



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



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Gag Disorder

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I have been reading Leon Panetta's book about his service at the White House, the CIA, and the Department of Defense. It is titled *Worthy Fights*. During a discussion about relationships with Mexico, he makes this statement, "A sharp rise in Mexican unemployment would almost certainly lead to a dramatic increase in illegal immigration, and the drug trade would explode as desperate people turned to it for a livelihood."²

Yesterday, I came across an article about a restaurant chain in Colorado, named Illegal Pete's. Several Latino firebrands are demanding the name be changed and the word *illegal* be dropped, because it has possible racial connotations.

First, the name of the restaurant refers to its founder, Pete Turner. Therefore, it has only personal connotations. Second, what are we to make of this assertion about "racial connotations"? Perhaps Mr. Panetta should change the sentence in his book because it might be interpreted as being bigoted. But what word to use? He uses *illegal* because that is exactly what he is referring to.

Nonetheless, the term "illegal immigration" is considered by a faction of protesters---those against the accurate use of language---to be offensive and racially-tainted. Where were these people schooled, Smith College? ...an institution that enters this politically correct farce shortly.

Because the word now has racial inferences---at least, according to some---we are in danger of not being allowed to use as in, "I made an illegal drug trade today." That might be taken that I am buying drugs from a minority group. (Am I allowed to use the word *minority*?) I think that some of my ancestors came over from Scotland illegally. I have no Mexican blood in me that I know, but perhaps I should never talk about this activity as it might offend some of my next-of-kin or even Mexicans (Am I allowed to use the word *Mexicans*?)

Funny? It should be, but maybe not. You have likely come across news media articles that describe the increasing restrictions being placed on free speech on college campuses. The adage, "I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend your right to say it," is under assault.

Nor can a person bring up a subject whose content might upset a listener, viewer, or reader. Our society is within range of this situation:

Ladies and Gentlemen, the following television program has segments dealing with child abuse, which some in the audience might find upsetting. But I am not allowed to warn you because my warning may have already upset you.

Of all places, educational institutions should value and treasure the right of free speech, even if some it is offensive. Free speech is considerably more important than the

¹ Thanks to Google for the image on the cover about suppressing speech.

² Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights*, (New York, Penguin Press), 2014, 154.

right to not be insulted. At Smith College, a forum was held titled, “Challenging the Ideological Echo Chamber: Free Speech, Civil Discourse, and the Liberal Arts.”³

One of the panelists Wendy Kaminer, a former member of the American Civil Liberties Union, a feminist, and a First Amendment supporter, was addressing a serious subject in an enlightening manner.

...[She criticized] the proliferation of campus speech codes that restrict supposedly offensive language. She urged the audience to defend the free exchange of ideas over parochial notions of “civility.” In response to a question about teaching materials that contain “hate speech,” she raised the example of Mark Twain’s “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,” arguing that the students should take it as a whole. The student member of the panel, Jaime Estrada, resisted that notion, saying, “But it has the n-word, and some people are sensitive to that.”

Then the panelist made a major political incorrectness mistake. In this academic, problem-addressing environment, she used the word itself. She was accused of institutional racism.

Let’s pause. Her intention was to explain that the image of the word in people’s minds was the word, regardless of use or nonuse of the initial. So, she had to use the word to make her point. Her point might not be correct, but that is the purpose of a forum: to debate and to learn.

The president of Smith College was criticized for not immediately assailing Ms. Kaminer’s use of the word. The president then came out with a letter to the Smith community with apologies to anyone who was “hurt” or made to feel “unsafe” by Ms. Kaminer’s comments.

My bones chilled when I read her concern about a respected academician at a public forum making someone feel hurt or unsafe. Borrowing a cliché, I silently muttered, “Student-up!” What are you in college for...to be mentally emasculated?

Intellectual weakness and spineless mentality were on display; a shameful mockery of what our educational institutions should be doing with controversial subjects. Those students are not going to come out of these kinds of sterile environments with robust mental frameworks to deal with the real world. They will likely come out with kowtowed and bullied spirits.

What’s next? Will I have to change my last name?

³ Harvey Silvergate, “Liberals are Killing the Liberal Arts,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 10, 2014, A17.