

NAS...UPDATE

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FOR REASONED SCHOLARSHIP IN A FREE SOCIETY

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Wingspread Conference Promotes the Teaching of Great Books in Pluralistic Settings

Over Veterans' Day weekend, more than 30 participants from across the country gathered at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin to devise ways of restoring Great Books to the college curriculum through programs designed to reach non-traditional students. Sponsored by the National Association of Scholars, the Wisconsin Association of Scholars, and the Johnson Foundation of Racine, the conference brought scholars together with senior higher education officials from ten diverse states—Alabama, Alaska, Illinois, Kansas, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin. For three days, participants met in plenary sessions, panel discussions, and informal conversation while enjoying the exceptional surroundings and hospitality of Wingspread. Building on the momentum generated at this meeting, the NAS is now making plans to create a permanent network of friendly state officials interested in using their broad influence to foster Great Books programs.

The shape of the conference owed much to **David Mulroy** and **Bruce Gans**, active NAS members who have created Great Books programs at their institutions. Mulroy directs a 39-credit certificate program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, while Gans heads the spectacularly successful Great Books program at Wilbur Wright College in Chicago that this semester

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Don't Miss Our Ninth National Conference

New York City,
January 12-14, 2001

REGISTRATION FORM INSIDE

Time is running out to register for the Ninth National Conference of the National Association of Scholars, to be held January 12-14, 2001 at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City. We truly hope you'll be able to join us as we explore the general theme *Taking Measure: Higher Education at the Turn of the Century*. We've included a registration form in this newsletter. If you receive the newsletter less than ten days before the conference and mailing delays may be a concern, simply bring the completed registration form with you to the Roosevelt Hotel. (Please note that we cannot accept credit cards at the conference: cash, check or money order only.) Better yet, you can register online at www.nas.org.

We are excited that **Herman Badillo**, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York, will deliver the conference's keynote speech on Friday, and that **Ward Connerly**, a member of the University of California Board of Regents, will address us on Saturday.

The Sidney Hook Memorial Award, our association's highest honor, will be presented to historian **Eugene Genovese**; the Peter Shaw Memorial Award, given to recognize "exemplary writing on issues

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OUTLOOK

Academic Freedom: Our Academic Taskmaster

by Stephen H. Balch, President

Who dares question academic freedom? As enlightened opinion would have it, only Yahoos and demagogues. For an academic, having doubts on the subject constitutes the rankest heresy.

Yet some serious questioning is long overdue. Not because academic freedom is a bankrupt concept, but because, in taking its virtues for granted, we can readily forget its original purpose and informing premises.

What then is academic freedom's purpose? Simply, to create a set of institutional circumstances conducive to the pursuit and dissemination of truth. Although from this stark fact much flows, its most important implication is that academic freedom is a delegated rather than a fundamental right.

A fundamental right inheres in personhood. Its root is self-interest rather than service to others. Thus, in modern democracies, the notion of "one-person-one-vote" isn't anchored in any assumption of equal knowledge about public affairs, but in the belief that an equal and universal franchise ensures that governmental actions respect the interests of as many individuals as possible. To be sure, all rights, even those regarded as fundamental, are generally held to admit some qualification. Citizens below a certain age, as well as convicted felons, can be denied the franchise because they are assumed to lack a minimum of wisdom or virtue. Still, there is a very powerful presumption on the side of individual adult citizens, including the uneducated and mentally deficient, being able to exercise their electoral rights. Whatever might be gained in social intelligence through denying them this is usually presumed to be outweighed by the threat such a denial would pose to their interests.

Not so with delegated rights, which attach to statuses rather than personhood. Here the assumption is stewardship instead of ownership, with continued possession dependent on stewardship's due exercise. Delegated rights are rights only in the sense that accountability is not detailed and continuous, but general and intermittent. In the political sphere, the

power of congressmen to cast a vote in the House of Representatives typifies the delegated right. During a fixed term they vote as they please, after which their constituents can evaluate their performances and either extend or withdraw their mandates. The supposition is that it serves the community's interest for a well-informed representative to be given latitude in assessing the details of policy, provided the folks back home ultimately determine whether or not he has served their interests in so doing.

There are sometimes appeals to academic freedom involving fundamental rights, as in cases where professors face institutional sanction for off-campus speech. But these are really instances of protecting the First Amendment rights that professors share with all other Americans, rather than protecting academic freedom per se. It is also true that several Supreme Court opinions have referred to academic freedom in its more strictly professional sense as being subsumed within the First Amendment's sweep. But what it comprehends in this context has never been precisely spelled out.

