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Penned in by PC ethnic cleansing

While President Clinton ponders airstrikes on Serbians as punishment for "ethnic cleansing," he might also think about dropping a few payloads on the University of Pennsylvania. There Afro-racists and their white thought-police have busily engaged themselves in trying to muzzle those who dissent from their totalitarian agenda, and few of the local apostles of free speech seem to be too worried about it.

Gregory Pavlik is a student columnist who writes for the college paper, the Daily Pennsylvanian. He leaves no doubt where he stands and what he thinks. He's criticized civil rights legislation for violating property rights and the celebration of Martin Luther King Day because Dr. King was a plagiarist and a fellow traveler, and he outspokenly defends the "Eurocentric" basis of American culture. All of which means he constitutes something of a problem for those whose profession is defending free speech.

Early in March, Mr. Pavlik was informed by a phone call that no less than 31 charges of "racial harassment" had been filed against him. Now in the happyland of academe, where every egghead considers it his indefeasible right to make a fool of himself by saying and publishing whatever thought lurches through his cerebrum, such charges are serious indeed. The eggheads at Penn. have seen to it that their right to free expression is protected by something called the Open Expression Guidelines, which explicitly state, "The freedom to voice criticism of existing practices and values are fundamental rights that must be upheld and practiced by the University in a free society."

Admirable, if somewhat ungrammatical, sentiment, that. But as Mr. Pavlik learned, those who spout it often know as much about freedom as they do about subject-predicate agreement. The "Judicial Inquiry Officer" who informed Mr. Pavlik he was being investigated told him "we are investigating to see if that [the guideline] applies to you."

investigated for their views. That was violated. Subjects of investigation are supposed to be notified of the exact charges in writing. That too was violated. When Mr. Pavlik asked the "Judicial Inquiry Officer" what the exact charges were, she replied, "You need to ask?"

Mr. Pavlik says she later offered to dismiss the complaints if he met the complainers for a "discussion" — that is, a group-grope brainwash session in which Mr. Pavlik would confess his ideological sins. The officer denies making that promise but admits that such a deal would have been "very possible."

Eventually, thanks to a supportive

professor, Mr. Pavlik was notified that all the charges had been dropped. That's when the real troubles began.

Two weeks later, a group calling itself the "Black Community" decided to liberate all 14,000 copies of the Daily Pennsylvanian from the 52 sites at which they were distributed at 7:30 in the morning. The paper that day contained Mr. Pavlik's last column of the semester.

Penn President Sheldon Hackney made the intrepid statement that the mass theft violated the Open Expression Guidelines and those who committed it would be held accountable. That and 50 cents will get

you yesterday's paper. University cops nabbed several of the thieves, but chief college cop John Kuprevich said none would be prosecuted "because the paper is being put out free at access points to be taken." Presumably, he thinks an awful lot of readers just wanted to check their horoscopes that day.

Actually, someone may be prosecuted, namely, one of the cops who is accused of — guess what — using excessive force against those who stole the paper. On that charge, Chief Kuprevich allows as how he's "sincerely concerned."

Well, yes, but what about the little drama of trying to muzzle Mr. Pavlik

and the mass action to suppress the whole newspaper because it contained ideas the Afro-racists didn't like? When academic authorities are as "sincerely concerned" about the battery of real campus dissidents like Mr. Pavlik as they are about overzealous cops, "racial harassment" and "open expression" for those who have nothing in particular to express, then we might take their posturing a little more seriously. Until then, the lesson taught at Penn is pretty clear: Open expression is terrific — except for those who openly express ideas beyond the narrow boundaries of what is ideologically permissible.

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