

representation, ethnocentricity and constructions of personal and group identities. That involved issues of language. Left-of-center constituencies focused on the political nature of language and considered the effects of particular names, terminologies and phrases. Right-of-center constituencies felt threatened and fought back. Many books were soon attacking the "liberal thought-police": Alan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Charles Sykes' *Prof-scams* (1988), Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* (1990), and Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* (1991) are just a few of those books.

As the titles indicate, this battle was played out within the academy. This occurred for at least four reasons. First, many professors and academics of this time period had grown up during the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s. Second, the investigation of language had already been an intellectual mainstay since mid-century — linguistics, semantics and the philosophy of language had become part of intellectual culture. Third, academics, professors, teachers and intellectuals are often paid to think about such issues as language. And fourth, many schools and departments were seeking to expand curricula by including Black studies, women's studies, gay/lesbian/queer studies, and feminism. Such disciplines consciously investigate systems of power and language.

These academic conditions coexisted with wider events of the 1980s and 1990s: the rise of AIDS, the spread of crack cocaine and its effects upon poor urban people of color, the federal cutbacks by Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, the rise of Hip-Hop and Gangsta Rap, the popularity of Public Enemy, a revived interest in Malcolm X, the popularity of androgynous male singers like Boy George, George Michael and Prince, the increasing visibility of LGBT professionals and the end of the Cold War. The last one is more influential than people think. The end of the Cold War eroded the traditional dividing lines of socialism and capitalism. Radicals were now focusing less on Marxian critiques of economic infrastructure and more on the hierarchies and oppressions of social, cultural and political identities. This motivated issues of multiculturalism, diversity appreciation, identity politics and language.

Conservative constituencies fought against this momentum and

launched anti-PC campaigns. To the best of my knowledge, there was no monolithic and unified campaign. But various people generated enough cultural commotion to make PC a disparaging term. Today, PC is a catch-all phrase for just about all left-of-center critiques and inquiries concerning the political nature of language. But the present day form of political correctness is quite surprising once we uncover the historical morphology of the term.⁹

PC Timeline

- ♦ During the 1940s, political correctness was used as a term by socialists who disagreed with strict Communist party dogma. To be PC was to toe the party line without question. Open-minded socialists used PC to critique dogmatic Communists.
- ♦ Some years later, PC was used as an insult for people who acted radical, but were in fact liberal or moderate. The true radicals might say something like, "Just come off it! You're only acting radical so you can be politically correct!"
- ♦ In the middle to late seventies, PC was used by radicals to humorously mock one another's idealism. Dreaming of revolution was so PC. This use was both satirical and affectionate; it acknowledged and appreciated radical idealism.
- ♦ Then, during the late 1980s, conservatives began using PC as a disparaging term to discredit multiculturalists and diversity advocates. They used the term to smear all liberal and left-leaning critiques of language. Questioning the political nature of language became synonymous with laying guilt trips on people and stifling thought and discussion. In other words, conservatives successfully branded multiculturalists and diversity advocates as "PC thought police."

The newest use of the term is quite perplexing because it misses, or distorts, the intention of multiculturalism, diversity advocacy and critiques of language. In actuality, what conservatives call "political correctness" simply refers to interpersonal and intercultural respect. Politically correct language acknowledges the fact that my personal experience does not and cannot represent your personal experience.

What offends me may or may not offend you. My worldview is not the same as your worldview. Because of this we should mind our use of language. This seems very logical and even extends the basic tenets of human rights — each individual is due the proper respect and consideration of being a person in the world. That respect and consideration involves language — try not to offend others, think about the terms you use to refer to others, try to understand the traditions and heritages of others, etc. In a nutshell, PC asks us to recognize the political implications of language and to use the most ethical language possible. This understanding of PC allows us to reappropriate the term for our own uses and to respond to the conservative attacks on our demands for more politically correct language.

Responding to the PC Charge

Below are some guidelines for dealing with the PC double bind. These comments are intended to be used for face-to-face interaction, including conversations, debates, interviews, post-speech discussions, or online instant messaging. Despite this focus, many of these principles can be helpful for written and electronic communication. The overall approach can be applied to just about any rhetorical situation. These are not absolute tenets that completely safeguard you from the anti-PC quandary. They are just some basic ideas for navigating the PC playing field.

