

## Arts and Culture

### Criticus

#### Take Us to Our Ghetto

G. B. Tennyson

IT MIGHT seem an act of journalistic onanism to spill more ink on a subject so extensively covered in the press as the recent spat over the establishment of a Chicana/o Studies Department at UCLA. Even inconstant readers and sporadic television viewers will numbly recall that after all the posturing in a tent city on the UCLA campus and all the sound bites from haltingly articulate students, from chancellor and vice-chancellors, the upshot was one of those face-saving accommodations that enabled both sides to claim victory while leaving most outsiders mildly confused about what had really happened.

After an alleged fast of 14 days, nine (count 'em, nine) hunger-strikers, their supporters and hangers-on, and their various spokesmen, ranging from state assemblymen to an all-purpose citywide Latino busybody, were rewarded for their pains with not *quite* the creation of a full-scale *Department* of Chicana/o Studies but with the creation of a *Center*, specifically the Cesar Chavez Center for Interdisciplinary Instruction in Chicana and Chicano Studies.

ACCORDING TO this formulation a center is held to be more than a program (which already existed) but less than a full-scale department (which was demanded), hence a victory for both sides. Or,

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seen another way, a failure for both. The administration did and did not concede; the strikers did and did not succeed. Take your choice. In these matters, as in all politics these days, perception is everything.

The really interesting points about this entire charade are those that weren't reported or appeared only in the small print or in obscure feature stories. These are enough like Evelyn Waugh for us to think of this whole enterprise as a kind of Southern-California-style *Black Mischief*. For your delectation Criticus offers ruminations on a few of these, first in the form of little known sidelights and carnival acts, and second in the form of some unasked questions, all concluding with

the real meaning behind the entire rumpus.

#### SIDELIGHTS AND SIDESHOWS

AT THE time of the protest the 20-year-old Chicana/o studies program had, officially, a total of 50 majors, of which 17 are said to have dropped the program, leaving 33, which as a percentage of students at UCLA works out to about one-tenth of one percent. The budget for the existing program is \$272,000 per year, or just under \$8,250 per major, though of course others than majors take some of the courses. The protesters demanded a 15-faculty department with a \$2 million budget, about a 735 percent increase, this at a time of severe budget cuts for the entire university.

In the existing Chicana/o studies program, 55.3 percent of all upper-division grades are A-, A, or A+. Only Asian American Studies at 64.6 percent A's has a more gifted enrollment, but African-American Studies is closing in fast with 51.8 percent of its grades being A's. (For comparative purposes it may be helpful to know that the largest majors on campus seem to attract less brilliant students; their percentages of A's weigh in as follows: English — 32 percent; History — 32.7 percent; Political Science — 33.3 percent; and Psychology — 34 percent; down among the dullards we find students of biology who gain only 24.5 percent A's.)

The nine hunger strikers were composed of an assistant professor of biology in the UCLA Medical School (teaching, we trust, Chicano biology), three female and two male UCLA students (unknown whether they are Chicana/o studies majors

