



To submit a case to FIRE, click [here](#).

To contact FIRE, click [here](#).



magazine search



AMERICA'S PREMIER CONSERVATIVE WEBSITE

NRO's LATEST

SITE SEARCH



NATIONAL REVIEW



Jay Nordlinger: Beijing 2008.

Home

G-File

Bulletin

Issue

Subscribe

Advertise

NRO Weekend



Missed a Buckley?

THE LATEST:

▪ [Who Do We Blame?](#)

4/10/01

▪ [The Long View on Hainan](#)

4/06/01

▪ [Who Do We Blame?](#)

4/06/01

▪ [The Sopranos' Underside](#)

4/03/01

▪ [Hillary at Yale?](#)

3/30/01

▪ [All the Way for McCain?](#)

3/27/01

▪ [Execution Days Ahead?](#)

3/23/01

▪ [Feeling One's Way on Finance Reform](#)

3/20/01

▪ [Hard Lessons from Traffic?](#)

3/16/01

William F. Buckley Jr.

NR's Editor at Large



Who Do We Blame?

The case of a YAF student chapter at Penn State.

April 10, 2001 12:30 p.m.

There was a great event in Pennsylvania two weeks ago,

but the background needs detailing.

A student chapter of Young Americans for Freedom at Penn State was organized and, as routinely is the case on that campus, applied to (no less) the Undergraduate Student Government Supreme Court for registration as a student organization. YAF's constitution contains a phrase, inherited from the founding organization statement in 1960, to the effect that human rights are "God-given" and therefore that human rights "derive from the right to be free from the restrictions of arbitrary force."

That sentiment (or affirmation) was not invented in Sharon, Connecticut, at the founding of the Young Americans for Freedom. The idea of God-given rights is about as novel in the



[Printer-Friendly](#)



[E-mail a Friend](#)



[WFB's Archive](#)

NRO Features

[Beijing 2008](#)

NEW YORK — The Olympics in the belly of the beast. By Jay Nordlinger. October 9, 2000 Issue.

[West Wing Finance](#)

GOLDEN, CO — Does McCain-Feingold apply to television dramas? By Dave Kopel. 4/10/01 1:05 p.m.

[Beating the Drums](#)

WASHINGTON, DC — The fight over Indian team names heats up. By John J. Miller & Ramesh Ponnuru. 4/10/01 12:50 p.m.

[Who De We Blame?](#)

NEW YORK — The case of a YAF student chapter at Penn State. By William F. Buckley Jr. 4/10/01 12:35 p.m.

[Who Is Bill Gates Sr.?](#)

VIENNA, VA — And why should we take instruction from him? By Neal B. Freeman. 4/10/01 10:30 a.m.

▪ [Buy Now, Pay Never](#)

3/13/01

▪ [Xenophobia on the Wing?](#)

3/09/01

▪ [Israeli Bully Boy?](#)

3/06/01

▪ [O'Neill Hits the What-Ifs](#)

3/02/01

▪ [Let's Drink to It](#)

2/27/01

▪ [Where Do We Go Now with Clinton?](#)

2/23/01



United States as a speech by George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. But the supreme court of the undergraduate student body was not looking about for historical wavelengths. It ruled that YAF could not form a chapter so long as it contained that phrase in its constitution, inasmuch as to do so constituted religious "discrimination."

The Penn State YAF students drew a deep breath and filed an appeal to a student-faculty appeals board. That board unanimously reaffirmed the student supreme court in forbidding recognition to YAF.

The transaction caught the eye of Thor Halvorssen, a recent graduate of the University of Pennsylvania who serves now as Executive Director of a relatively new association called the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (hence, FIRE). Alan Charles Kors, the president of FIRE, is a hefty intellectual, a historian who has written widely on 18th-century studies and has defended academic freedom vigorously. He wrote to the president of Penn State, Graham Spanier, noting straightforwardly that "it violates the anti-establishment clause of the First Amendment for PSU officially to elevate non-belief over belief, to the extent that believers are prohibited from organizing themselves into a group aimed at promoting their religious views.... It is PSU," he remarked, "that has demonstrated an unconstitutional intolerance of religious students."

Well, there is a very happy ending on this procedural point. President Spanier said he had been out of town when all this happened, but now that he focused on the point, he had to agree with Prof. Kors. And — quick like a flash! — "I am pleased to say that the Undergraduate Student Government Supreme Court met today and reversed its earlier decision. Registration has been granted to the Young Americans for Freedom."

That's good, and FIRE scored another victory, having in recent months taken on political correctness in Alaska, California, and elsewhere. FIRE's Board of Advisors include nationally prominent conservatives, such as David Brudnoy, T. Kenneth Cribb Jr., and Herbert London. But there are also straight-shooting liberals there, including Nat Hentoff and Roy Innis. They mobilized, a few weeks ago, to affirm the right of a woman poet at the University of Alaska to publish a poem even though, if one dug deep in it, one could note a despondency over that part of American Indian culture (she is herself part Indian) associated with sex abuse and alcoholism. Prof. Kors has been active in addressing complaints against the Orwellian (a necessary word here) appetite in many colleges to instill an altogether unnatural race consciousness, designed to encourage guilt.

[Feminist Mythology](#)
NEW YORK — The New Age MIT and its chorus. By Kathryn Jean Lopez. 4/10/01 9:50 a.m.

[The Jews and I](#)
NEW YORK — I am anti-antisemite. But I have been irritated by Jewish sensibilities. By John Derbyshire. 4/10/01 9:40 a.m.

[Exam Time!](#)
WASHINGTON, DC — The latest hilarious caper from the lovable *Washington Post*. By Michael Ledeen. 4/10/01 9:20 a.m.

[Inherit the Wind](#)
NEW YORK — "I was Scarlett O'Hara's Jewish lover." By Neil Seeman. 4/10/01 9:20 a.m.

[Slaying the RINO](#)
WASHINGTON, DC — Senators Chafee, Jeffords, and Specter are Republicans in name only. By Stephen Moore. 4/10/01 9:00 a.m.



"At Wake Forest University last fall," he wrote for Reason magazine, "one of the few events designated as 'mandatory' for freshman orientation was attendance at "Blue Eyed," a filmed racism-awareness workshop in which whites are abused, ridiculed, made to fail, and taught helpless passivity so that they can identify with 'a person of color for a day.'"

Swarthmore edges out Wake Forest. There, in the fall of 1998, "first-year students were asked to line up by skin color, from lightest to darkest, and to step forward and talk about how they felt concerning their place in that line." And this kind of thing is not eccentric. "Indeed, at almost all of our campuses, some form of moral and political re-education has been built into freshman orientation and residential programming. These exercises have become so commonplace that most students do not even think of the issues of privacy, rights, and dignity involved."

But here is a question not touched on by President Spanier. We know that YAF was permitted to affirm God as a sponsor of human rights. So the day was saved. But what about the student supreme court that refused registration? Ignorance? But if the students are to be excused, one wonders how it is that they arrived at such ignorance? And then of course the whopper: What about the student *faculty* committee that reaffirmed the denial? What are we to do about them? Can FIRE come up with an orientation course, not for freshmen at Penn State, but for faculty? President Spanier will no doubt be silent on the subject, but in being silent, he may be overextending individual rights in education.

[Back to NRO](#)