the lives and intellectual histories of these students is of no interest to the University."

Kruppa himself was not always a model of dispassion. He told the *Houston Post* that opposition to E-306 was spearheaded by "two right-wing faculty members." Some of them, he said, "are ultra right-wingers who are members of the National Association of Scholars," the National Association of Scholars being a nationwide group of generally moderate to conservative views that is seen as the Great Satan by the academic left. On another occasion, Kruppa furthered "genuine intellectual debate" by talking of "a campaign mounted by a few zealots." He attributed the defeat of E-306 to "misrepresentation and misinformation on the part of a few people of bad intentions." In my interview with him, Kruppa told me: "A small group of people took it [meaning E-306] to the media and made it a media event for their own purposes." He seemed to forget that the first people on campus to take E-306 to the media were he and Brodkey in their press release on the new course, which is what led to the favorable editorial in the *Austin American-Statesman*, producing Alan Gribben's three-paragraph letter to the newspaper. Kruppa did not sign a petition criticizing himself for making ad hominem attacks rather than engaging in genuine debate.

Another point is worth making with regard to the student Geoff Henley. It could certainly be said that here was a young man doing exactly the sort of thing that was supposed to be encouraged by E-306, making an effective argument. Henley's article in the *Texan* showed none of the clunky syntax, the trite, pedantic jargon or the imitative usages of Linda Brodkey and her allies, who at times seem

better qualified to take freshman composition than to teach it. But, then again, Henley was not a student in a composition class so he got no grade for his essay, and that's probably a lucky thing. Over and over again Brodkey, Kruppa, et al. maintained that different viewpoints would be encouraged in their E-306. Maybe that is true, but judging from the response of forty members of the English department faculty to Henley's article, it is hard to imagine that he would have been graded solely on the quality of his writing, and not at all on the content of his ideas.

In the end, the Brodkey E-306, even in the form it took after Rothenberg was dropped and the reading list was revised, was never put into place at Texas. Eventually, after a half year of battle, Brodkey and all the members of the Lower Division English Policy Committee resigned, even though the English department, by a secret ballot vote of 46 to 11, had given the committee a vote of confidence. When I saw her later, she told me that the committee had been maligned by Gribben in the press and left unsupported by the administration, so there was really no point in pressing on. Looking back on the whole incident, she said that she found that she was overwhelmed by events. Faculty from other departments expressed opinions on what she felt should have been an English department matter. The administration, in declining to support the department, sided with the course's critics.

"And then," she said, "Alan Gribben, who wasn't at the faculty meeting at which we talked about the course, came up with these letters to the *Austin American-Statesman* saying that we were going to indoctrinate kids. I think it was over at that point. I mean, I can't imagine a professor making a statement like that without having a lot of evidence.

"I guess he really believed that we were going to be indoctrinating students," Brodkey said of Gribben. "I don't really know him. He never came to my office or called me on the phone. He never said 'I'm really worried about what you are doing, Linda, and I want to talk to you.' I wasn't surprised that he was opposed, because there had been rumors, but I was surprised about the letters he wrote." Brodkey felt, moreover, that Gribben's public questioning of her motives, and his charge that she was engaged in "thought control," were outrageous. "It is a serious allegation to make against a colleague,

and I see it as an extraordinarily irresponsible act. It's to take real liberties with your colleagues' lives, professional as well as personal."

Brodkey said that after E-306 began getting publicity in the local press, she began receiving hate mail and obscene phone calls—men saying things like "I'm going to shoot your cunt off" and "I'm going to cut off your nipples, you dyke." Around that time, she says, she was not feeling well. Strangely, she said, she received one postcard expressing the wish that she die of disease, even though she had told very few people about her health.

The charge that most upset her, she said, is that her goal was to impose her own politics on students. She believes that faculty members who claim that their own courses are free of politics are deluding themselves. She held to the point of view that politics permeates everything. To teach a traditional course is implicitly to support the political status quo. She identified herself as a "progressive," meaning she believed that the status quo "doesn't work." But she maintained that her critics "confuse my personal politics with my classroom role. I am left wing," she said. "I do have strong ideas. But I also think I know the difference between what I believe and what I feel is my responsibility in the classroom."

