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Hackney, Sheldon: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1993): News Article 15

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'Confront problems, not people'

By James Harney
USA TODAY

Hillary Rodham Clinton on Monday urged University of Pennsylvania students to "confront problems, not people" as they deal with racial tensions that have wracked the campus in recent weeks.

"What we have to do at this university and in this country is to find a way to celebrate our diversity and debate our differences without fracturing our community," Clinton told 5,000 graduates at Penn's 237th commencement.

Outgoing university president Sheldon Hackney, President Clinton's choice to head the National Endowment for the Humanities, also urged tolerance.

"Our university ... is experiencing some very painful conflict. Those problems must be resolved but cannot be resolved here (at graduation)."

Just over 600 of Penn's 11,000 undergraduates are black. Controversy over race relations and free speech has simmered on the Philadelphia campus since:

► Five black female students filed racial harassment charges against a white male student who yelled "Shut up, you water buffalo" at them for making noise below his dorm window in January.

Eden Jacobowitz, an Orthodox Jew, denies that his comment was racially motivated, saying it is the English equivalent of a Yiddish epithet meaning "thoughtless person."

Results of a disciplinary hearing last week have not been announced.

► A group of black students last month confiscated 14,000 copies of the student newspaper, *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, to protest articles critical of affirmative action and Martin Luther King Jr.

Hackney came under fire from students for not responding forcefully enough after either incident. About 50 Jacobowitz sympathizers, their mouths taped shut, protested outside the president's campus residence two weeks ago. More than 100 participants in pre-graduation Alumni Weekend events wore "Free Eden Jacobowitz" buttons.

"(Hackney's) inaction in the Jacobowitz incident and in the *Daily Pennsylvanian* theft show us that he is not a true champion of free speech," says the newspaper's executive editor, Stephen Glass.

Ironically, Hackney was praised as a defender of free speech after he supported the showing of explicit Robert

Mapplethorpe photographs in a campus museum and backed a 1989 speech at the school by controversial Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan.

But Deborah Leavy of the ACLU of Pennsylvania, which is assisting in Jacobowitz's defense, says this time Penn has "tragically missed the boat."

"Instead of teaching the broader lessons of understanding other cultures and other people, the only thing the university is teaching is to keep your mouth shut. That's the wrong lesson."



HACKNEY: Makes plea for tolerance

AP