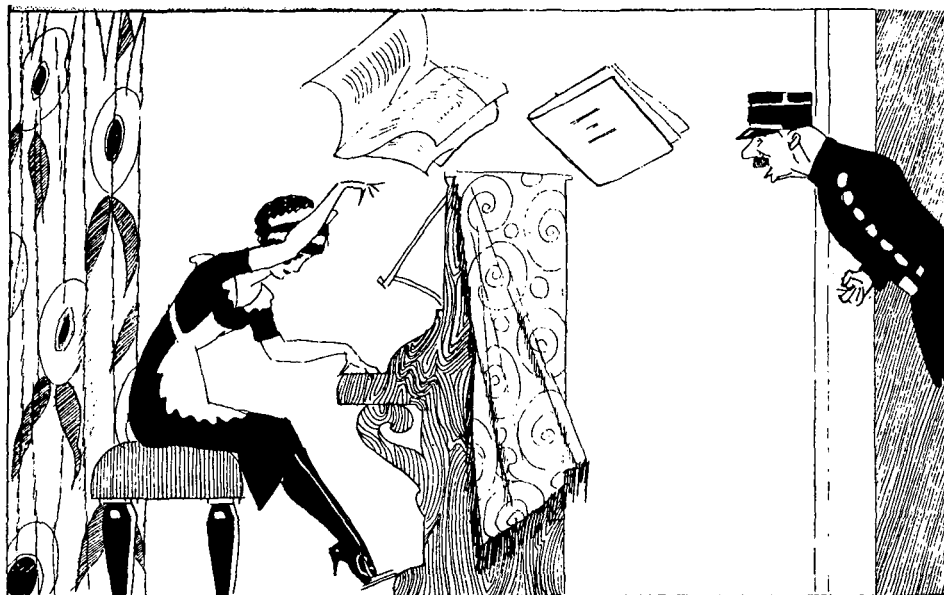


or not), the 16-year-old high school student sister of one of the above students, a male student from Mexico, and an otherwise unidentified 52-year-old man.

These heroes/heroines prominently displayed the flag of Mexico in Schoenberg Quad, the scene of the tent city, but not the flag of the United States. Also to be seen there were the Cuban flag and the quasi-Nazi-like flag of the United Farm Workers. *Viva das Volk!*

At an earlier demonstration, following the vandalizing of the UCLA Faculty Center by the Chicano protesters, counter-demonstrators appeared carrying signs with such legends as "Dutch Studies Now." Their signs were trashed and they were saved from physical assault only by the intervention of the campus police. They were not photographed by the valiant media.

AS FOR the media otherwise, they supinely observed the strictures regarding questions, times, and number of reporters permitted near the protesters. Bill Boyarsky of the *Los Angeles Times* grumbled a bit about this, as well as about the "air of reverence" adopted by protesters using hushed voices as though at a religious service. The timely appearance of a grizzled Sixties Berkeley protester, however, soon restored Boyarsky to politically correct fettle so that he could cast a long romantic eye down the corridors of history to the Shoshones and other noble savages and see that it was all part of a divine plan. (It's never quite clear in these rambles down history's memory lane when we are supposed to stop and pronounce this group or that one the rightful owners of the land. Myself, I'd like to see the King of Spain in charge again.)



The protesters, as Ruben Martinez reverently reported in the *Times*, refashioned "UCLA's Schoenberg Plaza, named after a dead European composer, into Plaza Aztlan, heart of the mythical indigenous nation Chicano activists have long dreamed of." Golly.

In that same publication an untutored profile-in-courage article on the 16-year-old high school student protester featured her devouring a Hershey chocolate bar with almonds at the end of the fast. Perhaps, considering her age and inexperience, she is to be forgiven such oppressors' food. (Chocolate was an Aztec favorite, of course, though hardly as made by Mr. Hershey, but almonds are Eurocentric. As it turned out, she didn't eat the almonds anyway because her stomach couldn't handle them yet. What a trouper!) Others forbore ingesting anything non-liquid until "the evening fiesta at which they ate tortillas dipped in salsa."

For her hunger pains the Hershey-bar-eating-protester "earned" herself, by one account, the Aztec name of Ixtlapayotl: "Heart of the White Butterfly." Another com-

mentator has it that she denominat-ed herself, on her own, Chilictlixatl, also meaning "Heart of the White Butterfly." This abundance of terms to mean the same obscure thing suggests an almost morbid interest among the Aztecs or Nahuatl in the hearts of the white butterflies, or just possibly confusion among the protesters as to the actual meaning of these tongue-twisters. Another protester was apparently rechristened or self-named Chitlichicoshayotl meaning "Seventh Rain from the Heart that Heals." Perhaps the new non-department will address itself to the teaching of indigenous dead languages so we can straighten this out.