"I was a maverick liberal who unknowingly took on an entire network of enforcers," Gribben told me in a letter, written after he had left Texas and was settled into his new job in Alabama. The passage of time had not dimmed his outrage at the slander he felt he had to suffer because he had flouted the reigning orthodoxies of UT's English department. Certainly, he is not persuaded by Brodkey's claims to have suffered as much from the controversy as he did. Brodkey, after all, is still a featured speaker on the academic-conference circuit, where she continues to talk about "difference" and to be a leader in the critical literacy movement. If anything, her move to San Diego, where she is the head of a whole college-level program, not just a department, represented a bureaucratic step upward. She does not seem to have been punished because of what happened to her at Texas.

Gribben feels that Brodkey's charge that he was "irresponsible" and took "liberties with his colleagues' lives" is reminiscent of the tactics used by the pro-E-306 forces all along. True, he took the

anti-E-306 side to the public, but Brodkey, Kruppa, and others in the debate gave interviews and made statements in the public debate as well. Put into juxtaposition with the threatening and obscene calls and letters she reports receiving, it insinuates that Gribben, by writing his views on E-306 in the newspaper, was somehow responsible for the expressions of hate directed against Brodkey, but this is certainly not true.

"You look at your feet when somebody makes those arguments," Gribben told me. "What can you say? It stops the debate." In fact, Gribben feels he took no "liberties" with Brodkey's life. Austin, Texas, and the university are very liberal communities. They do not correspond, Gribben says, to the redneck clichés regarding Texas harbored in the minds of easterners. Gribben, in arguing that Brodkey was politicizing E-306, was not inviting verbal violence against anyone. And, he feels, Brodkey's suffering from anonymous verbal assaults was certainly no worse than what he suffered from students and faculty members right there on the UT campus, in the student newspaper, at academic conferences, in speeches, transforming him from the "maverick liberal" he was into a symbol of the evil racist establishment. I remember once hearing Houston Baker, later the president of the Modern Language Association, speak of Gribben at a conference at the University of Michigan in October 1991. "Gribben was a radical at Berkeley," Baker said. "That didn't stop him from writing vicious articles in the *Daily Texan* and from really distorting the truth in terms of what had happened with the committee on E-306."

"They created me for their own purposes," Gribben told me. I had asked him why he bore the brunt of the radicals' attacks, while, for example, John Ruskiewicz, a self-identified conservative, had not. "I believe that without foreseeing what would ensue, I had threatened them," he said of those who attacked him, "and I didn't even mean to threaten them as much as I did. It was unnerving for them because I set an example for other liberal-minded people who were agonizing over the increasing politicization of their departments, so I was a bad example." Ruskiewicz, as a conservative, Gribben argues, was, paradoxically, less of a threat because his views would have been more expected. Ruskiewicz, along with Duban and Hairston, were also either members of the Lower Division English Policy Committee or members of the writing faculty, so, unlike Gribben, it was harder to accuse them of evil behavior when they were dealing with a matter officially within their purview. Still, Duban, feeling isolated and un-

comfortable in his department, took a job elsewhere in Texas; Hairston retired early. Only Ruskiewicz of the department's four E-306 dissidents remains at Texas. He, it should be noted, has become associate director of the new Department of Rhetoric and Composition, separate from the English department.

One of the most disturbing things about Gribben's case is that none of the major academic organizations, those supposedly watchful for freedom of expression, took up his cause. Indeed, they took the other side in the Texas battle. We have seen Houston Baker accusing Gribben of "distorting the truth." It happens that shortly after that, in 1992, the year that Gribben, his life made all but impossible at Texas, moved to Alabama to start a new life, Baker became president of the thirty-thousand-member Modern Language Association. Well before that, the MLA had played a modest but interesting role in the UT controversy. A year after the revised E-306 was rejected, the MLA published a statement in its newsletter, which goes out to its members, entitled "Postponement of Course Raises Academic-Freedom Issues." The MLA's Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities, having read about the controversy on E-306, decided to look into it, the newsletter said. It gave a brief account of "the facts," an account that left out the content of the course that Brodkey was proposing. It concluded "that pressures from parties outside the university, like the National Association of Scholars and columnist William Murchison [who writes for the *Dallas Morning News*], may have played a role" in the decision to postpone the course.

