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## Hackney, Sheldon: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1993): News Article 69

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# At Penn, the Word Divides as Easily as the Sword

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By Dale Russakoff and Mary Jordan  
Washington Post Staff Writers

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The University of Pennsylvania has become a symbol of increasing racial tension on the nation's campuses after black students threw away nearly every copy of the student newspaper one day and a white freshman was charged with racial harassment for calling five black women "water buffalo."

While Penn is hardly alone, its troubles have national significance because its respected president, Sheldon Hackney, is President Clinton's nominee to chair the National Endowment for the Humanities. His compromising response to the incidents has provoked rancorous national debate.

Also, Hillary Rodham Clinton is to be the key-

note speaker at Penn's commencement Monday, sharing the podium with Hackney.

The unrest at Penn has counterparts on many predominantly white campuses where minority students have become increasingly militant about alleged insensitivity and outright racism and white students complain loudly that university administrators pander to minority unease at the expense of other university values, including free speech.

Earlier this week, Mexican-American students staged a violent protest at the University of California at Los Angeles about a decision not to establish a Chicano studies department.

Meanwhile, in separate federal court actions this week, racial incidents that caused deep divisions on two campuses—an "ugly woman" skit featuring a white, male George Mason Univer-

sity student dressed as a fat, black woman, and racially charged speeches by former City College of New York professor Leonard Jeffries—were deemed protected by the First Amendment.

At the University of North Carolina and Ohio State University, black students have staged protests and rallies involving black cultural centers.

"There is a sense of people generally on tenterhooks and extraordinarily sensitive to anything that could be seen as an affront," said Herbert Morris, a UCLA provost. "On issues of race, ethnicity and gender . . . all that has to happen is a gnat lands on the shoulder, and they shoot from the hip."

In the late 1980s, scores of universities established anti-harassment or speech codes to foster

environments for minorities. Penn, like  
ols, has since narrowed its speech code. Even  
ars to be exacerbating tensions.

ay, Eden Jacobowitz, a white freshman, faced  
on charges that he committed racial harass-  
elling, "Shut up, you water buffalo," at five  
rity sisters making loud noises outside his  
ow on a January night. Penn Afro-American  
aid "water buffalo" has no racial connotations,  
se has gone forward because the five women  
the remark as racist and a campus judicial  
nd "reasonable cause" to believe that it was.  
y, who sources said believes that the charge  
it, had declined to intervene, saying the case  
n its course. This triggered protests led by  
ive commentators from Rush Limbaugh to  
et Journal editorial writers, all charging "po-  
rectness" run amok.

ewish alumni have threatened to stop contrib-  
he school. Jacobowitz, an Orthodox Jew, said  
"water buffalo" as the approximate translation  
ish epithet, "behema," slang for "thoughtless  
Seventy white students protested last week by  
eir mouths closed.

acobowitz yelled "water buffalo," other whites  
ing "nigger" and "bitch," according to numer-  
nts. When university police investigated, only  
z admitted to yelling.

esterday, Penn released a statement saying no  
was reached in the hearing, but Jacobowitz said  
impression that the panel would rule that he  
nd trial next fall.

olcanic reaction to the case reflected strong  
over handling of race relations and other is-  
iversity on campuses.

ey first became a lightning rod for the debate  
h when black students, identifying themselves  
"The Black Community," confiscated 14,000  
the Daily Pennsylvanian as a protest against  
y alleged was racism. Earlier, they had alleged  
columnist, who harshly criticized affirmative  
d the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., violated the  
ode on racial harassment. Their protest, they  
protected under Penn policies on open expres-

important university values, diversity and open  
on, appear to be in conflict," Hackney said in  
a remark since pilloried by many conserva-

ism also came from 15 Penn law professors in  
letter to Hackney saying he had not spoken  
enough in favor of open expression. The pro-  
y wrote, "struck at the heart of the most fun-  
damental diversity which the university should foster—  
y of thought, views and expression."

ney said in an interview that he views free  
as paramount but also wanted to encourage an  
of black students' grievances. "The grievances  
t be based on something real, but they ought to  
be talked about," he said.

Similarly, in the Jacobowitz case, Hackney acknowl-  
edged problems with the working of the speech code  
but defended it in principle. The policy "says that this  
is an inclusive community and we want everyone to be  
treated with respect and civility even as we have ob-  
ligations to disagree and discuss things vigorously."

