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ACADEMIC FREEDOM: For more than a decade, colleges have been adopting speech codes and other policies based on the idea that making anyone feel uncomfortable is a form of assault. That idea has been inconsistently applied, since upsetting religious people or conservatives has rarely been punished. The overall effect has been to erode academic freedom. None of this should be news, since "speech codes" and "political correctness" have been hotly debated for a long time. In the current charged environment, however, the left has suddenly discovered the problem. As this [Associated Press story](#) reports, "Colleges campuses take pride in nurturing debate but that tradition is being tested in the wake of Sept. 11. People across the political spectrum are feeling the chill."

In one celebrated case, a UCLA librarian was suspended without pay after he wrote an anti-Israel email in response to a mass email. Sympathizers on the [left were shocked](#) at what was, in fact, a gross abuse—but hardly an unprecedented one. Something similar happened when a University of New Mexico history professor told a freshmen-level course on Western civilization: "Anyone who can blow up the Pentagon has my vote." (He has since apologized and says, "I was a jerk. But the First Amendment protects my right to be a jerk.")

Those who think only conservatives ever threaten free speech are wailing about a "new McCarthyism," even when they supported the tools now being used against them. And leftists aren't, in fact, the only ones losing their rights in the current environment. Professors and students who've [offended Muslims and Arabs](#) have also felt the wrath of academic authorities. One of the most ridiculous cases, picked up by *Opinion Journal's* "Best of the Web," involved a Ethiopia-born student at San Diego State, who was punished after he [criticized in Arabic](#) some Saudi students he overheard praising the September 11 attacks.

Consistent defenders of free speech, individual conscience, and academic freedom are rare—but they do exist. The [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education \(FIRE\)](#), on whose advisory board I serve, is one of the best. Founded by Alan Kors and Harvey Silverglate, authors of [The Shadow University](#), FIRE made its reputation defending conservatives, including student religious groups, and others whose rights were threatened by policies implemented on behalf of left-wing identity politics. FIRE has had some remarkable successes, some public, some quiet. FIRE seeks not to score publicity points but to protect fundamental liberties on college campuses,

preferably by behind-the-scenes persuasion.

Contrary to some perceptions, FIRE has never been a conservative group but rather a consistent, principled defender of freedom. Its [mission](#) "is to defend and sustain individual rights at America's increasingly repressive and partisan colleges and universities. These rights include freedom of speech, legal equality, due process, religious liberty, and sanctity of conscience—the essential qualities of individual liberty and dignity. FIRE's core mission is to protect the unprotected and to educate the public and communities of concerned Americans about the threats to these rights on our campuses and about the means to preserve them."

Now FIRE is coming to the defense of professors and students across the political spectrum, including those who've made anti-American statements. (It also has offered assistance to the San Diego State student if he wants it.) Its defense of the freedom to be a jerk has led to attacks from conservatives. After the A.P. story ran, FIRE was swamped with angry emails, most of which sound very much like the left's argument for speech codes: Free speech is good unless the speech is really bad. As Nat Hentoff remarked at the last FIRE advisory board meeting, the left is awfully short-sighted to think it will always be in charge of the anti-freedom policies it has created. For information on how to support FIRE's work, click [here](#). [Posted 10/19.]

AVOIDING BACON: The MEMRI website offers [this translation](#) of an article from the Egyptian government daily *Al-Gumhuriya*, by columnist Dr. Abdallah Al-Nagga. It contrast the life-loving West with the Muslim desire to die and go to paradise. Bottom line: That's why America is good at science and technology, while Muslims are eager to kill themselves in war. (This guy makes the Muslim world sound a bit like *The Weekly Standard's* ideal society.)

"What is distressing is that their protection of their life has become an incentive for them to bolster their status by means of science and inventions. They have explored all means of defending their lives and imposing their inferior ideas on humanity through force of arms, while the men of truth [i.e. Muslims] have been negligent; they have not excelled at science and have not explored means that will guarantee their triumph in their struggle against men of falsehood [i.e. the enemies of Islam]."

"The believers do not fear the enemy [during] the struggle and do not protect their lives. Allah has promised them one of two good things: [either] victory or martyrdom. Each of these is a great hope..."

"Yet their enemies protect [their] lives like a miser protects his money. They do not give [their lives] easily; they do not enter into battles seeking martyrdom; they do not act in order [to attain] martyrdom. This is the secret of the believers' victory over their enemies—though the believers are few and the polytheists many, with advanced weaponry and equipment."

Unlike a lot of MEMRI's translations, which tend to present the most disturbing aspects of the Arab media, this one strikes me as funny in a sick sort of way. It seems like some kind of psywar disinformation, designed to demoralize the troops by reminding them of their enemies' superior capabilities. Exactly which

"victory" does Dr. Al-Nagga have in mind? [Posted 10/18.]