The newsletter said "may have played a role," rather than "did play a role," so it is only offering a conjecture. Still, it offered no substantiation for this conjecture, other than the fact that there were people outside the university arguing that E-306 as conceived by Brodkey was a bad idea. The newsletter made no mention of the opposition inside the university, such as the threats of departments to offer their own writing courses if E-306 were adopted, or the petition signed by fifty-six faculty members opposing the Brodkey proposal. Then, again with no evidence offered to back up another bit of conjecture, the newsletter concluded that "the character of the debate on the Austin campus and throughout the state suggests that incomplete, inaccurate and distorted information may well have con-

tributed to decisions affecting the course and the faculty members responsible for it." The truth is, the MLA statement goes on, that "at every stage the course design called for students to read arguments and court decisions on all sides of the controversial issues being discussed."

What is remarkable about this document is not only its blithe assumption that opponents of E-306 misrepresented it while those who supported it told only the truth. The MLA also assumed, again, it seems, on faith, that the E-306 proponents created a course in which "all sides of the controversial issues" would have been discussed. As we have seen, Linda Brodkey forthrightly acknowledged that the textbook initially proposed for the course did not present "all sides" at all, but that fact, she said, was "moot."

Another organization, one disposing of considerable prestige, also entered the dispute. This was the American Association of University Professors, founded about three-quarters of a century ago and known for its vigilance about threats to academic freedom. The AAUP's president, Barbara R. Bergmann, who teaches economics at American University in Washington, D.C., read about the E-306 controversy in the national press. She also received a copy of something called "An Interim Report on the Attack on English 306 and the National Association of Scholars," an anonymous, fifteen-page, single-spaced document put out by a previously unheard-of group, the Ad-hoc Committee on Subversion of University Autonomy.

This document, which could reasonably be accused of putting out "distorted information," came out at the height of the E-306 debate and advances the usual conspiracy theory, namely that E-306 was killed by "a series of right-wing institutions backed by equally right-wing foundations." The aim was a "roll-back" of multiculturalism that "explicitly targets not only multicultural elements in courses, such as the revised E-306, but all feminist, gay, minority and ethnic studies as well as non-academic programs designed to provide space of support for minority groups of students."

Since none of the opponents of E-306 ever said anything about "feminist, gay, minority and ethnic studies" (and since the president of the National Association of Scholars at UT had, when he was dean, instituted a women's studies major some years before), it was hard to see what was so explicit about the goals of this right-wing conspiracy. In any case, the document, which was widely distributed around the University of Texas in the weeks after the revised E-306 course was

postponed by Dean Meacham, refers to such elements in the picture as the "inflammatory letters" that Alan Gribben sent to newspapers "around the state," thereby setting off "the whole hysterical smear campaign" involving "a carefully planned and well-financed operation with a national agenda," for which the anti-E-306 individuals at Texas were the "shock troops."

To her credit, Professor Bergmann called Douglas Laycock of the UT Law School and asked him for his informal view of the matter. Laycock told her in a long return letter that she had read "an extreme version of one side of a complex dispute." He offered some opinions, calling the Rothenberg book, for example, "truly awful . . . riddled with factual errors," and flawed by its tendency of "relentlessly presenting the view that all is evil in America." By choosing it, the proponents of the course had forfeited their credibility, he said. Most important, Laycock, a long-term member of the AAUP who once campaigned together with Bergmann for equal pensions for female academics, dismissed the idea that any question of academic freedom had arisen. "The power of committees to impose a common syllabus on individual instructors is not an academic freedom right," Laycock wrote. Academic freedom is "a right of individuals," not of committees.

Bergmann, however, persisted in her inquiry. She had noted, she told me, that it was unusual for a dean first to express support and enthusiasm for a course planned by a department and then, suddenly, to withdraw his support for it and, in effect, kill it via a postponement. It was possible, she felt, that outside pressures on the university, pressures that the administration had refused to resist, had led the dean to his action. And, if that were the case, as she put it to Laycock, "might not there be a justifiable concern about the climate for academic freedom at Austin?"

A good question. Bergmann tried to interest the staff at the AAUP, particularly the staff of Committee A, which is concerned with academic freedom, in investigating the situation at Texas. Ernst Benjamin, who is the senior permanent member of the AAUP staff, got together a committee to look into E-306 and a few other matters. Originally, the intention was to visit several campuses and to prepare a report, but the committee did no such thing. What it did do, indeed, well illustrates the reflexes of major portions of the academic establishment. It used the occasion of a putative inquiry into events at UT to issue a proclamation on another subject entirely.

