

Eyes of Texas now function as big brother



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The *Eyes of Texas*, anthem of the great university bearing that name, takes on frightening connotations in the 1990s.

Yes, the eyes of Texas are upon you, all the livelong day. And supposing they don't like what they see? Why, then the hands of Texas fasten over your mouth. There are things you can say at the University of Texas and things you are well-advised not to say.

Last year, Alan Gribben, a Mark Twain scholar, achieved national prominence by sounding the alarm over plans for a freshman composition course based on readings about racism and sexism. He didn't think it fitting to infuse an ideological viewpoint into a course on basic writing skills.

Professor Gribben, discouraged at the personal abuse and professional isolation that came his way, departed this fall for friendlier climes. The English department hasn't got him to kick him around any more.

Never mind. There's his friend, James Duban, who had the effrontery the other day to question the premises of a proposed course on multiculturalism.

UT is thinking of requiring all students to study a "minority or non-dominant culture within the United States" and "at least one non-Western or Third World culture."

Professor Duban, at a recent meeting of the University Council, a legislative body, voiced objections. "The definition of a 'U.S. multicultural course,'" he said, "would . . . appear to exclude consideration of Irish, German, Italian or Jewish culture in the U.S. Have we come this far since 1846 only now to pronounce, 'No Irish need apply'?" Also the standards used to define the so-called multicultural course exclude numerous countries and cultures from the list of the cultured."

Professor Duban charged that the committee's "overall doctrine of exclusivity" apparently violated UT President William Cunningham's direction to "walk wide of 'political agendas or particular ideologies.'" The committee, Professor Duban charged, had distinguished "between non-dominant and dominant cultures," when what was wanted was consideration of "world civilization" — everybody included. Even Dead White Males, one supposes.

Less than a day after he spoke, Professor Duban was fired by the English department chairman as head of the departmental honors program. He had held the post for eight years. A supporter of the multiculturalist approach replaces him.

Chairman Joseph Kruppa invites us to see the change not as retribution for Professor Duban's speech but as the consummation of a process long under way (though not previously revealed to Professor Duban!). Pardon me for recalling suddenly the movie in which Jimmy Durante, caught absconding with a circus elephant, tries to screen the beast with his arms as he rasps indignantly, "WHAT elephant?"

Mr. Kruppa, nonetheless, may be right. In which case things may be worse than we suppose. Maybe the English department has a memory like Mr. Durante's elephant and hasn't forgotten the efforts made by professors like Mr. Gribben and Mr. Duban to derail the racism-sexism course. Maybe this whole episode is over English 306 — and something even larger.

Two impostures seem to be going on at the University of Texas and elsewhere. One is that Irishmen and Italians, for instance, rank as high as blacks, Hispanics, Orientals, women in the scale of academic concerns. They don't. "Multicultural education" is too much of the time an attempt to show up the "dominant," i.e., Western, culture and thereby make members of "non-dominant" cultures feel better about themselves. This is education as therapy.

The second imposture is that nothing out of the way is happening on the campuses, and that critics of the new dispensation are free to speak their minds. On the hard evidence, much of it documented by Dinesh D'Souza in his best-selling *Illiberal Education*, this assertion simply isn't so; critics aren't free to speak. Worse: If they aren't free even at the good old sober-sided University of Texas, my alma mater, we're in a mess for sure. Professor Duban and his like-minded colleagues are going to need a lot of help.

William Murchison's column is syndicated by Heritage Features.

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