The code bans remarks that "insult or demean" in-  
dividuals on the basis of race, color, ethnicity or national  
origin.

Of Penn's 11,000 undergraduates, 5.6 percent are  
black, the largest percentage of black students in the  
Ivy League. In addition to its speech code, other efforts  
to make the campus hospitable for African Americans  
include ongoing "diversity awareness" programs, in-  
tended to sensitize students to racism, sexism and other  
prejudices, and a dormitory for students of African-  
American culture. The dorm is virtually all black. There  
also are a black newspaper and a black yearbook.

In random interviews, black and white students  
voiced almost diametrically opposite views about how  
the university treats them.

Black students said the speech policies do not begin  
to address their concerns. Penn is in a predominantly  
black neighborhood of Philadelphia, with a high crime  
rate. Marissa Fox, a senior, said she and other black

students frequently are stopped by university police and  
told that they meet the description of a crime suspect.  
"We walk into buildings, we have to show our i.d.," she  
said. "Whites don't."

Walter Benjamin, a senior, said white students liter-  
ally run from black students who cross their path at  
night, "assuming they're somebody from the neighbor-  
hood." He and Fox said neighborhood youths steal bikes  
on campus and have assaulted white women, which Fox  
said "adds fuel to the fire, big time, because [whites]  
see black kids doing this."

Michael Chang, a black student leader, said he at-  
tended a predominantly white prep school in New York  
and "was cool with white kids then, but now I really  
don't want to be around" them. He said society, not just  
Penn, changed him, starting when his parents gave him  
a car and New York police repeatedly demanded to see  
his license and registration.

Now, he said, white students at Penn often accuse  
blacks of self-segregating but "people gravitate toward  
people who share similar experiences. No one says any-  
thing when white students congregate in dining halls."  
He said white students have thrown eggs and poured  
water onto blacks walking by their dorms and made  
anonymous calls saying, "The only reason you're here is  
that you're black."

Chang said blacks are "going to be a lot more polit-  
ically active about getting things done at this univer-  
sity," indicating that the newspaper protest and charges  
against Jacobowitz are only the beginning of a concert-  
ed campaign.

White students were more reluctant to give their  
names. One junior said he was upset about confiscation  
of the paper, considers himself a liberal and "never ex-  
pected to find myself on the opposite side of black stu-  
dents, having my views championed by Rush Limbaugh."  
But more and more, I'm beginning to think I'm a liber-  
tarian, I just feel the administration bends over back-  
wards to let black students get away with what whites  
can't.

Stephen Glass, a white junior and executive editor of  
the Daily Pennsylvanian, said he believes that the paper  
was insensitive under his predecessors. He plans an  
aggressive campaign next fall to recruit "students from  
all ideologies and races." But he said he cannot find  
common ground with black students who complain that  
simply publishing the work of a columnist who criticizes  
affirmative action and the Rev. King abuses free  
speech.

Glass said he was enraged when Hackney did not  
strongly condemn seizure of the papers. "He's quick to  
defend free expression when the attack comes from the  
right," referring to Penn's display of explicit photo-  
graphs by Robert Mapplethorpe, "but when it comes  
from the left, he doesn't defend it," Glass said.

Hackney disputed the charge but said he believes  
that "precisely because we are trying so hard to be in-  
clusive and to make everyone feel a real part of this  
place, we are more likely to have both [blacks] super-  
sensitive to slights on the one hand and [whites] a little  
leery of giving offense by saying something wrong."

Many critics of speech codes, including the American  
Association of University Professors and the ACLU,  
said they stifle communication and create just such po-  
larization.

"These are very complex problems, and you're not  
going to be able to solve them by telling people to stop  
shouting at each other," said Deborah Leavy, executive  
director of the ACLU of Pennsylvania. "Telling people  
to stop saying it when they're still thinking it is not the  
solution."

Chang said he opposes the speech code as a "fig leaf"  
that leaves most racism unaddressed. However, he also  
said he believes that Penn should bar columnists whose  
writing blacks perceive as derogatory. "All you're going  
to do is create tension and hurt people."

Roger Wilkins, a history professor at George Mason  
and longtime civil rights leader, sees the polarization as  
inevitable and believes that many universities are  
struggling commendably with it.

"If you are going to seek diversity, you are going to  
have problems," he said. "... There are tensions be-  
cause many people are more comfortable when they are  
segregated. But that's not the way we want the country  
to be in the future."

Russakoff reported from Philadelphia.