As Bergmann told me, the committee visited no campuses. It met for a single day and then issued a report, not on Texas or any other university, but on the subject of political correctness, which, for a few weeks, was something of a national media event. *Newsweek* had published a cover story brandishing the concept of the campus "thought police." *The New Republic* had written negatively about left-wing intimidation on campus. I myself had written an article in the *New York Times* headlined "The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct," which reported on the power on campuses of a kind of leftist orthodoxy. The campuses were in a tizzy about all the publicity. The allegedly politically correct were in an especial tizzy, accusing the press of sensationalism, of conducting a witch hunt, of manufacturing a nonexistent terror. And so the AAUP committee, supposedly considering the imbroglio at Texas, ended up making a pronouncement on political correctness in entire agreement with the PC point of view.

The statement, published in the AAUP's journal, *Academe*, accused the critics of PC of "sloganeering . . . name calling" and "irresponsible use of anecdotes." Their real motivation was an "only partly-concealed animosity toward equal opportunity and its first effects of modestly increasing the participation of women and racial and cultural minorities on campus." In other words, the AAUP, which is a body of university professors supposedly committed to the primacy of the disinterested quest for the truth, did not bother to look into the merits of the anti-PC arguments. In essence, the committee agreed with that Ad Hoc Committee on Subversion of University Autonomy that had charged the opponents of E-306 with wanting to roll back the gains of feminists, gays, and minority and ethnic group members at universities. And in framing the argument in that way, of course, the AAUP committee proved the power of the very force whose existence it denied. Once you have attributed to your opponents the motive of opposing "the participation of women and racial and cultural minorities on campus," you suppress debate without ever having to counter the actual arguments of the other side. You also illustrate the very tactic whose use you claim is highly exaggerated by the media.

I asked Barbara Bergmann about the committee's statement on PC. Perhaps, she replied, "it went a little too far in attributing bad motives to those who are raising the PC issue." But Professor Bergmann then went on to agree with its underlying spirit. "I think there

is an attempt by the right wing to silence those who feel oppressed and who are protesting their oppression," she said.

In the end, the AAUP never formally investigated Texas, and it is just as well. It might have found, as I did, that the opponents of E-306 had a better complaint about violations of academic freedom than the proponents did. Certainly, as he packed his bags and left for his new job, Alan Gribben might have thought so. Gribben, however, was not likely to think that if he brought a complaint to the AAUP, it would get an impartial hearing.

"The last twelve years have loosened the tongue of racism and made it less unrespectable to say things that hurt other people, to make other people feel bad," Bergmann told me.

We started this account of conflict at the University of Texas with the question of race and racial conflicts, and we will end it on the same subject. In the battle between the two universes in Austin there were powerful echoes of the surrounding debate about race. It was rarely explicitly thus—though Brodkey did at times explicitly make that link. But there is little doubt, in my mind, at any rate, that much of the moral fervor with which the campaign in favor of E-306 was waged stemmed from the belief that changing the curriculum, making it deal with "difference," would advance the battle against racism and for inclusion. The issue was seen in those terms by many outside the university as well. Bergmann, for example, feels that "new scholarship," the demand for diversity, the stress on the oppressive and unfair aspects of the American experience, are justified as part of the battle against racism. She thinks that when the charge of racism is made on campuses across the United States, the charge is justified, as are demands that racism be combated by fundamentally changing the university's intellectual program.

But is the charge true, and does it matter? Certainly there is plenty of evidence that racism at UT is not endemic but aberrational. While the battle over E-306 was at its height, the president of the student body, who had won her office by getting 54 percent of the vote in a secret ballot, was a black woman and a firebrand named Toni Luckett. How could it be that a place so deeply drenched in racism and sexism had elected a person like her?

