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Hackney, Sheldon: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1993): Letter to the Editor 01

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UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

NEH

Philadelphia, PA 19104

June 11, 1993

The Editor
The Wall Street Journal

To the Editor:

Your outrageous editorial page campaign to caricature Sheldon Hackney, President Clinton's nominee to head the National Endowment for the Humanities, as a left-wing ideologue, distorts the facts and his qualifications.

There are many inaccurate factual claims about Sheldon Hackney in your editorial of June 9. Among them are the following:

1) Allegation: Sheldon Hackney is a long-standing representative of academic 'political correctness.'

Fact: Sheldon Hackney's entire career has been devoted to protecting open expression on campus for all points of view. As he wrote in the Philadelphia Inquirer, October 3, 1991, "It is absolutely clear that the classroom must not be a place for indoctrination."

2) Allegation: Sheldon Hackney "tried to prosecute a freshman for shouting 'water buffalo' at some raucous black women....Only after near-universal uproar and ridicule in the press...did Mr. Hackney drop the prosecution."

Fact: One can debate whether Penn's student judicial procedures are effective or appropriate, but having established such a process, the University's president could not intervene in the middle of it. This case was ended when the complainants withdrew their charges.

3) Allegation: Sheldon Hackney "spoke out in favor of kicking ROTC from Penn."

Fact: Sheldon Hackney, a former Naval officer and product of the NROTC program, has spent the past three years resisting demands by many Penn students and faculty that he remove ROTC from the campus, because he believes that ROTC's presence on America's campuses serves important national purposes.

4) Allegation: Sheldon Hackney "saw only 'conflict' between 'diversity and open expression'" when Penn students confiscated copies of the student newspaper.

Fact: Sheldon Hackney said that diversity and open expression "seem" to be in conflict, but that "there can be no compromise regarding the First Amendment right of an independent publication to express whatever views it chooses," and he reaffirmed his existing ban on such confiscations.

5) Allegation: "A Penn lecturer, Murray Dolfman...was forced [by Sheldon Hackney, you wrongly imply] to apologize and undergo a 'sensitivity and racial awareness' session."

Fact: The faculty of Mr. Dolfman's own school (the Wharton School) and department found his humiliation of black students in his class unacceptable and the actions against him by the Dean of the Wharton School wholly justified.

6) Allegation: "Mr. Hackney's double standard suggests a man who'd dispense federal arts money according to a similar bias."

Fact: The National Endowment for the Humanities does not dispense federal arts money, and Sheldon Hackney has made clear that freedom of expression for all views takes precedence over other important values when they come into conflict.

7) Allegation: "The Hackney nomination is a tribute to personal ties" with the Clintons.

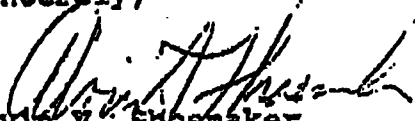
Fact: Sheldon Hackney's distinguished career as a historian, provost at Princeton University, president of Tulane University, and president of Penn have qualified him many times over to lead the N.E.H. He is among the most senior and most widely respected leaders in American higher education. The fact that his wife (a distinguished advocate for the well-being of children in her own right) happens to serve on a board with Hillary Clinton is hardly relevant to her husband's qualifications to serve his country.

8) Allegation: "Hillary Clinton...recently gave a fine speech at Penn deploring political correctness."

Fact: Hillary Clinton said virtually the same thing at Penn's Commencement that you have been lambasting Sheldon Hackney for saying: "We must always uphold the idea of our colleges as incubators of ideas and havens for free speech and free thought....Where every person's human dignity is respected."

As Chairman of Penn's Board of Trustees, I have worked with Sheldon Hackney for twelve years. He is a distinguished historian, a fair and judicious person, and a widely respected leader in American higher education. His distinguished record of achievements and moderate temperament will make him a fine Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Sincerely,



Alvin V. Shoemaker
Chairman, Board of Trustees of the
University of Pennsylvania