#### QUESTIONS AND PUZZLEMENTS

WHY DID the media not inquire, or point out if they knew, that UCLA Chancellor Charles Young, in deciding against a separate department, was acting on the advice of numerous faculty committees and panels over the years, that is, on academic advice that a Chicana/o Studies Department was *aca-*

## WATCHED WORDS

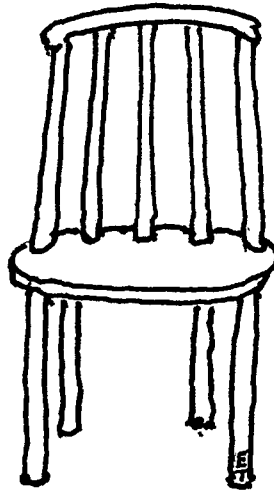
### The Looming Terror

AS LONG ago as the fall 1990 number of *CPR*, followed by the first "Watched Words" in Winter 1991, Criticus alerted constant readers to the looming terror of academic political correctness, a topic that was just being broached in advanced circles but that has since become a cliché. Indeed, notice of it has spread so widely, the jokes about it have become so obvious, that "Watched Words" has seemed superfluous and has been in quiet retirement for several issues now.

But the loony left never sleeps, and it never takes notice of unanswerable criticism. And often the right too complacently laughs off the grosser instances of left lunacy. Still, it came as a surprise recently to read in a column by William F. Buckley that he had not previously encountered the use of the word *chair* to mean *chairman* and that his use of *chairman* in addressing a female raised hackles and led to a severe reprimand of the noted wordsmith by a militant chairbeing. Where has he been, one wonders? Obviously not moving in academic circles where *chair* is now so firmly established that signs reading "Chair's Office" or statements such as "The Chair told me" elicit not the slightest glimmer of surprise or perplexity. No one on campus (other than Criticus), upon encountering such signs or statements, any longer envisions a room occupied solely by a chair or a chair uttering administrative profundities. Like the words that mean their opposites recently listed in a *Time* essay, we all now know that a chair doesn't mean a chair, it means a person.

One thing, however, that *chair* reminds us of in our bemused observa-

tion of the PC Follies is that certain revisionist terms have more staying power than others and are quickly adopted into the linguistic mainstream by the ever-pliant media. Therefore it remains the duty of a vigilant Criticus to point them out,



### ARE YOU IN?

Illustration by Elizabeth Tennyson

while leaving such palpable nonsense terms as "melanin impaired" (*i.e.*, white skinned) to fade away, so to speak, in a wash of gentle derision. Hence this occasional revival of "Watched Words."

### Two Worth Watching

Two terms that bear watching have recently fixed themselves on the newspaper and magazine pages and on your local television newscaster's lips. The first is the less offensive of the two, namely, "workers' compensation." The person (formerly "man") on the street may still speak of "workmen's compensation," but all *bien pensant* commentators have degenerated workmen to workers. It lacks euphony certainly, suggesting bees more than humans, but it can be lived with if you are of an accommodating nature. On the verbal offen-

siveness scale of one to 10, it rates a mere five.

Much higher on that scale and definitely to be resisted is the emergence in and around Memorial Day of that hitherto unheard of national shrine "The Tomb of the Unknowns." This sounds like a title of a B-movie sequel to "The Night of the Living Dead" but is in fact the quietly renamed "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier" in Arlington National Cemetery. No doubt the reasons for this change (who did it and under what authority?) are numerous.

### Pat Schroeder Tailhooked?

FIRST, THERE is more than one unknown soldier buried there. But then, one could call it the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers. Was the reason then, perhaps, that a given unknown body is that of an airman or seaman, not necessarily a foot soldier? If that were all, we could move to "Tomb of the Unknown Warriors." But surely the most important reason for the change is that words like soldier and warrior suggest a male person, and airman and seaman positively scream male to the politically correct ear. (The latter term seems to scream it twice over.) What if the unknown body were that of a WAC or WAVE — or Pat Schroeder tailhooked while dressed as Michael Dukakis in a tank? No, it wouldn't do to imply that only men have fought and died unknown. It might discourage women from wanting to be combat soldiers, so that they too could be injured and mutilated beyond recognition and placed under the mournful, memorial gaze of Robert E. Lee atop the hill at the Custis-Lee Mansion.

