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## Hackney, Sheldon: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1993): News Article 70

Howard Goodman

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# A plug for free speech at Penn

Tuesday, May 18, 1993

The Philadelphia Inquirer

The issue has cast a cloud over the university. Addressing graduates, Hillary Clinton made her position clear.

By Howard Goodman  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Without ever specifically mentioning the University of Pennsylvania's troubles, Hillary Rodham Clinton used her commencement address yesterday to vigorously endorse free speech, saying "free and open discussion" is what America needs to resolve its racial and ethnic differences.

"We have to believe," Clinton said, "that in the free exchange of ideas, justice will prevail over injustice, tolerance over intolerance and progress over reaction."

Clinton was an electrifying presence at Penn's 237th graduation exercises, which were held under sunny skies, but also under a cloud of controversy. Two incidents that pitted racial sensitivity against free speech have drawn national attention to the campus.

**The day, said the college president, belonged to the Class of 1993.**

Outgoing Penn president Sheldon Hackney acknowledged only briefly the "very painful conflict" the university is going through, saying the day belonged to the 6,711 graduates of the Class of '93.

The grads celebrated their individual milestones in festive style, wearing Day-Glo on mortarboards, holding balloons along with academic banners, blowing bubbles, bouncing beach balls, doing the wave in their black robes.

Even before the ceremony, they got a happy jolt when they encountered Clinton standing on Locust Walk, a campus landmark, and greeting the startled graduates as they walked to Franklin Field.

She was met with plenty of *Oh my Gods and I can't believe its*.

"I got her picture! I got her picture!" squealed one graduate.

At least two grads said they would have skipped the ceremony except that Hillary Clinton was speaking.

"I'm a hard-core Republican," said Julie Adams, who picked up a master's degree in engineering. "but how many times do you get to hear a first lady talk?"



The Philadelphia Inquirer / SHARON J. WOHLMUTH

**A University of Pennsylvania student stops to have his picture taken with Hillary Rodham Clinton. She stood with university president**

**COMMENCEMENT** from A 1  
degree. The idea of Hillary being here — who's a mom and who's done so much — it's really exciting."

Clinton, who got an honorary degree, wore an academic gown and a new haircut. The coif drew comparisons to television newswoman Diane Sawyer and an explanation from the bearer.

"When the President called for sacrifice," she said, "and asked everybody at the White House to take a 25 percent cut, I decided to go for the 50 percent cut to do my part."

Her speech — delivered from notes, according to Penn's information office — centered on the soon-to-be announced national health care plan being drawn up by a task force she leads, and on the themes of individual rights and collective responsibilities.

She has spoken on such themes before — they are favorites of President Clinton's, as well — but she clearly tailored her remarks on freedom and obligations to Penn's recent controversies.

Two incidents in particular have drawn extraordinary attention.

In one case, a black student group seized one day's press run of the Daily Pennsylvanian, the student newspaper, in protest over perceived racism. In the other, Penn's judicial system brought racial harassment charges against a white student who called a group of black women "water buffalo."

In both cases, Hackney and other top administrators have been widely criticized — with many commentators saying that Penn has been too mild in defending principles of free speech, and too quick to comply with groups on campus who would curb speech they view as racist.

Clinton said that "every person's human dignity" should be respected on campuses, as well as in the country at large.

"We must always uphold the idea of our colleges as incubators of ideas and havens for free speech and free thought," she said.

"But," she added, "we cannot debate our differences nor face our mutual challenges unless and until we respect each other — men and women, young and old, across the racial and ethnic lines that divide us."

She said hatred should be challenged "wherever we find it."

But, she said, "we must be careful not to cross the line between censoring behavior that we consider unacceptable, and censoring."

"What we have to do," Clinton said, "here 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 said that First Amendment principles have been great agents in social movements. "We have seen that in our own history," she said, "in the struggles over civil rights, workers' rights, women's rights, human rights."

"We have seen how movements armed only with the power of their ideas have prevailed over ingrained prejudices and entrenched injustices."

"That is why it is always time for a free and open discussion at every college and every community and throughout our country — about how we can live together, bring out the best in each other, make our diversity a source of strength and not weakness."

Hackney, who is leaving Penn by June 30 as President Clinton's nominee

to head the National Endowment for the Humanities, said he would not discuss Penn's current problems. But his speech referred to them indirectly by noting that "pairs of opposing values march through American history."

"Life is therefore full of choices, dilemmas and ambiguities," he said, "because all beliefs cannot be reconciled with each other."

Hackney, stepping down after 12 years in the post, received an honorary degree — a previously unannounced parting gift.

Alvin T. Shoemaker, chairman of Penn's board of trustees, noted Hackney's "hospitality to all points of view" and his "conviction that disagreement and dissent are hallmarks of a healthy university," as well as his effectiveness as a fund-raiser. The school's endowment quadrupled under Hackney.

Claire M. Fagin, former dean of Penn's nursing school, will take over as interim president on July 1.

Hackney's wife, Lucy, also received an honorary degree, in part for helping to pioneer services for Pennsylvania children. Lucy Hackney served on the board of the Children's Defense Fund while Hillary Clinton was its president.

Others receiving honorary degrees were Miriam Ben-Porat, the first woman named to the Israel Supreme Court; Jeanne Quint Benoliel, a nursing educator who has dealt with the issues of death and dying; Alfred Gellhorn, medical affairs director for the New York State Department of Health; Ralph Landau, a chemist and entrepreneur who helped develop polyester fibers, and William Julius Wilson, a leading academic writer on the effects of poverty and discrimination on black people in America.

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The Philadelphia Inquirer / SHARON J. WOHLMUTH

**Hillary Rodham Clinton** greeted University of Pennsylvania students as they headed to Franklin Field for ceremonies. With her is university president Sheldon Hackney. Both received honorary degrees.