Then there were those two racial incidents on campus that spurred

so many to action to combat the racist scourge. To many, particularly to black students, the incidents proved the existence of a deeper, albeit usually hidden, racism at Texas. These students, after all, were a minority among a largely white majority. All students of whatever race tend to be insecure about themselves, worried about their ability to compete, hoping to find that they belong. But the black students, many of whom are admitted by policies of racial preference, and often come from poorer families, arrive at Texas tenderer than most. Given that, when somebody scrawls FUCK YOU NIGS DIE on a car parked outside a white-columned fraternity residence that already resembles a plantation manor house, it is easy to see how cries of "institutional racism" result, along with demands for hate speech codes, for mandatory racial-sensitivity sessions, and for more courses on ethnic and Third World literatures, which are, presumably, antidotes to the Western culture that produced racism in the first place.

At Texas there was an effort to find out just how racist the institution was. Mark G. Yudof, the dean of the law school, headed a nine-member Committee on Racial Harassment that listened to all who wanted to testify before it and, without giving details about the specific incidents reported, concluded thusly: "Many speakers felt that they had experienced racism, resulting in deep feelings of personal anger, distress and isolation. . . . Various examples of racial harassment, both subtle and overt, were related." The committee recommended that students or faculty who commit racial harassment be disciplined, and it took great care in its definition of "racial harassment," trying to avoid the fate of some hate speech codes that were so vague and all-embracing that they were rejected by the courts. Texas used the definition of "racial harassment" as "extreme or outrageous acts or communications that are intended to harass, intimidate, or humiliate a student or students on account of race, color or national origin and that reasonably cause them to suffer severe emotional distress."

The committee also created a race-relations counselor, whose duties would be to receive complaints of racial harassment and help victimized students deal with attacks against them. In late 1993, after nearly three years, thirty cases had been handled by Curtis Polk, the race-relations counselor. They involved such complaints as those against the white male student who started speaking with a peculiar accent when some Asian students blocked his view at a performance; the Asian student who used the word "nigger" when he handed a fifty-dollar parking fine over to a black clerk; the woman who remarked

to her Jewish office mate that "Jews are stingy." Polk said that all but one of these matters were handled via mediation, generally involving some calm discussion with the offending person and often a face-to-face meeting between the perpetrator and the victim. But only one case, involving a student who sent racial epithets over a global computer network, actually led to disciplinary action.

What are we to make of these incidents? Certainly, many instances of racism are not reported. Among those that are—such as the time in 1992 when, according to the *Daily Texan*, racist graffiti were found in some bathroom stalls—many probably do not come formally to Polk's attention. The thirty cases that did—meaning on average ten cases a year, or, on a campus of sixty thousand students, one case per six thousand students per year—do not, in my view, indicate the existence of an epidemic of racism that needs to be combated by transforming the curriculum. Appointing a sensible race-relations counselor to handle incidents that do arise seems to be an adequate way of providing relief for students and others who feel that they have been victimized.

Whatever the figures on racism, however, there is clearly the perception that racism exists, and it is not difficult to perceive why that is the case. "There are very few overt incidents," Yudof told me, speaking of actual racial harassment. "What happens is that when white Americans see events as these they say that they are anomalies; they're terrible but they are anomalies. When a black student sees them, he says, 'This is the tip of the iceberg; they don't really want me here; they don't respect my culture.' What impressed me was not the total number of complaints, but that the worldview of these groups is so totally different."

And so, given that assessment, what should a faculty do? The fatal flaw in the Kruppa-Brodkey approach lies in the belief that changing the basic premises of liberal education is going to ease racial tensions and increase multicultural understanding. Here is the *déravage*, the point at which the civil rights impulse sends the locomotive off the tracks. The very educational values that led Texas from being an all-white, segregated, and quite conspicuously racist institution, which it once was, to one in which a black woman can be elected student-body president are the values that are corrupted when identity politics and group rights become the guiding principles of the classroom.

The English teachers said that E-306, and greater stress on "multicultural education," would have the result of reducing the allegedly

rampant racism that existed at Texas. But almost the entire debate took place without any evidence whatever either that racism was rampant or, even if it was, that the proposed changes would do anything at all to reduce it. Do English professors really believe that telling people in a classroom to be racially sensitive will actually make them so? And, in the end, is turning a course of study into what many will see as an effort in political indoctrination going to improve anybody's understanding of difference?

George Santayana once said, "Fanaticism consists of redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim." He may have been wrong about that. At Texas, the bearers of the New Consciousness did not forget their aim. Santayana should have said: "Fanaticism consists of redoubling your efforts even when what you are doing cannot accomplish your aim."