Hence the ghoulish formulation "Tomb of the Unknowns." Just be sure when you go through the place at night that you're whistling "Dixie."

— Criticus

*demically* unsound? How do faculty members who labored on such committees feel about faculty governance now? There's one born ....

Why did no faculty members who teach in the existing Chicana/o Studies Program participate in the hunger strike? Why did the protesters not call upon them for solidarity?

Why was not a single faculty member in the existing program sought out and interviewed by the media? Were they hiding out? What do they know that the protesters don't know?

Why name a studies center after a Dead American Male? Why not name this new venture the "Ixtlapapyotl-Chilictlixatl/ Chitlichicoshayotl Center for Chicana/o Studies"? At least the youthful bearers of these names, despite rumored possible liver damage from their fast, are likely to live a while. Presumably, they'll last long enough to give some other female a chance to distinguish herself in the cause so that, upon the deaths of Ixtlapapyotl-Chilictlixatl and Chitlichicoshayotl, the center could be renamed for another live female hero. And then renamed again at *her* death. And so on forever, to insure that the center will *always* bear the name of a *living Chicana woman*. (Rigoberta Menchu is reserved for the forthcoming Central American Studies Center, so keep your hands off that.)

And one last inquiry: If Chicana/o studies are to be linked to Aztec culture, can we hope to see human sacrifice in the Plaza Aztlán?

#### ANSWERS — OR — QUESTIONS AGAIN

ENOUGH OF these amusements, gentle readers. Amidst much else that is clear out of all this play-

acting, a few points should perhaps be made here, lest they not emerge clearly.

First. Tantrums work. Never more so than with liberals. Never more so than with academic liberals. There were in fearsome truth faculty members making their way with pained expressions across the picket lines into their previously trashed (and wholly innocent, as if that mattered) faculty center, stopping to sign petitions for a Chicana/o Studies Department and expressing grave concern about the health of the protesters. For comparable fatuity (unless he was being ironic) consider the chancellor's statement at the conclusion of the incident in which he expressed hope that the protesters could get back to class. All five of them?

So, tantrums work, which is why children throw them for indulgent adults. In turn, the adults get what

they deserve. UCLA deserves a Chicana/o Studies Department, as well as all the other ethnic studies departments that will now be demanded and probably established without hunger strikes. The Deng Xiaoping Center for Chinese-American Studies, located in the New Tiananmen Square quad opposite Plaza Aztlán. The Khmer Rouge Center for Cambodian Studies ... the Ho Chi Minh Center ... you get the idea.

BUT THE lingering question that is bound to fester in the minds of thoughtful readers remains: why should there be such departments? *Cui bono*; who benefits? The official answer is that they represent the multiculturalism of which California in particular and the nation in general should be proud. An altogether different answer that goes much farther towards addressing all



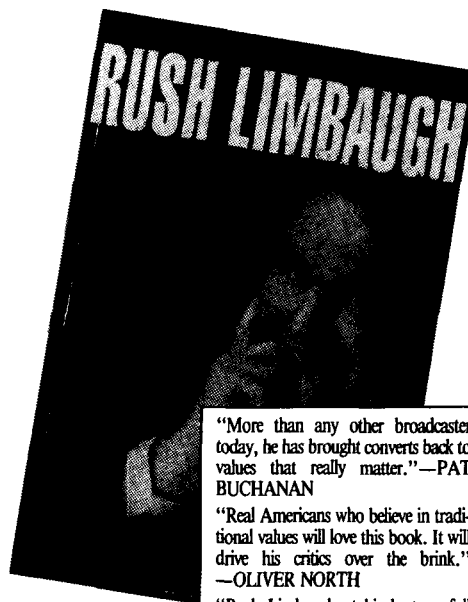


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the questions raised above is that academic multiculturalism is a form of self-ghettoization, but one that creates a privileged rather than a punitive enclave, a land of lotus-eaters who believe that intellectual "slumber is more sweet than toil":

