

# THE BOSTON **PHOENIX**

## Tyler Clementi

Freedom Watch

By HARVEY SILVERGLATE | September 30, 2010

Lisa W. Foderaro's page one story in today's *New York Times*, "[Private Moment Made Public, Then a Fatal Jump](#)," demonstrates how society's increasing reliance on fuzzy, politically correct ways of analyzing current events make national public discourse if not less intelligent, then certainly more idiotic.

Foderaro's absurd take on the Rutgers student, whose tragic suicide came three days after the secret webcam recording and broadcasting of his sexual encounter with a male, is evident in the fourth graf of her story, where she refers to "the online posting of hurtful material." The stuff posted was not "hurtful," for God's sake! It was illegal, a crime!

"Hurtful" is one of those newly minted words in the academy, the use of which is most helpful to politically correct deans trying to control student life. The problem with what the video-recording student did was not that it was "hurtful," but rather that it was a *crime* -- a despicable act, but nonetheless and most fundamentally a crime.

Foderaro reports that on the same day as the student's suicide, Rutgers "kicked off a two-year, campus-wide project to teach the importance of civility, with special attention to the use and abuse of new technology." With this thought-reform nonsense, the administrators are wasting students' time and taxpayers' money -- Rutgers, after all, is a public university with serious [budget problems](#).

If the school really wanted to help students, it should have simply circulated a memo as to the legal violations attendant upon gross invasions of privacy under federal and New Jersey law, and remind Rutgers students that they are expected to obey the law, period. To say that secretly video-recording a roommate's tryst and then posting it on the Web is "hurtful" utterly trivializes what is a serious felony.

Steven Goldstein, chairman of the gay-rights group Garden State Equality, quoted by Foderaro, said "he considered the death a hate crime."

Well, it was not a hate crime. It was a felony. What does hate -- or love, for that matter -- have to do with it?

Are we to punish law violators only after we test them and ascertain that they had hate in their hearts?

Take a look at the *Times'* description of the "[Project Civility](#)" program at Rutgers: "Long in the planning, the campaign will involve panel discussions, lectures, workshops and other events to raise awareness about the importance of respect, compassion and courtesy in everyday interactions." Is this a university, or a kindergarten? Kindergarten kids have to be taught civility, but college students have to be taught the liberal arts, the humanities, and the sciences, with only a reminder (coming better from university legal counsel than from some idiotic dean) as to state and federal laws governing activities in which the students might be tempted to engage.

The Rutgers administration is, I predict, going to react to this terrible tragedy by doubling its budget and its personnel who conduct thought-reform and behavior-modification programs that are uselessly but [expensively proliferating](#) today on campuses of higher education. This is precisely the wrong approach. Aside from it being none of the university's business how students think about non-academic subjects and what their attitudes are, the university should educate rather than indoctrinate. Part of that education is a simple memo informing the students as to what kinds of conduct are violations of state and federal law. (And, if the truth be known, if a student claims ignorance of the law that felonizes surreptitious recording and dissemination of a roommate's sexual activities, that student should be thrown out of college not only for being a criminal, but for being an idiot.)

What is wrong with the *New York Times* in how it reports this kind of tragic story? I know what's wrong with college administrators -- I analyzed that idiocy in my 1998 co-authored book *The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses*. But how can the *Times* indulge in this orgy of politically correct nonsense about "hurtful" behavior? Sometimes I feel that if I ever again hear an academic dean describe student behavior as "hurtful." I'll turn into a homicidal maniac. But now I'm reading such nonsense in the *Times*!! Were I an editor, I'd strike out all such words. (Joining "hateful," I would add the phrase "reaching out to ..." and a few other of my least favorite corruptions of the English language.)