

Satirical UMass Students Victims of 'Double Standards,' Says FIRE

By Jim Brown
October 21, 2004

(AgapePress) - A civil liberties group says at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, it's more acceptable to mock American soldiers than it is to make fun of racism allegations. That's why the group is accusing the school of "repression and double standards."

UMass has charged nine students with harassment and threatened to expel them for their involvement in a party where a caricature of one of them as the "grand wizard" of the Ku Klux Klan was drawn. The picture was intended to mock allegations of racism leveled at a candidate for student body president who questioned the constitutionality of a minority set-aside program proposed by the university.

David French is president of the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE), which is advocating on behalf of the students. He says the school's actions are in stark contrast to its treatment of a student who wrote a controversial article attacking former NFL player-turned-Army Ranger Pat Tillman, who was killed in action in April while serving in Afghanistan.

"They defended the free-speech rights of the individual who's called Pat Tillman an idiot and a Rambo type who got what was coming to him," French explains. "But then, for somebody who writes a caricature of a member of the Klan, to make fun of a bogus racism allegation, they throw the book at them. It's an amazing double standard."

According to French, the satirical drawing is constitutionally protected expression. "It's undisputed that the students were in a student government office and having a party when maybe they shouldn't have been doing that," he says. "But they should get the same penalty for that that everyone else gets for similar violations. The university cannot enhance the penalty at all based on the caricature."

The FIRE president says it is unfortunate that "appalling double standards" are not uncommon at colleges and universities across the U.S. -- "but UMass has taken the unfair treatment of students to a new low."

Vice Chancellor Michael Gargano says UMass may file criminal charges against the nine students, seek 100 hours of community service for them, or make them attend a diversity forum.

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