*But they smile, they find a music  
centred in a doleful song  
Steaming up, a lamentation and an  
ancient tale of wrong,  
Like a tale of little meaning tho' the  
words are strong.*

Whether called departments or not, group and ethnic studies centers are political rather than academic constructs, conceded to by academics almost always under pressure to placate, buy off, co-opt, and otherwise neutralize a militant interest group while still keeping one's political credentials correct. At some level everybody knows this, which is the answer to why the most directly affected faculty watched this parade from the sidelines, and why they will find reasons that they should stay in their original academic departments, unless they too want to vegetate in an academic dead end, or worse, run the risk of being ousted for insufficient revolutionary zeal. It is also the answer to why the vast majority of the large number of Latino students on campus are not Chicano studies majors and did not swamp Plaza Aztlán in a show of support. It is the answer to why the media never sought an in-depth examination of the issues, though at least a few radio talk shows, to their credit, sought to address it, even if they succeeded only in attracting an even larger than usual proportion of the uninformed among their callers.

Some, of course, will make political gains out of this, and already

have, but more of the beneficiaries will entertain themselves by majoring at considerable public expense in feel-goodism: Build us more stately ghettos, O ye taxpayers, we will not wander more. CPR

## BOOKS

### 'Child-Centered' Education

*What Are We Trying To Teach Them Anyway? A Father's Focus on School Reform*, by Ronald K. Pierce, ICS Press (Institute for Contemporary Studies), San Francisco, 1993, 176 pages, \$19.95, cloth.

Reviewed by Amy MacDougall

AFTER READING this book, I digested this June 16, 1993, newspaper headline with a healthy skepticism: "Program aims to boost math, science education." The article under it described a new multi-million-dollar "child-centered" educational program in Los Angeles County designed to "improve teachers' skills" at a new institute concentrating on math and science. The program also offers teacher internships in industry and at universities and will equip schools with "technology learning stations" — "computers and telecommunications gear" — without which math and science apparently can no longer be learned.

But having read *What Are We Trying To Teach Them Anyway?*, I thought: It seems most of the money will be spent on making *teachers* more skilled. "Our teachers know a lot about content," the

newspaper quotes a county education office spokesman as saying, "but what they have not had is sophisticated training in how to teach kids in this problem-solving, hands-on manner." Will *any* help be directed to the children, I wondered?

Having read this book, I can imagine its author, Ronald K. Pierce, heaving a sigh after reading about yet another such "child-centered" program. Pierce considers a program child-centered when, of all people, the *student* decides to learn math or science (or whatever) because it relates to something real in his own life. He says American education typically follows a teacher-centered approach with day-to-day lessons dictated to children without regard for their aptitudes for learning, for assuming the responsibility of *choosing* to learn, or for mobilizing their desire to learn. He contrasts his own difficult experiences in school with the enjoyment and excitement he felt in reading and learning on his own. " ... the puzzle for me was, Why did learning in school seem so dull and confrontational when learning on my own was so much fun?"

A father of three, Pierce began clarifying his ideas about education following a series of disturbing events beginning in 1989. First, there were the suicides of several young people in his home town of Denver — a rare incident 25 years earlier when he was a teen-ager. He wondered: did their experiences at school contribute to these suicides and to the wide variety of destructive behavior that attracts young people today?

THEN, EDUCATIONAL specialists at his own children's public school said his nine-year-old twin boys were suffering from an "emotional development disorder" and should undergo counseling. Pierce says the educators were sin-

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