



THE

AFCON

SENTINEL



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Purpose:

To promote academic freedom, defined as intellectual freedom in educational and research contexts. This includes freedoms of belief and expression and access to information and ideas.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT—Spencer Davis

Is Academic Freedom a Survivor?

By now we have all seen or heard about, been entertained or offended by the CBS summer hit "Survivor." All of this chatter sparked in my mind the question of the survival of academic freedom. It certainly seems that right now academic freedom has few friends and many enemies. AFCON is committed to educating the public and the parties in specific conflicts about the importance of academic freedom, and we feel we have a big job to do.

It was therefore disturbing to me to read a recent *Omaha World-Herald* editorial (August 23, 2000, p. 16) congratulating Southern universities and museums for ending racist apologies and presenting realistic interpretations of Southern history. While the *World-Herald* editorialists presented encouraging examples of progressive Southern institutions, they omitted examples on the other side of the ledger. In particular the editorial staff omitted, or is unaware of, the Neo-Confederate movement.

Watching the raising of the Confederate submarine H.L. Hunley from the floor of Charleston harbor troubled me. This was no sober archaeological procedure. There was instead a crowd of several thousand, some in period costume, and all apparently gripped by a powerful emotion far beyond any respect for the remains of the deceased. I was watching on C-SPAN and had I been there in person I might have gained a far different impression. But what I thought I saw was the transforming of a technical achievement of underwater recovery into something like Confederate propaganda.

The *World-Herald* might have balanced its very rosy account by recognizing a recent decision of the Executive Board of the Georgia Historical society. The Society's journal of Georgia history had long been edited by members of the University of Georgia history department. But the Executive Director of the Society and a majority of the Board have tired of articles on slavery, class, race, and gender and have dismissed the university history department and determined to edit the journal in a way less disturbing to their members and major contributors. This episode might be categorized as mere academic squabbling, but surely it is some proof of a Southern institution maintaining (or reviving) traditional attitudes.

At least as disturbing is the recent decision by a major Southern university to accede to the demand of a Confederate heritage. Tony Horwitz's Confederates in the Attic, a somewhat uncomplimentary survey of the Neo-Confederate movement, was on the freshman reading list. University officials are allowing the Southern Legal Resource Center to include its version of events with Horwitz's book. It is hard to imagine other groups getting such extraordinary treatment. The Confederate Cause, and its contemporary defense, trumped the traditional authority of instructors to assign readings.

The *World-Herald* is right to recognize instances in which "Southern academic institutions . . . have abandoned discredited regional partisanship in favor of a sounder, more serious approach to historical study." At the same time the *World-Herald* should in fairness recognize that "regional partisanship" still exists and still restricts academic freedom in Southern academic institutions.

Upcoming Events—AFCON

Board Meetings, October 14, November 11, December 9
Gere Library, 56th and Normal, Lincoln, 10 AM

MINUTES of the AFCON Board of Directors

June 10, 2000—

Due to absence of a quorum, no action was taken.

McMurtry presented the Treasurer's Report with a balance of \$1,040.23. Lofthus, currently completing a survey of public schools and libraries in Nebraska on incidents of challenge or censorship of materials, received the AFCON survey funds in payment for his services.

Davis and Ball have contacted several organizations on membership issues. Moshman is working with UNO-AAUP which has shown interest in becoming a member of AFCON.

Moshman had no new information on the Peru State Mauch or UN-L Reinhard cases. In another case, Moshman advised an individual to contact ACLU-N regarding a possible violation of his First Amendment rights.

Black reported NSEA staff member Jay Sears will send a list of persons possibly to be appointed to the Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee. Haller continues organizational efforts for the Higher Education Subcommittee. Moshman has contacted a potential member for that committee.

Black reported the June issue of the AFCON Sentinel was ready for publication.

Next meeting July 8, 2000, 10:00 AM Gere Library, 56th and Normal, Lincoln.

July 8, 2000—

Due to absence of a quorum, no action was taken.

The representative of the Nebraska Press Association resigned. Davis will seek a replacement from the NPA.

The Board discussed lists of paid or-

ganizations and their representatives to ascertain the organizations which are not being represented at AFCON Board meetings. Members considered lowering the number of Board members required to establish a quorum. The Board has not been able to take action during the last two meetings since seven Board members have not been present.

Moshman gave background information of the Fourth Circuit decision regarding a Virginia law stating that government employees can't access sexually explicit materials on computers at work during business hours. Moshman also reported that the individual he advised to contact the ACLU-N did. The ACLU-N believed he had no case.

No August Meeting.

Next meeting September 9, 2000, 10:00 AM, Gere Library, 56th and Normal, Lincoln.

FOR SALE BY AFCON

Send orders to Mel Krutz, 2625 Bluff Road, Seward, NE 68434-9801

T-shirts with a Paul Fell "banned books" design; Sizes M, L, XL, XXL, XXXL; \$15.00. Packaging and postage: \$2.00 each.

