

Doug Clark: What's another word for hypersensitive?

Doug Clark/SR

Today we will examine that old childhood saying ...

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can turn some people into uptight politically correct loons.”

Or in this case, some Washington State University instructors who are being accused of violating students' First Amendment rights by banning the classroom use of certain words in courses they teach at the school's Department of Critical Culture, Gender and Race Studies.

I'd be upset, too, if a child of mine were a student embroiled in this Wazzu kerfuffle.

Mainly, I'd be yelling, “Are you outta your mind? How do you ever expect to get a good-paying job after graduation when you're wasting your time taking classes in the Department of Critical Culture, Gender and Race Studies?”

Welcome to the real world, work seekers.

But getting back to today's word problem, our news coverage reported that the blowback is all about the instructors banning certain words they deem oppressive or hateful, words like “The Man,” “illegal aliens,” “tranny” and “income tax.”

No, wait a second. That last one is a term I personally find hateful and oppressive.

The point is that words are important. Unless, that is, you're singing “Surfin' Bird,” the 1963 hit by the Trashmen.

The song lyrics are essentially a repetition of “Bird, bird, bird, b-bird's the word. A-well-a, bird, bird, bird, the bird is the word ...”

Which, come to think of it, would probably drive the aforementioned WSU instructors completely insane if, say, all the students started singing “Surfin' Bird” nonstop during entire class periods.

Not that I'd ever suggest anything that evil, mind you.

But what's happening at our Palouse Outpost of Knowledge is not that unusual. For years, this leftist word-banning agenda has been going on at many of the country's finest intellectually intolerant Ivy League schools.

Some of these universities, in fact, have become so language sensitive that the mere act of conversation has been banned as too risky.

Students walk around with their mouths duct-taped shut. Conversation takes place by holding up flash cards that say things like “Yes,” “No” or “Please pass the soy burgers.”

I seem to recall a similar controversy years ago from some well-intentioned WSU football fans.

They got annoyed whenever people used the term “Coug,” which has become synonymous with the verb “choke.”

The issue blew away, however, when the team kept on Couging.

And Couging ...

As a person involved in the ol’ word biz, I may be able to help these overwrought control freak instructors.

I’ve found in over 30 years of writing columns that there’s always room for compromise.

Case in point: Not long ago I used what I thought was a harmless though humorous word to describe the sex act.

Rhymes with riddled.

Anyway, this was deemed too graphic for a hip, cutting-edge publication such as The Spokesman-Review. So, during the editing process the phraseology was surgically excised.

Then, in a spirit of collaboration, I agreed to a safe and unfunny alternative term for the tango with no steps. This kept the editors happy and, more importantly, me with a paycheck.

I know. Free speech – bosh!

Call me a pie-eyed dreamer, but I think the same thing can happen at WSU if we just put our narrow minds together.

Now, let’s see what we can do with some of those nasty offensive terms, like ...

THE MAN – This is a grossly overused cliché, especially in today’s bellicose political climate. The replacement term that I think we can all agree on should be “The Trump” or “The Donald.”

TRANNY – I, too, have been deeply offended by this term, mainly because I am a mechanically challenged person. I feel waves of inferiority whenever I get around car guys and they start saying things like “What’s that baby got under the hood?”

And then the other motorhead will say, “Oh, man. It’s gotta 426 hemi with a G-Force tranny that’ll turn 14,000 RPMs.”

Meanwhile, I just stand around feeling inadequate not knowing what the hell they’re even yakking about.

New term: “Thingie that makes the wheels turn.”

ILLEGAL ALIENS – This harsh label is often applied to a lot of very nice people who illegally come to America for a better way of life. Except, that is, for the small minority of not very nice people who illegally come to America wanting to blow us all to smithereens.

New term: Geographically Misplaced Individuals.

Well, I think that’s enough compromising for today. Hopefully these, um, educators will see how much easier life can be when they stop vaping paint thinner and learn to get along.

Doug Clark is a columnist for The Spokesman-Review. He can be reached at (509) 459-5432 or dougc@spokesman.com.