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Our nutty professor beats theirs

Tuesday, April 26, 2005

As perhaps the leading defender of state pride, I wish to bring your attention to yet another area in which New Jersey leads the nation: nutty professors.



PAUL MULSHINE

Much has been made in the national media lately of a Colorado professor named Ward Churchill who made some loony remarks about the victims of the 9/11 attacks. But I am prepared to argue that we have here in our midst a professor who makes Churchill look sane by comparison. His name is Grover Furr and he teaches at Montclair State University.

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What does he teach? English literature, of course. It always seems to be the English teachers who bray the most loudly about politics. This raises a question: If these guys care so much about politics, why didn't they study political science?

I suspect it's because anyone who understood politics would not have taken to the Internet on Sept. 11, 2001, to inform the university community that "It's up to us to show the truth: all this is the result of decades of the most brutal U.S. imperialist massacres and exploitation."

Furr set up a Web site on which he went into great detail about what he termed "the very imperialist foreign policy which is the ultimate cause of this terrorist attack in the first place." On the site, he proclaimed that the United States "has killed many, many times the number of innocent civilians as were killed in the terror attacks of Sept. 11."

Colorado's Churchill later had his own nutty comments on the 9/11 attacks, calling the victims "little Eichmanns." But our guy was there first. Furr let loose his looniness at a time when the smoke from the collapsed towers could clearly be seen from the Montclair hills.

Now that's nutty.

But it wasn't unprecedented. In 1991, right before the first Gulf War, Furr wrote a column in the student newspaper in which he asserted that "The U.S. is the biggest aggressor in the world."

"Want to support our soldiers?" he wrote. "Here is what you can do. Remind them: You have the guns. In Vietnam, many American soldiers 'fragged' (killed) the officers and 'lifers' who tried to get them killed by forcing them to fight."

In Colorado, the controversy over Churchill's remarks became a national news story. But here in Jersey, Furr's fanaticism has never made the news, though it has been written about on Frontpagemag.com, an Internet Web site.

So Furr's career is safe. If anyone's career is in danger, it is that of Ted Price, a fellow English professor at Montclair State who has been critical of Furr. Unlike Furr, a Baby Boomer who has retained the childish leftism of the 1960s, Price is an 80-year-old World War II vet who is an unabashed conservative. He has been openly critical of Furr's defense of Josef Stalin, which can be seen along with his other ravings on Furr's Web site (<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/>).

"I call him a Stalinist fascist and he hates to be called that," Price told me. "In letters from my chairman, they said that sort of thing was harassing a fellow colleague."

This is a common tactic in academia today. Whatever a left-wing professor says, no matter how outrageous, is protected by academic freedom. But when a conservative speaks up, the charge of "harassment" follows.

Price has written to the Foundation for Individual Responsibility in Education to protest the administration's effort to curb his criticism of Furr. FIRE was founded by Alan Kors, a University of Pennsylvania professor who went from the Jersey City public schools to Princeton and Harvard.

"The real problem is not the sole lunatic who is dumb enough to let the public know how people really think on the campuses," Kors said of Furr. "The real problem is that these people tend to clone themselves in hiring and promotion. Whole sections of the university have been given over to the politically correct."

English departments tend to be the worst, Kors said. That's certainly the case here in New Jersey. Furr is typical in that his expertise is in medieval literature but he teaches courses that focus on left-wing political tracts of no literary value.

There's room for political eccentrics on both the right and left in academia, says Kors, but we've reached the point where only the left-wing wackos have academic freedom.

"If instead of talking about fragging soldiers, he had talked about turning weapons on gays, they would have marched him off campus," Kors said of Furr.

As for Furr, I gave him a call and asked him to comment. He declined but later sent me an e-mail:

"You asked about 'the controversy over my teaching,'" he wrote. "There is no controversy over my teaching."

He's right about that. I rest my case.

Paul Mulshine is a Star-Ledger columnist. He may be reached at pmulshine@starledger.com.

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