

Radical Islam vs. Academic Freedom: One Example

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In late March, about two hours after I had sent the announcement of Daniel Pipes's forthcoming (April 10th) lecture at the University of Washington on "The War on Terrorism and Militant Islam" to its academic sponsors for distribution on their "lists," I was besieged by e-mail messages from self-identified Muslims. These exhorted me to cancel the lecture or — failing that — to do penance for having organized it or to allow designated Muslims to "answer" it. The most heated of these fiery blasts of indignation and intimidation came from one Jeff Siddiqui, representing a group called American Muslims of Puget Sound. He wondered whether I knew Pipes's "area of specialty," and — without waiting for an answer — proceeded to delineate it: "he is a rabid Muslim/Arab hater" who "has ... suggested getting rid of Muslims in America" and who, "if he goes any further he will be in the same company as Hitler when he told Mussolini the the [sic] Jews were like 'TB bacilli [sic]' and must be eradicated."

Although Mr. Siddiqui declared he was "not at all suggesting censorship," he urged me to "withdraw your sponsorship or at the very least, publish a letter expressing regret over this sponsorship. You can also invite a member of the Muslim Community to speak for about ten minutes after Pipes has had his day bashing us."

Other letter-writers soon affirmed their support for "Mr. Jeff" or told me that they were "discouraged and ashamed [by] the departmental support this lecture has received" because "Daniel Pipes works for the Israeli Lobby." One letter denouncing Pipes as a "hate-monger" scandalously "given this type of venue" by the university came from the Associate Director of an organization called Hate Free Zone Campaign of Washington, whose HATE FREE ZONE signs festoon the campus, apparently conveying the message that if only the people who worked in the World Trade Center had placed such signs in their windows they would be alive today.

In response to Siddiqui's specific requests (copies of which he had sent to all the academic sponsors of Pipes's lecture as well as to the student paper), and after consultation with both the (non-student) advisors to the Associated Students of the University of Washington and the campus police, who instructed me to forward to them every letter of this sort that I received, I wrote the following: "I hope you won't be shocked to learn that I can't comply with your request that I cancel Mr. Pipes's lecture

or that I express public contrition for arranging it or that I allow you or one of your acolytes to preside as grand inquisitor and judge of his remarks. Apparently you are not aware of the age-old conventions regarding public lectures (and free speech) in this part of the country. There is no requirement that a lecture touching on radical Islam must be 'answered' by an Islamic radical, any more than a lecturer on fundamentalist Christianity must submit to a harangue at the end of his talk by a Christian fundamentalist.... After the lecture, Mr. Pipes will respond to concise questions from audience members, who have the right to ask them not as members of a group but as individuals. (There will be no speeches from the floor, and in the unlikely event that persons in attendance cannot curb their eloquence, they will be ejected and subject to prosecution.)"

My last sentence brought a new batch of letters, especially from those who now fancied themselves victims of discrimination or even prospective martyrs for their cause. One Khadija Anderson, for example, wrote that "I am assuming from the hostile nature of your response [to Siddiqui] that I will be targeted for exclusion (expulsion?) as although I appear obviously of caucasian [sic] descent, I wear a traditional Muslim headscarf."

Faced with my stony intransigence, Siddiqui then sought out the support of local print and radio journalists, whom he plied with quotations licentiously wrenched out of context to "prove" that Pipes wakes up every morning thinking of new ways to defame Muslims. The publicity, especially in *The Seattle Times*, had the (presumably) unintended effect of giving huge publicity to the event — the hall accommodated 440 people, and hundreds more could not get in — but also alerting the local authorities (as well as the Department of Justice, which was frequently in touch with me) to the possibility of disruption and violence.

But although the university police took very seriously the danger of disruption and of violation of the lecturer's first amendment rights, the university administration had very different priorities. When I asked the Vice-President for university relations, Norman Arkans, for his impressions of the situation on the day of the lecture and also whether he would represent the president of the university at this potentially stormy event, he wrote back as follows: "I have followed things, and it looks to me as if preparations are about as good as they can be. I expect there will be demonstrations, both inside and outside Kane [Hall], and people need to feel comfortable with noise and attempts at noisy disruptions. If it stays at the

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noise level, it's tolerable and can be managed. Obviously, we don't want to have to carry someone out. That gets pretty ugly." It was left uncertain as to whether this need to "feel comfortable" with verbal violence that prevents a lecturer from speaking would also apply to hecklers of abortion rights advocates or of gay marriage. What was certain was that the university administration was — whether knowingly or not — at odds with its own police force, which instructed me to warn the audience before Pipes's lecture loudly and clearly that "anyone who disrupts the lecture will be escorted from the auditorium." And the warning worked: Pipes delivered his lecture (to tremendous popular acclaim) without disruption (unless one counts the exit during the question period of one or two Thespians shouting "Arafat is my hero").

Having failed in their efforts to shut down Pipes's lecture, efforts made even as they kept insisting that they were devout adherents of the principle of free speech, the Muslim radicals tried to conciliate public sympathy by other means.

One Ahmed Amr, an editor of Nilemedia.com, said he was planning to sue the [Henry M.] Jackson School of International Studies for bringing Pipes to the university. "They shouldn't have let him speak. He's the Farrakhan of

the Jewish Taliban." The president of the UW Muslim Association, Humza Chaudhry, managed — with considerable effort — to get himself ejected from the building's lobby when he (alone) refused to follow instructions that the police issued to the overflow crowd to leave the lobby. This gave him the opportunity to allege that he was the victim of "racial profiling," indeed that he had been "harassed by law enforcement all my adult life because of the way I look." He also revealed — as evidence of the toll that police brutality was taking on his life — that he had just dropped his chemistry class in order "to analyze the policies of the UWPD."

At the outset of his lecture, Pipes took note of the various attempts made by Radical Muslims in the Seattle area to prevent him from speaking and thanked his sponsors for persevering in their sponsorship. Militant Islam, he observed, "is not only my subject but it is also my context. The debate over this lecture is a textbook example of militant Islamic methods: an attempt to close down discussion of issues; intimidation; scurrilous attacks; fabrication." Thus was Pipes, with characteristic elegance of mind, able to use the very campaign against his lecture as a perfect existential realization of one of its central ideas: namely, that Radical Islam is not merely a dangerous phenomenon but it is here, in our midst. •