

Editorials/Op-Ed

Desecration

TODAY'S EDITORIAL

February 11, 2007

A state university in California is weighing punishment for students who disrespected a flag. Not the American flag, of course.

The College Republicans at San Francisco State University are in hot water for stomping on the flags of the terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah during an October "anti-terrorism rally." Little did they know, the flags bear the name of Allah in Arabic script -- the trampling of which is a grave offense to Islam.

The university is currently weighing whether to punish the students even though they couldn't have known. It is expected to hold a disciplinary hearing in the coming weeks. It has already investigated them for "incivility," "inciting violence" and creating "a hostile environment" -- and will soon decide whether to expel, suspend or warn the College Republicans.

Alternatively, the school could just drop this whole profile in hypersensitivity. Think about it for a moment: An American college campus is weighing whether to exile its Republican student group for unknowingly showing disrespect for a religious figure. This is undoubtedly the first time this has happened in America this century and probably in the century or two before it. Last we checked, the taxpayer-funded San Francisco State is not a madrassa. But in this case, for all intents and purposes, it is acting like one.

The complainers effectively insist that non-Arabic-speaking non-Muslims should be held accountable for not knowing that two terrorist groups' flags bear the name of Allah, and for unknowingly committing an act which they deem to be offensive.

Who's more "uncivil," the students who stomped the flags, or the radical opponents of free speech and their cowardly friends in the administrative offices?

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, the scrappy campus watchdog that alerted us to the case, is pushing the school to drop it before hearings begin. The school should do so immediately. No one was injured, no damage was incurred and no insult to any religious figure was intended. The offended parties should grow up. America is a diverse place with many religions and customs, none of which trump the right to free speech.

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