A
approximately four years ago, the pub-
lic could not escape the deluge of
speeches, editorials, and sermons regarding this issue.
A new plague was spreading across universi-
ty campuses in North America. With dire
alarms about the imminent collapse of multi-
culturalism, conservative spokespersons and media
reappropriated managed to paint a picture of campus life resembling
Achilleion Renoir’s vision of Hell.
Indeed, even casual attention to the main-
stream media was enough to discern that
the institutions of higher learning had
been “taken over” and transformed into
hotbeds of malfeasence by a societal alliance
of academic draconians seeking to impose
the edicts of political correctness on pish-
tan faculty and students.
A phrase used with an ironic sub-
text by the Left as a term of self-mockery in
the late 1980s and early 1990s, p.c. was
appropriated by the conservative Right and
turned on its proverbial head. In the
process, p.c. was denuded of its historical
specificity and subsequently assumed an
entrapment of defining characteristics, not
least of which was an alleged disdain for
free expression. In the end, it was
claimed that those “radicals” who had
once marched for the right to free speech
were now vigorously suppressing Oberlin’s
students of those same police whose mini-
tivities of truth were spurning up like
noxious weeds on campuses and choking out
the flowers of free expression.
“P.C.” has by now found a comfort-
able home in popular parlance, but many
of the issues foregone during the p.c.
wave continue to form at present
university campuses. Indeed, those who feel
“threatened” continue to invoke p.c. as a
term of derision for all things which
could loosely be described as multicultural
or feminist, and organizations such as the
Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship
have recently launched a vigorous
assault on the alleged hegemony of p.c.
forces. The current spate of books and
drawings attending to polarizing issues
and concerns on campus publica-
tions and handbills are further indication that
the campus “culture wars” are far from over.
One scholar in John Felkets, whose
book Moral Panic: Biopolitics Rising has
itself caused a panic of sorts. It has
been denounced by some and heralded by oth-
ers. If nothing else, Felkets obviously
intended to cause a stir with his publica-

indigenous strains, and is reserved for “bio-
informers” and what he calls the “vio-
|lence narrative.” According to his theory,
|the almost half of Moral Panic is dedicated
to debunking the statistics which have been
|produced by both sides of the “violence against
|women” debate in this country. Felkets’
|concern is aimed particularly at Changing
|the Landscape: A Historian Responding to
|Ending Violence (the Final Report of the
|Canadian Panel on Violence Against
|Women) and Walter Deaknson and
|Katebi’s 1995 campus abuse study.
|Felkets contends that these and other
|similar surveys have generated inflated sta-
|tistics due to biased categories, political
|prejudices, and the “myth” of patriarchal
|oppression. In this, in turn, has created an
|enormous dynamic of “moral panic,” heightened
|women’s anxiety, and demonstrated men’s
|arrogance.

What is more, one may be inclined to credit
|Felkets for pointing to the folly of some
|studies that place killing and rape under
|the same rubric, which makes Moral Panic:
|difficult to digest in its callous trivialization
|of violence against women. According to
|Felkets, it is not actual violence that has
|increased in the last decade, only the “statis-
tics of violence against women” (147). This
|however is not intended to suggest that
|violence is any way eliminated, for the
|crue of Felkets’ argument is that the
|recency of biopoliticism has created a
|“whol-e new class of male victims” (27).
|This rhetoric of male victimization is part
|of anachronistic panic currently sweeping
|American and native populations. The
|reduction of these “victims” of biopo-
rhetoric has been met with resistance by
|Felkets, but at present is likely to be
|unavoidable.

One is Philippe Rantzen, who, as
|Felkets reminds us, has received many
|awards, including a Guggenheim
|Fellowship, and has penned countless arti-
cles and books, including his latest, Linear,
|Evolution, and Behaviour, which drew
|the lead review in The New York Times
|Book Review. He would also add the opinion
|of scholars such as Susan Faludi and
|Charles Murray. The Bell Curve also
|received some “honour.” Felkets says
|that Rantzen’s book is one of two
|academic freedom and the suggestion that
|the meat of Rantzen’s work can only be
|judged by “intensive and rigorous scientific
|scrutiny” (214). This claim lends a sci-
cific aura of credibility to Rantzen’s
|work. Felkets then proceeds to chastise
|those who have sought to “expose” Rantzen’s
|scientific findings. What Felkets
|consistently negates is mention, however,
|is that Rantzen has received
|reasonable support from the right-wing
|Pioneer Fund—a New York-based orga-
nization founded in 1957—which prides
|itself on financing research into the disme-
tion of “race” betterment and whose direc-
|tors maintain that black people are “gen-
etically deficient.” In his summary of
|Rantzen’s plight, Felkets almost exclusively
|releases on a field defending Rantzen’s
|academic freedom written by City College,
|New York’s philosopher, Daniel Gross.
|Gross is the author of such books as
|Discrimination in Reverse (1978) and
|Reverse Discrimination (1987)—both
|callous trivialization of violence against
|women.
APPRAISISMUSTAN ...