MODERN MUSLIMS: Once suppressed by the communist regime, Islam is flourishing in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. But according to this [report](#) by Tracey Eaton of the *Dallas Morning News*, the Islamic revival there is utterly modern. "Uzbekistan is where East meets West," writes Eaton. "Lovers hold hands and smooch along Broadway Street, lined with open-air restaurants. Teenagers flock to all-night Internet cafes to chat online. Unescorted singles kick up their high heels at the Juliano disco."

"Thanks to Allah, I was born in Uzbekistan," Dilyafruz Namatova, a devout 24-year-old who prays five times a day, tells Eaton. "If I were living in Afghanistan, I would have to wear a full veil. The Taliban want women to live as if they were in the fifth century." The dignity of women is a major difference between mainstream Uzbek Muslim life and the fanatics who threaten that life from both inside and outside the country. Says another young woman, "In Afghanistan, they only have their own culture. Women can't do anything. Here women have no rules on how to live. We're modern Muslims."

"It's impossible to live without God in your heart," says a young man. But, he explains, "I don't pray five times a day, because I don't have the time. I'm stuck in the middle. At night I go to the disco, and on Fridays I go to the mosque." Says another Uzbek, "In Afghanistan, they are fanatics. We consider ourselves real Muslims." Whether they'll get to continue thinking, and living, that way will depend a lot on what happens in the current war. [Posted 10/18.]

INTERNAL PASSPORTS: Six years ago, Sen. Dianne Feinstein and others tried and failed to pass legislation to require an i.d. card linked to a central database as a condition for working in America—not just for immigrants, but for all of us. It's back. *USA Today* [reports](#) that Rep. Tom Tancredo, a Colorado Republican who claims to support smaller government, plans to introduce legislation this week that will include requiring "a national database that employers would have to use to verify workers' identification and a requirement that states check Social Security's database before motor vehicle departments issue state ID cards." Back in 1995, Glenn Garvin examined both the cost to citizens' liberties and the practical flaws in such systems. His [article](#) is definitive, powerful, and well worth re-reading. None of the problems he documents has disappeared since September 11. [Posted 10/18.]

ALIAS PATCH, II: Thanks to reader Jeff Wolfe, who sent me a way to fix the alias/frames problem that doesn't involve Javascript. If this one doesn't work, reader Michael Wells has sent some other ideas. You guys are great. [Posted 10/18.]

ALIAS PATCH: Thanks to reader Kevin Wenzel, who sent some Javascript code that should fix the alias/frames problem, allowing you to use vpostrel.com to get here but still escape to other URLs. I'm hereby testing it. [Posted 10/18.]

L.A. FLAGS: Angeleno readers agree: Los Angeles is full of American flags, and [Frank Luntz](#) is peddling nonsense (the polite term). Some samples:

From Jim Hake:

I live in Pacific Palisades—part of the Westside "bastion of liberalism"—and it looks like the 4th of July ... on my block there are about a dozen flags flying ... drive around and it looks like a presidential motorcade though it probably is 1 in 10 that have flags on there cars.

yes, Luntz is either blind or malicious.

From Eric McErlain:

I just returned from a long vacation in the San Diego area, and I had to write in about Frank Luntz's comments regarding flags in LA. On October 7, I drove from San Diego to LA to visit a friend who lives in Venice Beach. At every, and I mean every, highway overpass, was either an American flag or some other sort of patriotic banner. Once I got to Venice, and later to Santa Monica, i saw flags everywhere. That night I caught a hockey game at the Staples Center, and lo and behold, more flags.

The real question is why is Frank Luntz picking on Hollywood now? I've got no ideas.

From Mike Snell:

I know Riverside County and Orange County are not exactly LA—but it sort of is LA's back yard (and in the Bay Area anything south of Bakersfield is LA-G). You can't drive anywhere without seeing millions of flags. On the convoluted route we use to take the kids to school at least 3 people have actually installed flagpoles in their front yards since 09-11-01. One guy on the school route even covered his garage door in red & white shiplap siding with a blue field and what appears to be hand cut plywood stars. It looks cool, but if it really is shiplap that double door must be pretty heavy. At least 4 out of 10 cars have flags and stickers (one guy I see most days has a 20 foot flag mounted in the middle of the pickup bed of his truck). At freeway offramps, at major intersections all over the county, and at the Galleria Mall the folks who normally hawk flowers are now hawking flags or flags and flowers. Along Victoria Avenue, which runs through the citrus belt, the orange groves are decorated along the street with red, white, and blue bows the size of a Yugo. Furthur down Victoria the 100 year old Eucalyptus trees are covered with red, white, and blue ribbons (and a few yellow ones). Even the pan handlers and the homeless are displaying flags or flag colors. The only place where you don't see many flags is at UCR [University of California, Riverside—vp].

Several people wrote in to recommend places to shoot photos on my upcoming trip. One, which I'd noticed on my way back to the airport last time, is the Univision headquarters not far from LAX, which has a huge flag facing the 405 freeway. Univision is the Spanish-language TV network. [Posted 10/18.]

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