Note cards with a Paul Fell design; \$1.50; four for \$5.00. Packaging and postage: \$0.75 per packet.

Reader's Theatre Script of a TANGLED ISSUE: Student Freedom of Expression. \$10.00 buys the book with rights to duplicate the script and produce the play. Packaging and postage: \$2.00 each.

REQUEST FOR NEWS FOR FUTURE ISSUES

The editor of the AFCON SENTINEL invites all AFCON individual and organizational members to send news about academic freedom issues in Nebraska or editorial comments for inclusion in this newsletter and/or announcements of organizational meetings for the UPCOMING EVENTS column. Due date for submissions to the December 15, 2000, issue is November 27, 2000.

Threats to Academic Freedom at American Universities

By

Dr. Dwayne Ball, Associate Professor, College of Business, University of Nebraska
and President-Elect, AFCON

This begins a series of short articles on the state of academic freedom at American universities that I will resume early in 2001. This first article gives the outline for the ones to follow.

I returned to the academy 13 years ago after spending four years as a manager with a large U.S. multinational corporation. The environment for expression of ideas in the corporate world is repressive, largely although not entirely for sound business reasons. For example, I was told to keep my activities on the board of the state Sierra Club “under wraps.” I was told, in confidence, by my colleagues, that appearing in the newspaper on behalf of environmental issues might provoke an unpleasant inquiry by my employer, with termination or fatal delays in my career advancement a real possibility. This implied threat existed regardless of the true value of what I might have spoken. Naturally, I kept my head down and let others in more secure positions speak publicly the words I would have liked to speak. As you can imagine, when I returned to academe, I felt a great weight drop off my shoulders. Here, I believed, one could speak one’s mind without fear of retaliation.

We might not all agree on the precise moral origin or extents of academic freedom, but I hope we would all agree that the university, as an institution of our society, serves its role best where no opinions are suppressed. We must have institutions that cherish and protect the iconoclast and his or her ideas, and even the ugly and offensive idea. Orthodoxy should be our enemy. We generate, develop, expand, discuss, test, evaluate, and judge ideas—but we do not suppress them or their advocates.

When we do our job well, a university is a powerful agent of societal evolution. Without the constant sifting and churning of thought, the striking out in a thousand directions at once, and the often obnoxious creative bustle and conflict that mark a critical mass of free thinking, a society will ossify and become brittle to the slings and arrows of history. So, my concern for academic freedom goes well beyond the comfort and freedom of academics and their students. I want the society in which my grandchildren will live to be a thriving, prosperous, free, and adaptive society. Universities should be unique institutions that uniquely foster those qualities, and academic freedom is the essential component without which universities cannot serve that role.

And so, I have become increasingly concerned as the environment at universities in some ways has come to resemble that of corporate America. Anyone who has been around

universities for the past decade, and who cherishes academic freedom, has had such cause to be concerned. There are three classes of disturbing trends that have grown to disquieting proportions since I returned. I would like to lay them out in no particular order here, and return to them later, one by one, in greater depth.

Threat 1: The restructuring of higher education: As much as we have seen change in the way higher education is organized and paid for, it is nothing to what we will see in the next 20 years. The increasing cost of a college education and consequent pressures to re-engineer the university, the use of adjunct faculty, the elimination or narrowing of tenure, the rise of distance education and independent delivery systems, the commodification of the faculty, the search for large grants and profit-making enterprises, and the rise of a powerful professional administrator class, all combine to produce potentially negative effects on academic freedom.

Threat 2: Political correctness: The past decade has seen the rise of speech codes, vague and draconian hostile environment regulations, a “diversity” mantra that is used as the all-purpose justification for abuses, violations of the fundamental due process rights of the accused, and a new kind of McCarthyism in which faculty and students must fear that stray words and anonymous accusations may destroy their lives. Combined with the spinelessness of some administrators and the eagerness of some faculty to carry out witch hunts, there has not been a period in the past 40 years in which faculty with controversial opinions have had more reason to be fearful that those opinions can get them fired or otherwise damaged.

Threat 3: Ignorance and disagreement in the academy and among the public regarding academic freedom: Ask a sophomore to explain what academic freedom means, and observe the blank stare (for that matter, ask him or her about the First Amendment.) More frighteningly, ask a typical voter or member of a state legislature. Even more frighteningly still, get a group of faculty to discuss what is protected under academic freedom and what is not, and observe the massive disagreement on principle. Throw in an administrator or two with his or her own agenda, and your head will begin to hurt, I assure you. Finally, inquire about the legal status of academic freedom. Is it a contractual right of the faculty as a whole, negotiated with the university and jointly administered, or is it an individual right of each faculty member and student, partially protected by the courts as well as university institutions? Something with so little consensual and legal basis about it may be vulnerable to extinction.

(Continued on page 4.)

