



Revolution #044, April 23, 2006, posted at revcom.us

In issue #42, *Revolution* ran a review of David Horowitz's book "The Professors—The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America" (see "'The Professors . . .' David Horowitz and the New Brownshirts," by Alan Goodman at <http://rwor.org/a/042/professors-horowitz-new-brownshirts.htm>).

A number of the professors who are attacked in Horowitz's book responded to the review, and some gave permission to share their responses at this online forum. These professors' comments reflect their own views, and not necessarily those of their university, of *Revolution* newspaper, or any other organization or institution. And the professors whose comments are included here are not responsible for other content at the revcom.us Web site or in the print version of *Revolution* newspaper.

Partly in response to these comments, Alan Goodman wrote a follow-up piece in *Revolution* #44, "[Brownshirts on Campus with Deep Connections to Bush—David Horowitz and the Halls of Power](#)".

From Dean J. Saitta, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Denver

Thanks for forwarding this article. While I'm willing to give Horowitz the benefit of the doubt that he doesn't really intend to "legislate" what can be said in the classroom or institutionalize a new censorship (what many of his critics suggest), his crusade does invite others to go down this road. Certainly, his book is shoddily researched and he makes some terribly reckless claims about those profiled in it. He not only attacks, as you point out, critical thought and debate about today's pressing questions, but also many established truths about the "overdetermination" of knowledge, the fluidity of disciplinary boundaries, and the social position of the university in society. Mr. Horowitz himself seems a deeply contradictory critter. As I suggested in a post to dangerousprofessors.net:

"Mr. Horowitz says that he wants professors to be academic and scholarly, yet his book research is superficial and sloppy, and should inspire no confidence that his accounts of rampant student persecution are accurate. He wants professors to stick to their subjects, yet he fails to realize that disciplinary boundaries have become increasingly permeable to the point where everything happening in intellectual and social life is conceivably relevant to the classroom subject at hand. He stands for eliminating political bias from the classroom, yet he ignores a century of scholarship showing that biases of all kinds inevitably shape all forms of academic inquiry, and that they can actually work to education's advantage if teachers and students are aware of them. He thus misses the point that "depoliticizing" classrooms implicitly politicizes them. He claims to be a pro-democracy patriot, but he rejects Jeffersonian ideals of teaching for citizenship in favor of an elitist, "sage on the stage" model of tweedy professors filling up empty-headed students with disinterested knowledge. He wants to promote intellectual curiosity, yet he bailed on his own graduate program because, in his stunningly impoverished view of intellectual life, "everything had been mined. There was nothing to research that was interesting anymore" (Chronicle of Higher Education interview, May 6, 2005).

He supposedly is a student advocate, yet he clearly disrespects the ability of students to think for themselves, and he underestimates the resolve of our very best students to "battle test" their ideas in the classroom. He says he stands for civil discourse, yet his online magazine Frontpagemag.com is an unreadable hate sheet. Clearly, if we want to encourage intellectual curiosity about how the world works and model inquiry in pursuit of truth, this is not a man from whom we should take much advice.

Unfortunately, however, what Horowitz says about the academy resonates with large numbers of citizens. The problem is widespread public ignorance of what professors do and what the university is for. I'm afraid that many professors themselves worry too little about accountability to the public, and think too little about the relationship between the university and wider society. And public debates between Horowitz and Ward Churchill do almost nothing to educate the public on this important issue, and will hurt the cause of academic freedom more than help it.

By the way, I'd cut Horowitz some slack with his defense of Larry Summers. I also defended Summers' right to speculate about the causes of the differential participation of women in science, without endorsing any of his conclusions as established fact. As noted above, disciplinary boundaries are becoming increasingly permeable. We need to let "borderland" fields (like evolutionary psychology, which inquires into evolved differences between men and women) develop before we issue proclamations about "the way the world is" (e.g., that of the American Sociological Association). But I'm an anthropologist, and I've got problems with much of what sociologists say!

Thanks for your work, and all best.