Hackney, Sheldon: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1993): Letter to the Editor 03

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Readers ridicule Penn’s response to its turmoil

David Boldt recently expressed his concern about the (well-deserved) reputation of the Editorial Page for its well-balanced, well-meaning, terminally dull editorials. Here’s a chance to break out of the mold.

The soon-to-be former president of the University of Pennsylvania has presented you with a target of opportunity that comes but rarely. I refer, of course, to president Sheldon Hackney’s straight-faced defense (letter printed April 29) of the university’s investigation into the enormously serious “water buffalo” incident. As Art Buchwald likes to say about his best columns: “I didn’t make that up.”

This is comedic material of a very high order indeed. But as one who was delighted at the removal of right-wing censors from positions of control in federal agencies, I confess to more than a trace of unease amid my laughter.

President Hackney insists that his carefully crafted investigative process must be allowed to run its course. But the disclosure that Bill Clinton’s nominee to head the National Endowment for the Humanities can’t see the utter absurdity of any “process” that can be invoked to investigate a student’s state of mind when he uttered the dreaded “water buffalo” epithet is more than a little sad. I mean, this is not rocket science. It is 1994, performed by the Marx Brothers.

You could improve everybody’s spirits with an editorial that took on the subject from the perspective of a Saturday Night Live skit.

David P. Breton
Philadelphia

Keeping the flame alive

As a native Philadelphian, I have always been proud of our propensity for preserving tradition. While others may lightly discard the past, we value it highly. That is why I am deeply touched to see that one of our prestigious institutions is keeping alive a tradition that most of us felt had long since been relegated to the dust bin of time.

I refer to the courage displayed by the rulers of the University of Pennsylvania in preserving the hallowed rules laid down by the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy. We have been much too lax lately in permitting people to express their thoughts. This is not pleasant work, but someone had to do it.

The liberal tradition must be preserved at all cost. Let us never forget the liberal lexicon: “We are all equal, but some are more equal than others.”