

1993

# Hackney, Sheldon: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1993): Letter to the Editor 05

Sheldon Hackney

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## Letters to the Editor

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### *What's in a Name?*

I write to correct the unfortunate impression left by your editorial of April 26 "Buffaloed at Penn," about a student disciplinary case now pending at the University of Pennsylvania. Although I am not permitted by federal law or university policy to discuss the facts of the case, I can put it into context.

Freedom of expression is the paramount value at Penn, and we are unwavering in our commitment to protect it. To that end, we have well-established policies to protect open expression, and we have very deliberate and fair procedures for judging alleged violations.

Penn is a special kind of community. Not only does it put the free exchange of ideas at the core of its being, but it strives to ensure no member of the community is prevented from full participation in those debates by intimidating and abusive racial slurs intended only to wound, rather than to enlighten.

Whether a student has engaged in racial harassment according to our very narrowly defined policy is now up to a judicial panel of students and faculty to determine. If errors are made, ample avenues of appeal are available after the judicial panel has reached its conclusion.

Those who think they know what the outcome should be are impatient with the process, but that process must be allowed to run its course.

SHELDON HACKNEY  
President

University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia

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This is a stunning example of PC-paranoia and the malignant erosion of all that academia should represent. In particular, the process handled by Robin Read, the university's campus judicial inquiry officer, has condemned Mr. Jacobowitz for a nonexistent crime and ignored data that contradicted, what seems to be, her personally held belief.

Mr. Jacobowitz, as represented in the editorial, should be congratulated for his courage to stand his ground all the way through and for speaking up, initially, when his "rights" as a student were infringed upon as a group of rowdy people disturbed the scholarly atmosphere of the campus.

Penn will be indelibly damaged should this student be harassed further, let alone expelled.

SALLY L. SATEL, M.D.  
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry

Your account of Mr. Jacobowitz's ordeal for having referred to a group of noisy black sorority sisters as "water buffalo" reveals that Ms. Read is long on PC but short on mammalogy. A water buffalo is a Southeast Asian mammal. "The large black animals that live in Africa" are African or Cape buffalo. I refer her to Dorst and Dandelot, "A Field Guide to the Large Mammals of Africa."

"Water buffalo," when used to describe a boisterous fraternal (or sororal) group may also derive from Fred Flintstone's fraternal organization, which in turn refers to a rather loose British fraternal organization, the Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, which met in British pubs with the bars open, resulting in gatherings that were not always models of decorum.

Ergo, to refer to members of any noisy or rowdy group as "water buffalo" is neither racist nor sexist as these terms are used and gives little offense to any but the Antediluvian Order, who are all WASPs.

CHARLES L. HORN

Bloomington, Minn.

Ms. Read's insistence on following through with Eden Jacobowitz's prosecution, especially in light of the academics who have offered to testify on his behalf, would be more appropriate in an institution that discourages intelligence.

Indeed, Ms. Read's vigilant pursuit of Mr. Jacobowitz collides with the principles that should be espoused by a university. College provides a student with numerous paths to a diploma. One hopes that along the way a mind is free to engage in, and be challenged by, a spectrum of ideas.

BRADFORD R. SILVER

Washington

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The situation at Penn is just the latest in a long line of abuses in the application of the university's selective free speech policy. The following incident, which occurred just a few weeks before the trouble surrounding Mr. Jacobowitz started, demonstrates what free speech means at Penn:

Early one morning, a campus homosexual-bisexual organization descended on the main pedestrian walkway, known as Locust Walk, to express its feelings by writing on university property with chalk. Conscientious maintenance workers quickly discovered the chalk and cleaned off Locust Walk before anyone saw it. If

this was all there was to tell, it would just be another funny story. Unfortunately, the administration and its free speech policy became involved.

Later in the afternoon the homosexual group returned and again proceeded to deface university property with its message. The group covered two full blocks of flagstone on Locust Walk and the base of a statue of Benjamin Franklin, Penn's founding father, with defamatory remarks about God and explicit references to sexual practices and parts of the human anatomy. In the name of free speech, university officials expressly forbade the maintenance workers from removing the graffiti, allowing prospective students and their parents, as they toured Locust Walk, to see what a great place Penn is to go to school.

Many of my fellow students and I "felt aggrieved," as President Hackney likes to describe it, that the administration condoned and encouraged activity that marred the property of our school. In this case, however, the perpetrators carried the "right" political message and campus officials felt obliged to do nothing.

During the three years I have been at Penn, the university has granted certain preferred minority groups a free hand to do whatever they please. Over the same period the conservative school paper, The Red and Blue, had its funding cut and many largely white fraternities have either been removed from campus or buried under a mountain of rules and regulations. I can only imagine the reaction of President Hackley if one of these "white-male, Eurocentric, and undiversified" fraternities decided to exercise its "free speech rights" in a similar manner.

ROBERT MORRIS

Class of '94

University of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia

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That the females were rude and thoughtless does not seem to be in dispute. Perhaps a graduation requirement at Penn should be a class of Manners & Etiquette. In this way they could all see just how silly the dispute really is and how important manners are.

Moreover, we should all be so fortunate to be possessed of means sufficient to send our children to an "august" school that would squander precious resources this way and engage in mindless log-rolling exercises.

MICHAEL C. MEAD

San Francisco