In America, of course, the temptation to constitutionalize everything is always present. Although one might imagine an evolution of judicial doctrine advantageous to scholarly autonomy, the process could equally turn judges into the ultimate arbiters of academic affairs. Whatever the value of judicial intervention in specific cases, making academic freedom an inherent, and thus constitutional right, is thus to swing a two-edge sword. Moreover, it overlooks the fact that academic freedom was long assumed to be warranted only on the fulfillment of clearly understood conditions.

When America's leading scholars began campaigning, at the onset of the twentieth century, to have academic freedom formally recognized by the country's institutions of higher learning, they had no doubts about its conditionality. Their arguments in its favor had a clear-cut epistemic premise: the modern university was essentially a scientific enterprise, serving society through its unique capability to discover and disseminate new

truths. University faculties, and by extension, those of respectable undergraduate colleges, deserved a free hand in following inquiry wherever it led, because they were governed by a special fidelity to evidence and logic. Although academic freedom's founding fathers were not all literally scientists, the careful, considered scholarship they regarded as best practice, together with the conscientious peer review they hoped would police it, seemed science-like enough to constitute a reliable instrument for advancing human knowledge even in such domains as the humanities and social sciences, where elements of moral or esthetic judgment also came into play. In the AAUP's founding 1915 *Declaration of Principles*, they took care to lay out these canons of professional conduct explicitly:

"The claim to freedom of teaching is made in the interest of the integrity and of the progress of scientific inquiry; it is, therefore, only those who carry on their work in the temper of the scientific inquirer who may justly assert this claim. The liberty of the scholar within the university to set forth his conclusions, be they what they may, is conditioned by their being conclusions gained by a scholar's method and held in a scholar's spirit; that is to say, they should be set forth with dignity, courtesy and temperateness of language."

Recently, however, other sorts of justifications have begun to be urged on academic freedom's behalf. For example, Ronald Dworkin, has argued that the defense of academic freedom should be grounded in what he calls "ethical individualism," the right of "people whose responsibility is to speak and write and teach the truth as they see it" to do so freely. Note the not-so-subtle shift here, away from a definition predicated on process and toward one centered on objective. Needless to say, it is much easier to claim oneself a lover of truth, as almost everyone both inside and outside academe does, than to submit to difficult and demanding disciplines of inquiry.

Given the contemporary intellectual climate in many areas of the humanities and social sciences, to say nothing of Professor Dworkin's own discipline of law, this effort at premise modification should be no surprise. In fields where political advocacy has become open, unapologetic, and often overtly connected to outside movements, or in ones where "truth" is thought to be whatever particular communities deem it, good intentions may be the sole argument left for academic freedom. But mere good intent will hardly prove sufficient when it inevitably collides with that of persons armed with much greater power. Nor should we rest content with it.

The friends of academic freedom are thus faced with a painful obligation, more difficult even than the methodological ones imposed by their disciplines. They must inform their colleagues of an unpleasant truth; that they receive their special rights not from (to quote the *Declaration of Independence*) "nature and...nature's God," but from a studied adherence to demanding practices that distinguishes them, in the fields where they are competent, from the laity. Unlike inherent freedoms that exist to be enjoyed, academic freedom can only be possessed when laborious, tasking its holders with intellectual sweat and pains. Few of our colleagues will like us for saying that, but if academic freedom is to be preserved, we surely must. Ω

Annual Membership Meeting

The Annual General Membership Meeting took place at 11:00 a.m., Saturday, December 2, 2000, at the Tabard Inn, 1739 N Street, Washington, D.C. The following persons were elected to the NAS Board of Directors for the term beginning January 1, 2001 and ending December 31, 2004:

1. Evelyn Avery—Towson University
2. Glynn Custred—California State University at Hayward
3. Candace de Russy—State University of New York, trustee
4. George W. Dent—Case Western Reserve
5. Michael I. Kraus—George Mason University
6. Thomas Lindsay—University of Dallas
7. Jeremiah Reedy—Macalester College
8. Philip Siegelman—San Francisco State University

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pertaining to higher education and American intellectual culture," will be awarded to **Robert Conquest**, Senior Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University; and **Alan Charles Kors**, Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania, will receive the Barry R. Gross Memorial Award for outstanding service to the cause of academic reform. Ω

Conference Registration Form

Please reserve ___ place(s) in my name at the Ninth National NAS Conference, *Taking Measure: Higher Education at the Turn of the Century*, January 12-14, 2001, at The Roosevelt Hotel, New York City. Registration covers admission to all panels, the keynote address Friday afternoon, the reception and buffet Friday evening, and the awards luncheon on Saturday. Enclosed is:

- ___ \$125 per person for NAS members and *Academic Questions* subscribers and their guests
- ___ \$150 per person for non-members and their guests
- ___ \$40 per person for graduate students
- ___ I cannot attend the conference, but would like to make a tax-deductible contribution of \$ _____ to support the ongoing work of the NAS.
- ___ I wish to join the NAS, receive a subscription to *Academic Questions*, and qualify for the members' conference rate. I will also receive a free copy of *Losing the Big Picture: The Fragmentation of the English Major since 1964* (a \$15.00 value).

