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POLITICAL CORRECTNESS – 2029

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The unwritten rules of political correctness can be considered indices of social change. The terms African-American, Italian-American, and Hispanic have replaced ethnic slurs of past years as these groups became assimilated into American culture. In addition, in urban areas, the greeting “Merry Christmas” has been replaced by “Happy Holidays” in order to recognize December festivals recognized by other religious groups.

The most common example of political correctness is the term *Ms.* which has replaced *Miss* and *Mrs.* Even those who actively opposed women’s rights and the Equal Rights Amendment use the term *Ms.* because it is considered politically correct. It is no longer necessary to indicate the marital status of a woman when citing her name. It is also of no consequence. Similarly, people no longer ask others how many children they have. It is up to the individual to volunteer this information. As with marriage, having children is no longer considered a person’s defining characteristic.

What will constitute political correctness twenty years from now? The terms should reflect changes in relationships and family structure that are expected over the next two decades if not sooner. Here are some examples:

Today: “He had two children from his first marriage, one child from a relationship, and no children from his second marriage.”

2029: “He had two children from his first relationship, one child from his second relationship, and no children from his third relationship.”

By 2029 the circumstances of the birth of children will not be considered important enough to be anybody’s business. The terms “marriage” or “civil unions” will just converge into the term “relationship,” especially since fewer people are expected to go through the formality of either marriage or civil union by that time. We should also note that the term “out of wedlock” is taboo even today.

The terms “husband,” “wife,” and “spouse” will be replaced by “partner.” The latter is used today to indicate members of a homosexual bond, but by 2029 the gender of the significant other, or through what process legal or otherwise the union arose, will be neither important nor considered anybody’s business.

Children will likely still refer to their parents as mother and father but some will begin referring to them as Parent John and Parent Mary just as they use Uncle Max and Aunt Susan today. This will make way for many children whose parents will be Parent Al and Parent Tom or Parent Barbara and Parent Alice. The prefix “step” as in stepmother will be a thing of the past. Of course it is less clear that names like John, Mary, Max, Susan, Al, Tom, Barbara, and Alice will exist in 2029.

The terms ‘African-American’ and ‘Hispanic’ are the politically correct terms that replace ethnic slurs of decades past. But by 2029 these terms will have little meaning. Indeed even today, the self-identification from a limited list of terms like these is probably a contributing factor to the surprises in the early analyses of the US 2010 census. Mixed marriages and adoption make these terms inaccurate even if politically correct. The cost of DNA testing is expected to drop over the next few decades and DNA testing will become routine. Political correctness will evolve from ethnic descriptions to DNA types. Just as with Myers-Briggs personality classifications, status hierarchies are sure to form as people search for new forms of identity.

This usage will correspond to social change expected over the next two decades. Yes, there are many who oppose same sex marriage today just as there were once those who opposed women working outside the home. At one time there were also people who supported slavery, supported British occupation in India, and opposed women’s right to vote. However a significant number of those people also knew that their positions could not be justified indefinitely into the future. Their goal was really to postpone change and leave it up to a new generation to decide first on what is politically correct and later on what is morally and legally appropriate. Thus, political correctness can be an early signal of social change.

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POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM (send comments to forum@futuretakes.org or post on FUTUREtakes blog):

- *The terms “African-American” and “Hispanic” connote region-based (continent-based) identity and association. In contrast, for Americans of European ancestry, the descriptors are usually more country-specific – e.g., “Italian-American,” “Irish-American,” “German-American” – and in this, all European nations do not fare equally! Will this dichotomy continue (in the US) through the next decade, and why or why not? If not, which basis for identity and association will prevail? More generally, which other sources of identity will predominate in 2029?*
- *In 2018, to what extent will Herson’s predictions apply in cultures in which women are not regarded as equal to men?*
- *As Herson observes, it is now less common in the US for people to ask one another about the number of children they have, at least when they first meet. (In contrast, many years ago, such questions were typically followed by questions about one’s religious preference!) Nonetheless, “What do you do?” – referring to one’s occupation or profession – remains one of the first questions that people in the US typically ask one another when they first meet. (The collegiate equivalent: “What are you majoring in?”) A decade from now, will people in your part of the world similarly relate to one another in terms of descriptors such as these? If so, what will the descriptors be? If not, what*

ways of relating to others will follow the present “relating-by-descriptor” and its close cousin, counterpoint-based identity?