Know the game and know the rules. Be aware of the PC game and understand how the rules work. If you critique language then you'll be called a liberal fascist. If you speak from your heart and call it like you see it then you're called an angry Anti-American. This double-spin can silence you even before you speak. But knowing these rules helps you break the rules. If you're accused of being too PC, argue back that PC is actually a conservative construction intended to discredit multiculturalism, diversity and progressive ideals. Cite the genealogy above that outlines the history of the term. Point out that the current use was invented by conservatives and in no way reflects the real impetus of political correctness, which is interpersonal and intercultural respect. This type of response throws people off. They

don't expect you to be so knowledgeable about the history of PC and they are not expecting you to meet the PC charge head on. People expect you to cower; when you don't, they are surprised. This enables you to control the frame of discussion. You then have more ability to question people's language and ask them to reflect upon its implications.

Read the context and break the expectations. Analyze the situation and then understand and break the expectations. The other person might be using offensive language knowing that you'll jump all over it. The person then gets to label you a PC fascist, making you look bad. If that's the case, then don't address the language. Just let it go and focus on the main issue of conversation. That may be tough to do, but it gets you out of the PC trap. But the situation might be different, with the person expecting you to be angry and non-PC. The person might try to bait you again, making statements that would normally anger you. Avoid that trap by doing the opposite — be calm and controlled as you speak in a politically correct fashion. This confuses the other person and allows you to have more control over the situation.

Sometimes the other person is prepared with both traps. The person might be pressuring you with both the liberal fascist charge and the angry anti-American charge. If that's the case, then stop, relax and call out the situation: "It's not actually PC or anger that stifles political discussion. Instead, it is narrow-minded thinking that inhibits dialogue and communication. We need to stop baiting one another and try to communicate on a person-to-person basis." Such a response locates the problem within narrow-mindedness rather than an individual person. This allows you to highlight what is going on without actually attacking the other person; it lets you make the critique without making the other person defensive. This clears space for more productive talk and debate.

Be fair and balanced and strive for credibility. Try to recognize and acknowledge the good within the bad. You might say, for instance, that the language of mainstream society is often sexist, racist, classist

and homophobic. But despite these problems, American culture has made great strides over the years. People are more respectful and mindful and most people do try to avoid overtly offensive language. This is progress and everyone is better off for it. These kinds of comments, even when coupled with your more critical comments, earn you credibility in the eyes of others. People are then more likely to at least consider your ideas and less likely to label you as P.C.

Use audience-friendly communication. Critiquing people's language often sounds preachy, snobbish, arrogant and condescending. Nobody likes that; it gets you nowhere. Take your time, think through the situation and patiently address the issues in audience-friendly ways. Straightforward critiques can often alienate people. If that's the case, then you need to use cautious, supportive and non-defensive communication. Here are four suggestions for doing that.

- ♦ *Suggest rather than assert.* Offering, proposing and suggesting alternative words and phrases lightens the situation, allowing for self-reflection without defensiveness.
- ♦ *Ask rather than tell.* Ask others how they feel about certain types of language. Ask them if they see any issues with that language. Ask them if other language might be more appropriate. These leading questions can spark discussion rather than heated debate.
- ♦ *Critique yourself rather than others.* Rather than critiquing others, turn the conversation back around and critique your own use of language. Give an example or brief story about your own journey toward linguistic awareness. Implicating yourself opens the floor for others to do the same. Rather than you pointing out their mistakes, they do it for themselves.
- ♦ *Assume the best rather than the worst of others.* Try to give people the benefit of the doubt and assume that they are doing the best that they can at this given time. You shouldn't excuse their language, but you should try to be understanding. This sets up a non-defensive situation in which people are more likely to think, reflect and discuss their use of language.

It's about effectiveness, not correctness. Your communication should be guided by rhetorical effectiveness rather than political correctness. Sure, you want to be understanding and supportive, and you want to avoid offending others, even those you disagree with or dislike. But sometimes you have to simply state the obvious by calling people out and laying it on the line. Some people are racist. Some people are homophobic. Some people are simply power-hungry imperialists without heart or soul. You need to think before you make these statements, hopefully using more effective language. But that's a judgment call on your part. There are no sure-shot rules for guiding your decisions to be P.C. or not. But the general goal is always the same: to make rhetorical choices that bring about positive social change. If you're ever in doubt, just remember that it's about rhetorical effectiveness rather than political correctness. Analyze the situation and make your decision.