...what makes Moral Panic difficult to digest is its callous trivialization of violence against women.
The collection of essays that constitute The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debacle offers a much more balanced overview than Moral Panic of contemporary controversies about gender, race, sexual politics, and political correctness in general. For those already familiar with the onslaught of recently published books on political correctness, the subtext in the volume, with the possible exception of Stunt Hall’s broadside on the topic, offers little that is new. That is not to say the debate is over, or that the issues of free speech and political correctness are unworthy of serious discussion. But it is true that the Author’s note (by a number of the contributors) provided the most opportune time to push the pro- and anti-moralist into mainstream pop- ular culture. Thus, the debate continues, and the authors provide perceptive commentaries, drawing on their personal experiences and the insights of others. 

Despite the fact that the collection was published in Britain, many of the essays address the current state of affairs on American campuses. This is perhaps why many of the essays exhibit glaring inconsistencies. John J. Mearsheimer’s “The Culture War and the Politics of Higher Education in America” and Yehuda Koren’s “The ‘Great Backlash’” both argue that the media and conservative pundits have been overreacting and the situation has been vastly exaggerated by the extent to which the Left has taken over U.S. campuses. They also respond to the claim that the stigmatization of McCarthyism has distorted the account which most students have not been aware of the complexities of the McCarthy situation, which has been treated as a simple, unidimensional, and ideological issue. The problem with Annette’s account is, however, that it suggests the one-pi- cationalism it so vigorously attacks. It is in fact an ironic commentary on the political climate which the essays account for, most obviously in the early 1980s and early 1960s in response to the fear of McCarthyism in the classroom. In addition, the book’s perceived innocence of a more complex culture which has undergone “the linguistic war.” Without discussing the political re- lationship of language, Hall maintains that many perpetual follow-ups of a disparaging nature are guilty of clinging to the belief that if things are not right, then they cannot exist (186). Therefore, on the climate of those who view alterations in language as a progressive and of them- selves, Hall argues that such positions are actually defined in their ability to address issues of sexual relations of power, exclu- sion, and marginalization. Thus, the authors suggest some “politically incorrect” paths- ways through the maze of p.c. politics, Hall states that although p.c. is coupled with a strategy which is democratic in the sense that it genuinely addresses the real issues of life, to waste time and effort to constitute the reality so.”

While political correctness has been more a target of the Right, it has also raised the ire of some Leftist intellectuals, many of whom have argued that p.c. represents a discursive withdrawal from politics. More concerned with eroding changes in lan- guage than with substantive shifts in power relations, these Leftists have accused p.c. advocates of retreating into an endless array of language games. In her revision, acclaimed Deborah Tannen seeks to challenge this assertion by focusing on the “power of language.” She argues that the various speakers’ changes engendered by p.c. policies are welcome and necessary developments.

In the concluding essay, Stuart Hall argues that p.c. reflects the fragmentation of the political landscape and the breakup of social constituencies that no longer adhere to collective master narratives such as those built upon class and/or race. In this regard, Hall views p.c. as the inevitable result of the rise of identity politics. Hall also points out that the discursive and indi- vidualist notions encapsulated in p.c. polit- ics are symptomatic of a larger intellectual culture that has undergone “the linguistic war.” Without discussing the political re- lationship of language, Hall maintains that many perpetual follow-ups of a disparaging nature are guilty of clinging to the belief that if things are not right, then they cannot exist (186). Therefore, on the climate of those who view alterations in language as a progressive and of them- selves, Hall argues that such positions are actually defined in their ability to address issues of sexual relations of power, exclu- sion, and marginalization. Thus, the authors suggest some “politically incorrect” paths- ways through the maze of p.c. politics, Hall states that although p.c. is coupled with a strategy which is democratic in the sense that it genuinely addresses the real issues of life, to waste time and effort to constitute the reality so.”

I cannot help thinking that my father’s having his penis on the outside of his body was another sign of his vulnerability, his fragility . . . .

Lynne (age eight or nine): Aren’t you afraid you’re going to break it?


Daddy collapses on the couch, laughing.
behaviour that serves particular agendas at particular moments in history. Fetke, however, fails to acknowledge this and thus falls prey to a common trap: for getting that if the freedom of speech of the Roditiens and Yagans is to be defended, it is too must the voices of their critics. Much of what Fetke calls "censorship" is actually protected and dissent. It is the "false speech" of those people whom Fetke and company do not want to hear. Nonetheless, given the contemporary social and cultural climate, the term is accurately used as a backhanded term.

Fetke and his comrades can position themselves in the same category of libertarians and defenders of free speech against the intrusive, abhorrent fingers of the "left", as Gardin does in his inchoate anti-p.c. tirade delivered at the University of Michigan in 1991.

