

Jessica Bryan came out on the short end of a tit-for-tat exchange with the conservative press and blogosphere this month.

The part-time North Idaho College English instructor was the focus of a nasty e-mail campaign that was triggered nationwide when her disparaging classroom comments about President Bush and Republicans and her college e-mail address were published by conservative Web site WorldNetDaily. Several addressed her with a slang name reserved for female dogs. One threatened to sodomize her. Others hinted that she and like-minded liberals should be shot.

Nasty stuff.

But Bryan isn't without blame. Apparently, she used her authority as a college instructor to routinely jab at the current administration in particular and Republicans in general. On the first day of class this semester, according to former student Linda Cook, she told students that "George Bush was elected president because people in this country can't read." On Feb. 12, she ignited the firestorm that eventually engulfed her by stating: "I believe in the death penalty. ... First, we line up everyone who can't think and right behind them, anyone who's ever voted Republican."

Dumb comments, although said with a smile. Later, after the backlash, Bryan claimed her words were meant to provoke debate. No mention was made in various newspaper articles and op-ed columns by both Cook and Bryan whether the English teacher ever poked fun at Democrats or the scandals of former President Bill Clinton's administration. The constant Republican bashing stimulated Cook to quit the English 102 class. Cook, a former aide for the late conservative Congressman Helen Chenoweth-Hage, then successfully demanded from the college that the \$379 she paid for the class be refunded.

The flap epitomizes the disdain the True Believers on both sides of the conservative-liberal divide have for each other – a hatred that prevents them from communicating and thwarts the vast middle segment of this country from demanding that politicians work for the public good rather than their political parties.

The liberals use their vantage points in higher education, the Big Media and the entertainment industry to pour contempt on Republicans and religious conservatives. When they're caught at it, they respond with an innocent expression, as Bryan did, and say, "Most (comments) were said facetiously in an attempt to get my students to think. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that anyone would take it seriously."

Offended conservatives, meanwhile, vent their spleen, providing fodder for the liberals to huff and point out how hateful they are.

In the North Idaho College flap, conservatives provided plenty of fuel for their bashers on the left. Nasty comments sent via e-mail to Bryan and later turned over to the Coeur d'Alene Police Department included:

- "Why don't you just kill yourself" – from "a Libertarian who thinks all Democrats should be executed."
- "You are a parasite in this country. ... I hope you lose your position and cease poisoning the flower of our future who enroll in your class with your leftist indoctrination" – from Austin, Texas.
- "Pray that there's never a right-wing coup d'etat in this beautiful nation because if you don't get to split in time, you'll be one of the first ones floating on a river like your cronies did in Argentina and Chile. And some of them were accomplished swimmers."

Tough words from small-minded computer nerds hiding in the blogosphere.

Cook denounced the cowardly attacks on Bryan. Although there were no indications that local Republicans were involved in the cyber attack, Kootenai County Republican Central Committee leaders should have done so, too. They missed a chance to tell their partisans that this sort of attack is inappropriate.

Hate isn't a family value reserved only for conservative Kool-Aid drinkers. Liberals are mean-spirited, too.

When Chenoweth-Hage died in a single-car accident in Nevada last October, the crazies unleashed their vitriol on the Democratic Underground blog, calling her sundry names including "whore" and stating things such as: "Couldn't happen to a nicer gal." And: "That (expletive deleted) deserved to die." And: "Sorry but I just don't give a damn about hatemongers like her. I just consider it a little more space in the world for someone who might provide a better contribution."

Instructor **Bryan** harmed her tax-supported **college** by providing letter-to-the-editor fodder for Kootenai County residents, including dominant Republicans, who view NIC suspiciously as just another liberal bastion of higher education. Predictably, foolishly, hatefully, conservatives overreacted on the other side.

And the dance of the extremes goes on, keeping us a country divided.

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