Words of Change

This last section helps us create new words of radical change. For the sake of simplicity, we focus on "the word," which I define as a single word, term, phrase or utterance that expresses an ideological vision and a political identity and mobilizes people to action. Some examples might include Communism, socialism, Bolivarianism, Pan-Africanism, anarchism, environmentalism, feminism and Zapatismo. Such words encapsulate and express political worldviews and define and anchor one's radicalism. We often see ourselves through these words, living out their meanings and political agendas. These words shape our understanding of social, cultural, political, historical, and economic operations. These words literally outline our political realities.

These words of change are discussed in the five sections below. First, we outline the basic nature of these words. Second, we discuss the life-cycle of words and the need to create newer, more rhetorically effective words. Third, we analyze the rhetorical effectiveness of two older words, "Communism" and "anarchism." Fourth, we review some newer words and discuss the changing nature of twenty-first century

words. And fifth, we discuss five steps for creating new words of radical social change.

Understanding Words of Change

Words of change, as defined here, are not the same as mere slogans. Some slogans may eventually become words, but words are not reducible to slogans. Truly powerful words capture people's imaginations and withstand the test of time — they are more historically meaningful and more politically powerful than mere slogans. Words are also different than propaganda. Words could become propaganda if used to manipulate people and distort the truth. But that's a risk of all language, rhetoric and communication. Words, when properly used, empower rather than manipulate people.

Words of change consist of three key components: ideological vision, political identity and mobilization.

Ideological vision. The word encapsulates an ideological vision and political framework. It is a system of thought, action and direction. It could be a strict ideology, like Leninist Communism, or it can be a loose set of guidelines, like feminism. Either way, the word expresses a political agenda that guides and defines one's actions.

Political identity. The word expresses a political identity. That identity is developed by carrying out the political framework of the word. Communists become *Communists* by rejecting capitalism and fighting for better economic systems. Anarchists become *anarchists* by rejecting authoritarianism and fighting for voluntary relationships. And feminists become *feminists* by rejecting patriarchy and fighting for gender equality. Political identities emerge as people align themselves with the political actions of specific words. You can of course embody many different words, thus developing a decentered political identity, like autonomous-Marxist-feminist, for instance.

Mobilization. The word is also a mobilizing force that pulls people into political activities and creates conditions for social movements. Those conditions are produced by the word's rhetoric: the word

radiates an outward excitement that attracts people to action. That excitement grows and the actions become larger and more frequent as more and more people are attracted to the word. Soon a movement is born and the word becomes the catch-all expression of struggle and action. We thus get such historically powerful words as socialism, Bolshevism, women's liberation, labor, hippie, New Left and global justice.

The Lifecycle of Words

The rhetorical effectiveness of words doesn't last forever. Words are here today and gone tomorrow. They come into vogue, mobilize populations, and then fade away. Many words do linger on, but ineffectively so. These words had such impact in the past that many people hold on in the hopes of reviving that previous power. But that's often a losing cause. Words, like all human creations, aren't meant to last.

Feminist writer Lisa Jervis addresses this issue by questioning feminism's wave terminology. As she states: "What was at first a handy-dandy way to refer to feminism's history, present, and future potential with a single metaphor has become shorthand that invites intellectual laziness, an escape hatch from the hard work of distinguishing between core beliefs and a cultural moment."¹¹ She's basically arguing that the wave terminology perpetuates oppositionally: First Wave is different from Second Wave, and those are different from Third Wave. For Jervis, these distinctions are troubling for at least three reasons: they fail to recognize the similarities across waves, they divide feminists and they perpetuate and are perpetuated by sexism, patriarchy and hierarchical structures. Jervis admits that there's no sure solution to the problem, but she does advocate for a context-based use. Sometimes you should refer to and identify with particular waves, and sometimes you shouldn't. It all depends on the context.

I believe that we should follow Jervis's lead and rethink the effectiveness of all current words. Personal investment makes this difficult because we *are* our words, and to question our words is to question ourselves. But we must face the music and reflect on the rhetorical force of our words. If that force is there, then fine; continue forward.

But if that force is absent or close to nil, then we must create new words. I believe that many of our words fall into the latter category; too many of them are timeworn, stagnant and overdone. That's a big statement, but I believe such constructive criticism is warranted. To substantiate my claim, I analyze two of our dominant words below: Communism and anarchism.

