

# LETTERS

DEAR EDITOR

I was extremely disappointed by the content of the Higher Education and the National Security State Special Focus section of the 2005 *Thought & Action*. The one-sided nature of the articles merely confirms what many critics say about higher education: that conservative viewpoints are demonized and caricatured in many institutions of higher learning. Moreover, such biased coverage of a topic presumes that all NEA members are politically left of center and believe that liberal thinkers are victims of censorship.

Predictably, Noam Chomsky confidently declares that conservatives are not discriminated against on college campuses, so readers of *Thought & Action* are expected to accept this view as gospel. Unfortunately, such blatant deck stacking does little to prove that academics are committed to free intellectual inquiry. Ironically, in one article John K. Wilson writes, “An institution of higher learning should not...prefer bland clichés to intellectual content” (129). Yet the contributors in this section are guilty of this precise charge when they speak ominously of “The New McCarthyism in Academe” or “the return of witch hunts to the academy.” Readers of *Thought & Action* are subjected to a litany of anecdotal examples to prove that liberals are under siege, yet conservative thinkers, had they been asked to contribute to the section, could have provided an equal number of compelling anecdotes to support their viewpoint. The benefit of such an approach is that readers could make up their minds for themselves rather than being told what to think.

Why wasn't David Horowitz asked to contribute to this section? Rather than dismissing him as someone who is “bankrolled by a familiar cast of wealthy neo-conservative backers,” he should have been given an opportunity to state his position directly. Instead, *Thought & Action* provides readers with a piece by Professor Alexis Pogorelskin, in which the author laments her abusive treatment at the hands of a group of Young Republicans. Of course you neglect to mention that Horowitz needed armed security guards at the University of California, Berkeley when he delivered a speech opposing reparations for slavery, or that a group of liberal activists threw a chocolate cream pie in his face when he spoke at Butler University. The editors should acknowledge that both sides in the debate are equally guilty of trying to intimidate and silence dissenters. If NEA is truly committed to free speech on college campuses, it will condemn all attacks on academic freedom, not just those inflicted on liberals. 

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DEAR EDITOR

I very much appreciated Ellen Schrecker's point that an amoral lack of human commitment can masquerade as open-mindedness (“The New McCarthyism in the Academy,” Fall 2005). Extremist ideologies feed each other, but you can't enforce moderation by disappearing people. I think a better way to counteract ethnic and religious hatreds is to point out that when

the Nazis were allowing only those Jews who went to Palestine to leave Germany, they were also circulating “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” in the Middle East. (Unfortunately, it’s receiving a lot of play in the Middle East now.)

With everyone on the brink of disaster, we all need to calm down and remember each other’s humanity. It’s true that academics, like others, can sometimes get caught up in climates of thought that aren’t extremely well informed. If the energy and courage to picket could be translated into the energy and courage to speak up for unpopular causes, that could serve us well. And this “principle” doesn’t need to be carried to the extreme of saying that if Jews and Arabs get equal time, so should others like the Ku Klux Klan, the Nazis, and crime organizations. At this time in our history, we don’t have the luxury of toying with empty words. 

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DEAR EDITOR

Just a note of appreciation for the excellent issue of *Thought & Action* (Fall 2005) with its focus on national security and the academy. Its highlight, in my view, was the provocative and perceptive interview with Noam Chomsky.

I entirely share Chomsky’s concern about efforts to stifle discussions or to impose standards on what faculty and students are allowed to talk about, and stand with him in denouncing anyone, inside or outside the academy, who seeks to impose restrictions or shut down debates.

Where Chomsky observed (p. 98) that universities ought to be places where faculty and students “are encouraged to challenge, question, press the borders of inquiry, to be completely open to challenging received and accepted ideas,” it then occurred to me that something was missing from his analysis.

As an African historian, I have loathed and despised ethnic or racial group stereotypes as a way of perpetuating chauvinism and racism. Yet over the past 25 years or so, anyone who opposed, say, racial double standards in university admissions or criticized gender double standards in faculty hirings would often find themselves receiving the same verbal abuse, personal attacks, or vilification that Chomsky himself rebukes and deplors.

Alas, until the academy itself (and NEA as well) acknowledges how it helped establish, support, and police a “doctrinal orthodoxy” on racial and gender double standards, discrimination and preferences in student admissions and faculty hirings (amply documented in Michigan, Texas, California, and Washington, inter alia) over the past 25 years, the complaints of Prof. Chomsky will engender the lamentable tsk-tsks of “chickens coming home to roost.” 

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