AFCON SPEAKER'S BUREAU (As of November 1999)

Dwayne Ball: "Threats to Academic Freedom at Universities"
3120 Jasper Ct., Lincoln, NE 68516
dball@alltel.net

Linda Beckstead: "Freedom of Student Press Issues"
3919 Davenport, Omaha, NE 68131
becksteadl@aol.com

John Bender: "The Nebraska Student Freedom of Expression Bill"
3609 S. 20 St., Lincoln, NE 68508
jbender@unl.edu

Spencer Davis: "Academic Freedom on the College Campus" and "Principles of Academic Freedom"
512 Laurel Circle, Bellevue, NE 68005
sdavis@bobcat.peru.edu or ssdavis@uswest.net

Bob Haller: "Money Talks: Ideas in the Political Process" and "Religion, Intellectual Freedom, and the University"
4000 S. 56th St., Lincoln, NE 68506
rhaller@unl.edu

Jeff Lofthus: "Surveying Censorship in Nebraska"
1220 Hayes Ave., Norfolk, NE 68701
jlofthus@pluggers.esu8.k12.ne.us

Mel Krutz: "So, When the Supreme Court Says Yes to Censorship, What Do You Say, Dear?" and "Current Nebraska Censorship Issues and Why They Matter"
2625 Bluff Rd., Seward, NE 68434
mel34938@navix.net (soon to be mel@alltel.net)

Carol MacDaniels: "Street Language and Student Writing"
4740 Grassridge Rd., Lincoln, NE 68512
cmaddani@unl.edu

David Moshman: "Nature and Purpose of Academic Freedom;" "General Principles of Academic Freedom;" "AFCON Policies;" "Intellectual and First Amendment Rights of Adolescents;" "Intellectual and First Amendment Rights of Students;" and "Intellectual Freedom and Intellectual Development"
1901 Pepper Ave., Lincoln, NE 68502
dmoshman1@unl.edu

Presentation of the Readers' Theatre production of A Tangled Web: Student Freedom of Expression (a cast of adults and students)

Threats to Academic Freedom . . .

(Continued from page 3.)

That is my categorization of the threats we face and my reason for caring. In the future, I will try to dissect each threat as best I can, and suggest remedies where I think they are available. Academic freedom has had critical periods in the U.S. over the past two centuries, and we are unquestionably in one of those critical periods now. I still have some hope that we come out on the other side with the concept and practice of academic freedom intact and vital.

AFCON Membership is Growing

The Nebraska State Reading Association Board recently voted to join AFCON which qualifies it for a voting representative on the AFCON Board of Directors. The Nebraska Press Association and the Nebraska Writers Guild, already members, are in the process of selecting new voting representatives to the AFCON Board of Directors.

They join the Storyteller Monkey, Nebraska English/Language Arts Council, American Civil Liberties Union-Nebraska, American Association of University Professors—UNL Chapter, Nebraska State Education Association, Nebraska Association of Scholars, Nebraska High School Press Association, and Nebraska Educational Media Association as organizational members of AFCON. Additional organizations are in the membership discussion stage.

Individual membership has increased almost 7 per cent.

Won't you consider joining ?? Contact President Spencer Davis, 512 Laurel Circle, Bellevue, NE 68005

AFCON

515 North Thomas Avenue
Oakland, NE 68045.

Mailing
Address
Label

ACADEMIC FREEDOM COALITION OF NEBRASKA

HELP AFCON PROMOTE ACADEMIC FREEDOM

As a member of AFCON, you can help us

- ◆ support applications of the First Amendment in academic contexts, including elementary and secondary schools, colleges, universities, and libraries.
- ◆ educate Nebraskans about the meaning and value of intellectual freedom, intellectual diversity, mutual respect, open communication, and uninhibited pursuit of knowledge, including the role of these ideals in academic contexts and in democratic self-government.
- ◆ assist students, teachers, librarians, and researchers confronted with censorship, indoctrination, or suppression of ideas.
- ◆ act as liaison among groups in Nebraska that support academic freedom.

MEMBERSHIP (To become a member, send dues, organization or individual name, address, and phone number to Cathi McMurtry, 515 N. Thomas Avenue, Oakland, NE 68045)

Organizational Membership (\$100) entitles the organization to one seat on the AFCON Board and one vote in the election of officers and at the annual meeting, and eligibility for office and for chairing standing committees and provides newsletter subscription for the board member to share with the organization's information director and reduced rates to AFCON conferences for its members.

Individual Membership (\$10) provides newsletter subscription, eligibility for office and for chairing standing committees, reduced rates for AFCON conferences, and one vote at annual meetings.

Student Membership (\$5) entitles full-time students to the same privileges as provided by the Individual Membership.

**AFCON ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS, PLEASE DUPLICATE THIS NEWSLETTER FOR YOUR MEMBERS.
INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS, PLEASE PASS THIS NEWSLETTER TO A FRIEND AFTER YOU HAVE READ IT.
ENCOURAGE HIM OR HER TO JOIN AFCON**