Examples of Old Words

I believe that the rhetorical effectiveness of Communism has passed and its revival, while possible, is unlikely. The Cold War has ended and so too has the mobilizing force of the word, "Communism." The same goes for "socialism." Both terms have been used, reused and misused by many authoritarian, murderous regimes over the last one hundred and fifty years. Those misuses undoubtedly damage the rhetorical effectiveness of "socialism" and "Communism." Other, more positive and accurate uses of these words have occurred. We have learned from, and we should continue to investigate the successes and failures of those uses. We should also recognize the credibility of Marx and Engels. Their work, along with that of Luxemburg, Gramsci, Lukacs and others, is brilliant and should continue to be read, discussed and applied. And, most importantly, the *call* of Communism remains pertinent. More ethical, equitable and socially just economic systems are still needed. That has not changed. But the word "Communism" lacks rhetorical effectiveness. Its overuse and misuse no longer stir revolutionary excitement.

I believe that "anarchism," as a word, suffers a similar fate. Too many people have too many preconceived notions of that term. The word is simply over-determined. The general public associates "anarchy" with chaos, disorder, violence and lawlessness. This type of political language alienates rather than attracts people. Such alienation obviously runs deeper than the word itself. Many people fear a nongovernmental, self-organizing system of life. Many if not most people believe in the inherent need for authoritarian rules, structures and governments. This prejudice obscures their understanding of anarchism. But convincing them otherwise must entail more than a long and detailed explanation. Explaining the actual meaning of

the word can help, but that's unlikely to change their ingrained bias against it. Anarchism, to be effective, must undergo a linguistic upheaval. Anarchism, to be a social force, must cease being *anarchism* and start being something else.

Transforming these words involves more than a word replacement. A simple renaming won't do it. People are too smart; they will realize what you're doing and reject it. A true linguistic transformation involves an overhaul of thought, idea and application. The external packaging as well as the internal meaning of the word must be changed. Remember that language is the means by which we create worlds of experience. Re-evaluating "anarchism," "Communism," and many other words, must involve paradigmatic shifts. We must create systems that specify new realms of experience, new political agendas and new forms of action. We must create new words that express new ideological visions and political identities. Those words will then energize twenty-first century minds and bodies. This task is not easy, but it is possible. In fact, it's always in process. We simply have to take notice and consciously create more powerful, effective words.

The Potential of New Words

There are some contemporary words that point us in the right direction. These words may not be as powerful as, say, Communism or anarchism, but that is still to be determined. As time passes, some of these words may actually eclipse the power of previous words. But more likely, we will see a different type of wording. Rather than a single word speaking for many people, we will have many different words from many different people and agendas. Each word will express and encapsulate uniquely powerful constituencies. Those constituencies will then discuss and debate one another's words, generating a contentious yet supportive collective. The era of the single word will thus end, giving rise to an era of kaleidoscopic wording. I believe that this process has already begun. Reviewing the non-exhaustive list below supports my belief. As you'll see, no one word dominates. Instead, many words link together, forming a decentered lexicon of contemporary radical words.

Horizontalism: The use and construction of non-hierarchical relations, especially within activist and organizing efforts. Horizontal forms of organizing are used to create a horizontal society without leaders or followers; everyone equally participates in the creation of society.

Decentralization: Non-centralized forms of organization. People and groups act on their own with no centralized command or control. This occurs as a form of activism as well as a social ideal to strive for.

Networks: The inter-linking of decentralized points. People and groups act on their own but they are also connected to larger movements and/or communities. Those movements and communities are networks of people and groups.

Swarm: A form of decentralized, mass action. Collective action is stronger and smarter than individual action. Together, we can swarm the streets and overturn the power structures.

Prearity: The state of being uncertain and unsure, especially in relation to one's labor and work. It usually refers to the shifting face of the global workforce, much of which lives paycheck-to-paycheck and day-to-day. It also has existential underpinnings — to be unsure of one's place in the world.

Immaterial labor: A form of labor that uses and produces non-material phenomena. Immaterial laborers use information and communication to create feelings, emotions, symbols, languages and forms of knowledge. The marketing and advertising industries are common examples, but as this book argues, activism is also a form of immaterial labor.