Another case, less publicized, is that of Jacques Collin, a University of Manitoba professor, disciplined and punished for using sexist and racial language and slipping a student whom he was trying to stimulate to brighter attention (22). Fetke justifies Collin's behaviour by referring to his pedagogical style as "flamboyant" and "theatrical" and, it seems, because the 60-year-old scholar and his 18-year-old students had given "30 years' service" to the academy. In fact, maligning to "cases of servitude", as he did when discussing embattled war heroos is a recurring theme in Fetke's writings. Indeed, Fetke's outbursts are alleged to have been condoned by various professors, when not appealing to freedom of speech, rest largely on an agenda to be drawn, and profoundly and irritatingly, suggests that such upstanding, "taunted" faculty are beyond reproach.

The latter charge is less defensible in the case of Moral Panic, where the collection of essays that constitute The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate, offers a much more balanced overview than Moral Panic of contemporary controversies about gender, race, sexual politics and media revision. For those already familiar with the onslaught of recently published books on political correctness, the addition to this volume, with the possible exception of Burt Hall's foreword to the topic, offers little that is new. The book fills the void that is created by the jettisoning of issues related by political correctness. For the uninitiated, however, The War of the Words provides an adequate introduction to a range of views that both lend and critique p.c. politics.

Despite the fact that the collection was published in Britain, many of the essays address the current state of affairs on American campuses. This is perhaps why many of the essays exhibit glaring limitations. John Arnett's "The Culture War and the Politics of Higher Education in America" and Yasmin Alibhai Brown's "The Great Backlash" both rightly point out that the media and conservative puns have deviously costumed their cause by exaggerating the extent to which the Left has "taken over" U.S. campuses. They also expose the fact that the stupendous use of slam & McCarthy rhetoric has distorted the account which most children have received about campus relations.

Today, however, the stenched radicals still stand for the effectiveness of conservative critics in college classrooms. In particular, the campaign attack the supposed success of the "war on p.c.", both publicly and privately, by noting how well the "true" anti-p.c. college has been in response to "leftist moves in college classrooms. In addition, he wroungly diagnosed that the "war on p.c.", sounding board to the National Association of Scholars (which, incidentally, has chapters in Canada) was established in 1987. While it is true that the NAS membership grew by leaps and bounds in the late 1990s, the interest of the NAS dates back to 1982, when it was called the Coalition for Democracy. In fact, the groundwork for the right-wing backlash was being laid in the late 1970s and early 1980s by a number of corporatist-affiliated think tanks and foundations. Thus, the attack on p.c. is not a spontaneous movement, but rather part of a long-term, well-financed plan by the corporate sector. The 1990s saw the phenomenon that was in the 1980s.

Still, the attack on p.c. is coupled with a strategy which is democratic— in the sense that the conservative opposition addresses the real fears, confusions, and anxieties as well as the pressures of ordinary people, tries to educate them to new ways of life, to take them over and thus to constitute a new order. While many of the essays that constitute the book offer a range of views that both lend and criticize p.c. politics, the book itself seems to lack a coherent and persuasive argument. It is a collection of essays that are largely disconnected from each other.

While political correctness has been a target of the Right, it has also raised the ire of some leftist intellectuals, many of whom have argued that p.c. represents a discursive withdrawal from politics. More concerned with exotic changes to language than with substantive shifts in power relations, these Leftists have encouraged p.c. advocates of reimagining into an endless array of language games. In her essay, "The Campaigns: Why the Left Has Taken Over U.S. Campuses," Yasmin Alibhai Brown seeks to challenge this assertion by focusing on the "power of language." She argues that the various claims of the Left have been underpinned by p.c. policies that are welcome and necessary developments.

In the concluding essay, Stuart Hall argues that p.c. reflects the fragmentation of the political landscape and the breakdown of social coalitions that no longer adhere to collective political narratives such as those built upon class and/or race. In this regard, Hall views p.c. as the insidious result of the rise of identity politics. Hall also points out that the deliberate and individualist notions encompassed in p.c. policies are symptomatic of a larger intellectual culture that has undermined the "linguistic turn." Without disputing the political relevance of language, Hall maintains that many champions of discourse change are guilty of clinging to the "beliefs that if things are language-based, then there is an easy escape to it." (16). Therefore, against the claims of those who view individualism as a social science, Hall argues that such positions are necessarily limited in their ability to address broader social relations of power, exclusion, and marginalization. In the attempt to suggest some "political correctness" paths, through the maze of p.c. politics, Hall states that unless p.c. is coupled with a strategy which is democratic— in the sense that the conservative opposition addresses the real fears, confusions, and anxieties as well as the pressures of ordinary people, tries to educate them to new ways of life, to take them over and thus to constitute a new order. While many of the essays that constitute the book offer a range of views that both lend and criticize p.c. politics, the book itself seems to lack a coherent and persuasive argument. It is a collection of essays that are largely disconnected from each other.