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## The New F-Word. Why the Big Deal? And Why Now?

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It's not that Ann Coulter used the word "faggot." This is the person who continues to defend her argument that women whose husbands burned alive on 9-11 are enjoying their deaths.

And it's not the media attention she received; a successful prime time television was built around people eating the entrails of cattle.

What struck me most was the depth and the breath of the reaction to a gay slur in a country that is not all that far removed from swapping AIDS jokes.

So far, five out of the 30 some papers that carry her column have dropped her. Republican candidates have run away from her. Big name sponsors have pulled out of her Web site. The *New York Post* got so many letters to the editor, it combined them in a separate story with most sentiment along the lines of this one: "She has mortified honorable Republicans and has assisted in pushing many of us away from the Party." She found herself on *Hannity and Colmes* offering the tortured explanation that "faggot" wasn't really hateful at all. Hey, it was just a "school yard taunt."

Remember, when it comes to hate-speech, she is a repeat offender. It was not quite 12 months ago that she called Vice President Al Gore a "total fag." The response then: hardly a peep. With her rebuke coming on the heels of the NBA, sponsor and public smack-down of former NBA player's Tim Hardaway for saying "I hate gays," one has to wonder what is behind this groundswell of reaction.

I think there are multiple answers.

One, it may simply be a matter of visibility from *Will and Grace* to the spate of high Q-rated entertainers stepping out of the closet or refusing to go in: Ellen DeGeneres, Nathan Lane, Lance Bass, Neil Patrick Harris and TR Knight among them. They're here, they're gay, and we like them. All in all, something of a nightmare for those who see such visibility as part of the encirclement strategy of the homosexual agenda.

But at the same time, it is more than that.

As the Bush administration dissolves in career remediation and sacrificial offerings, more are simply willing to stand up and say: No, it's not ok to use the word "faggot." It's not ok for the right to cynically trot out an in-house cheerleader practiced the politics of division. The only real question is: how long will the media continue to play a game that the public has grown tired of even if the star player is tall, blond and photogenic?

It may even be something more fundamental still. Rather than a tipping point in the awareness and acceptance of another minority, maybe the Coulter attack reminds us that we have become a whole country of minorities.

To win the last two elections, Karl Rove had to cobble together a confederation of believers: that you should be allowed to bring your gun to work, that the right to marry is selective, that women don't have dominion over their own bodies and that Adam and Eve rode the dinosaurs to church. He squeezed out his electoral victory, but as the mid-terms showed, the seams of the coalition proved no match for the epic incompetence of the people it put in office.

With demographers saying that by 2050, the terms majority and minority will no longer have any meaning, it is going to be increasingly tough to consolidate by dividing. We're all simply going to be smaller pieces of a more complex puzzle. The more diverse we become, the harder it is to find someone to pick on.

I see that kind of diversity in action in my work studying men and women. Just two years ago I wrote a book called *Raising Boys Without Men*. It was based on my studies of one of America's newer demographic pulse points: single by choice moms and two mom families.

The deciders and the protectors of legitimate family structure were not amused at my findings that these households with no man on site could produce strong, happy and caring young men. I never heard from Ann Coulter directly (I still feel somewhat slighted by that). But others stepped into the void -- calling me a dunce, zealot, misguided liberal and, of course, a dyke. All very interesting for someone in a 37- year marriage with two kids.

Two years later, I imagine such a book would still set the conservative punditry's hair afire. But as for the base to which they had monolithic appeal I wonder. It's possible that more and more of us are becoming open to the proposition that good, happy productive lives can grow from experience different from our own. Or failing that, perhaps we have become so damn busy getting on with our own lives in a time of war and myriad uncertainties that we're too preoccupied to pass judgment on how others live theirs.

Maybe just maybe the Ann Coulters who would continue to furiously work the levers of mistrust and division are talking to people who have simply moved on.