

## *The Record (Bergen County, NJ)*

### **THOUGHT POLICE SPRING TO ACTION ON THE CAMPUS**

November 26, 2001

**JONATHAN YARDLEY**

**JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT** it was safe to go back to college, here come the thought police again, back in business with a vengeance. While most of the nation has been roused to a revival of patriotism and stiffened resolve by the terrorist attacks and their aftermath, the thought police have launched a new onslaught on free speech and revived the anti-Americanism that was pandemic on the campuses in the age of political correctness. Now as in the not-so-distant past, speech on campus is free mainly for those with whom the thought police agree.

There are two big differences between today and the period from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s when the correctness wars raged. The first and most obvious is 9/11, which raised threats to U.S. security and self-confidence that simply had no parallel in the days of the economic boom and the widespread complacency that accompanied it. The second, little noticed but beginning to gain attention, is that there now exists an organization dedicated to rooting out and exposing assaults upon "free speech, individual liberty, religious freedom, the rights of conscience, legal equality, due process, and academic freedom on our nation's campuses." Its somewhat cumbersome name is Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE). It was founded a couple of years ago by Harvey A. Silverglate and Alan Charles Kors, authors of "The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses." Silverglate is a lawyer and writer in Boston who has a particular interest in civil liberties; Kors teaches European intellectual history at the Pennsylvania State University and has worked for years in defense of academic freedom. The executive director is Thor L. Halvorssen, a Penn graduate who, FIRE reports, "revived and edited Penn's conservative journal, the Red and Blue." FIRE's somewhat conservative bent provides a ready opening for those on the left who assume that everyone to the right of center is repressive if not outright fascist, but in truth it has been quick to defend those who have expressed dissenting views in the past two months.

These include professors at City University of New York who held a "teach-in" where U.S. foreign policy was criticized and who subsequently were publicly condemned by CUNY's trustees and chancellor, as well as the professor at the University of New Mexico who notoriously (not to mention foolishly) announced to his class in Western civilization that "anyone who can bomb the Pentagon has my vote," for which the university's president promised he would "vigorously pursue" disciplinary action against him.

Predictably, though, the speech that the thought police have shown the greatest zeal for

**suppressing comes from other directions. To call this speech "conservative" would be a disservice to the speakers, for mostly what they have tried to say is that they support their country and its anti-terrorism policies and that they mourn the victims of the September attacks.**

**There is, for example, the student from overseas who heard other students at San Diego State loudly celebrating, in Arabic, the terrorist attacks; the student attempted to debate with them, in Arabic, for which he was accused by the university of -- get this -- "abusive" behavior and warned that "future incidents, where your involvement is proven, will result in you facing serious disciplinary sanctions. " At Duke and Penn, professors who posted articles on their Web sites calling for strong military action against terrorism were rebuked by university administrators. Duke at first shut down the offending professor's site, then grudgingly permitted him to reopen it, but only with a disclaimer -- the posting "does not reflect the endorsement" of Duke or the professor's department -- that, according to FIRE, is a first for the university.**

**As for Penn, a high academic administrator informed the professor that his comments were "insensitive and perhaps even intimidating" to students who took issue with him; the university's president later expressed his support for unfettered speech on campus but insisted that the administrator had not made "an attack on free speech. " At the College of the Holy Cross, in Massachusetts, the sociology chairman forced a secretary to remove an American flag she had hung in her office to honor a friend who died aboard one of the hijacked airplanes. At Florida Gulf Coast University, the dean of library services insisted that employees remove "Proud to Be an American" stickers from the library; she relented only after objections were raised outside the campus.**

**At the University of Massachusetts, administrators granted a permit to students who wanted to demonstrate against the war on terrorism, then denied one to students who wanted to demonstrate in favor of it.**

**At Central Michigan University, students who hung flags and other patriotic articles on the doors of their dormitory rooms were told by a resident assistant to remove them because -- get this -- they might be "offensive" to other students. FIRE immediately entered the case, sending a letter to the president of the university, Michael Rao, whose response should be committed to memory by the lily-livered administrators who are caving in to thought police on other campuses: "The university's removal of any items considered offensive to some is not condoned," he wrote. "The university is taking steps to assure students in the residence halls that their right to post materials and express opinion on their room doors is protected. The university does not and will not condone any of its employees limiting the free-speech rights of its students. " As Alan Charles Kors said, Rao's "decisive leadership in this matter is the ideal model of authentic and honest academic administration. " Unfortunately it is a model that all too few others in comparable positions elsewhere have shown any interest in emulating.**