Consensus: A type of group decision-making process. Usually, group members voice their opinions and then everyone gets to discuss the best option. No decision is finalized until everyone approves.

Participatory democracy: This is almost synonymous with consensus, but there are more implications with participatory democracy. Many activists seek to replace bureaucratic governments and voting systems with smaller, decentered neighborhood assem-

bles. This structure allows each person to directly participate in political decision-making processes. Participatory democracy is thus a vision for a different society as well as a tool for achieving that society.

Freeganism: An anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist lifestyle using alternative means of survival like dumpster diving, foraging, squatting, urban gardening, community bike shares and truly free markets in which everything is given away, shared or bartered. The words use of "free" and "vegan" expresses a withdrawal from capitalist exchange and cruelty.

Hacktivism: A widely contested term that for the most part refers to forms of virtual civil disobedience, including virtual sit-ins, websitedefacement, software sabotage and the liberation of software codes as well as everyday political information.

Multitude: A self-constituting revolutionary class of various peoples, standpoints, worldviews and political agendas. This revolutionary class is based on the idea that every human being participates in the creation of local and global realities. If this is true, then we are all potential revolutionaries.

Global justice: The idea that everyone has the right to self-determination. This implies the abolition of all hierarchical relations and oppressive systems. No to representational government. No to corporate rule. No to capitalism. And no to racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, etc.

Bolivarianism: A form of quasi-decentered socialism. It was originally developed by nineteenth-century Latin American revolutionary Simón Bolívar and later updated and implemented by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Bolivarianism uses decentered models of leadership, hands-on community organizing and self-empowering social programs to create a classless and unified society.

Zapatismo: A non-ideological political way of life as developed by Mexico's Zapatistas. Zapatismo combines aspects of Marxism, autonomism, liberation theology, indigenous culture, pacifism, militancy and modern Internet technology to create a self-determining yet collectively supported way of life.

Creating Twenty-First Century Words

The above list is exciting and energetic, but it's not enough. In fact, it's never enough. No word or group of words will say everything once and for all. New issues, events and experiences lead to new visions, and those visions need new expressions. We are thus compelled to create words and languages that evoke new and preferably better realities. Go out, look around and see what's happening. Touch the world and get a sense of your day. Then choose words and languages that express that experience. Think of words that enliven the world; words that bring to life details we have not yet seen. If you can do that, then you've just made your ephemeral experience concrete and livable for others. That is to say, you've just created a reality that we can experience, discuss and debate. That's the power of the word and this chapter ends with steps for creating such words.

Analyze the conditions of the day. Analyze the events and happenings of the wider world and figure out how people are thinking and feeling. Think about the words and languages that populate the public landscape. Think about the language being used to describe the current state of the world. Get a sense of the dominant metaphors, analogies and descriptions.

Analyze the current state of radicalism. Examine the events and happenings of your fellow activists, organizers, radicals, revolutionaries and social movements. Try to figure out what folks are focusing on right now. Try to assess the motivations and goals of today's radicals. Try to place your finger on the pulse of cutting-edge radicalism. This usually involves talking with people, doing research, living in the world of activism and looking around and taking note.

Brainstorm ideas. Think of some words that accurately describe the current state of radicalism. Don't overthink the process; just list the words as they come to you.

Use your imagination. Shuffle through your list and choose a few words that capture the heart of today's radicalism. As you do so, be

creative and put those words to the imaginative test. See if you can tweak and refine those words, making them more powerful and attractive. The most powerful words do two things: they manifest details of the world that are commonly ignored or bypassed, and they help people understand their political visions, identities, desires and reasons for acting. Such words articulate what people are thinking but have not yet said. Those kinds of words are hot, edgy, sticky and vivid. They enliven collective dreams, bring people closer together and illuminate paths for action. Those words often have experiential impact — people immediately think, "That's it, I get it!" That won't always happen, but it's a good rhetorical guideline.

Share your words with others. Share your words with other people and see what they have to say. Some of your words may stick and some may not. Realize, though, that no word has the final say. You are one person among millions, so there's no way that a word or even a group of words will fully capture the depths of the radical imagination. But that's not really the point. Instead, you are making a rhetorical contribution to a collective effort of radical social change. You're trying to create words that other people can relate to and identify with. This will help them understand and express their political goals and actions, and that will almost always be appreciated.