

Children behaving badly

Posted Friday, June 8th 2007, 4:00 AM

Editorial

Poor Julius Spiegel. Just over a year ago, the Brooklyn parks commissioner took a stand for sanity and shut a student art exhibit in the Brooklyn War Memorial on the grounds that a penis sculpture had no business being displayed at a solemn site that was open to families.

Well, the self-important Brooklyn College artistes and their faculty enablers, who saw nothing wrong with putting a genitalia display in a war memorial in a public park, marched to federal court. Now, Spiegel (photo) has been humiliated and forced to apologize in a settlement that will cost taxpayers \$56,750.

Corporation Counsel Michael Cardozo says the city had no choice but to settle, given how courts apply the First Amendment, of which we are wholeheartedly in favor. Cardozo's analysis may be correct, but that doesn't mean the students and faculty were right to make a federal case of the matter.

The Parks Department did not have to open the memorial to them. It did so as a good neighbor with an informal understanding that works would stay within appropriate bounds. When some artists crossed the line of taste for the setting, Spiegel said no. Then, lacking civil grace, the oh-so-oppressed kids demanded judicial vindication of the right to bad manners.

City lawyers are now laboring to write guidelines explaining that anything doesn't go when a city facility is converted into a temporary art gallery. They hope to avoid court battles with artists who are denied the opportunity to show their works. Good luck to the lawyers, because rules like that are virtually impossible to draw and even harder to enforce without challenge.

Maybe the attorneys shouldn't bother. Perhaps they should bar art exhibits on city property. Marni Kotak, whose work was displayed at the war memorial, told the New York Sun, "This will never happen to any other art students in the city - that is all we can hope for." There's one way to make sure she gets her wish. And she wouldn't like it one bit.