Dues are: \$42 (for full-time faculty and administrators)
 \$22 (for graduate students and adjunct and emeritus faculty)
I enclose annual dues of \$ _____.

Name(s): _____ Guest(s): _____

Street address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Affiliation (for name badge): _____

Home phone: _____ Office phone: _____

Fax: _____ E-mail: _____

Total enclosed: _____ (Please make checks payable to National Association of Scholars.)

To help us in our planning, please indicate whether you expect to attend the following events:
Friday reception/buffet Yes ___ No ___ Saturday awards luncheon Yes ___ No ___

To pay by credit card, please supply the following information:

Type of card ___ MasterCard ___ Visa ___ American Express

Card number _____

Expiration date _____

Name on card (please print) _____

Cardholder signature _____

Amount to be billed _____

NOTE: Credit card information must be mailed, as an original signature is required; we cannot accept credit cards at the conference (cash, check, or money order only).

Mail to: National Association of Scholars
221 Witherspoon Street, 2nd Floor
Princeton, NJ 08542-3215
(609) 683-7878

NOTE: You may also register on-line at www.nas.org.

offered 28 sections of Great Books courses to over eight hundred students. A front-page article in the *Chicago Tribune*, appearing the day after the Wingspread meeting ended, characterized Wright's students as a heterogeneous group, "many of them immigrants and working-class students attending college part time,"—in short, precisely those whose academic needs the conference sought to address. Gans delivered the conference's keynote speech, "What We Are Doing Here: The Indispensable Role of the Great Books for the Underserved," a compelling account of the power of the classics to motivate and inspire the students most institutions simply condescend to on the basis of their race and ethnicity.

The Wingspread Conference Center, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in the late 1930s, was made available to conference participants through the generosity of the Johnson Foundation, which became interested in the NAS's efforts to promote the Great Books following their coverage in a front page story in the *New York Times* last January. The largest private residence of Wright's design ever built, Wingspread was conceived as the home of Herbert Johnson and his family, who resided there until 1959, after which the dwelling was taken over by the Johnson Foundation and converted to its present use. Our conference's working sessions were held in one of the building's four wings, which form a pinwheel around the Great Hall, with its five fireplaces and 30-foot ceilings, where participants dined and gathered for conversation.

Saturday morning's plenary session featured **Patrick Collins**, son of Marva Collins, whose school achieved national prominence by boosting the academic performance of inner city students. Collins spoke of the positive effects he has witnessed in teaching Great Books to these children. Using Aesop's fables and other classic texts as models for behavior, he encourages students to become more self-reliant and self-confident—more like ants, as he put it, than like grasshoppers. Collins recalled how students take pride in learning literary terms like "protagonist" and "antagonist," and in knowing the names of Greek heroes like Hector and Achilles, with whom they can identify.

A Saturday morning panel session, moderated by Bruce Gans, dealt with "The Challenge of Academic Pluralism." **Don Barshis**, an educational consultant and former provost at Wilbur Wright College, described how he provided the administrative support and expertise that helped launch the Great Books courses that Gans had initiated. **Bruce S. Thornton**, professor of classical languages and literatures at

California State University, Fresno, told of challenges and successes in teaching the classics to a highly varied student body, and of how growing up on a cattle ranch in Texas had helped him relate to his students. Professor of Linguistics **John H. McWhorter** of the University of California, Berkeley, author of the current best seller *Losing the Race*, saw the Great Books as a splendid balance to Afrocentric texts that may only heighten Afro-American students' sense of isolation from mainstream society. McWhorter also recommended the study of the classics as an excellent way of learning standard English.

Chris Nelson, president of St. John's College of Annapolis, taking as his title, "Of Cannibals and Cannibalism," had the attention of his audience following the noontime meal. His cannibalism, however, referred not to matters of the flesh but to his borrowings from a colleague's speech in portraying the method of shared inquiry that characterizes the teaching of the Great Books at St. John's. All classes at the college use the same approach, discussing books in small groups under the guidance of a tutor without reference to critical sources. Nelson lauded the end result of this educational approach as providing a superlative grounding in the Great Books and developing inquisitiveness, discernment, and mental acuity, though he noted that it takes a year or two for students to become proficient in the method. There was also support among the conferees for a different pedagogical model—especially when dealing with less well-prepared students—permitting students more active use of scholarly criticism and allowing professors greater freedom to demonstrate their expertise in the subject matter.

Saturday afternoon, David Mulroy moderated a panel on "Making the Case for Great Books to Colleagues and Administrators." **Cynthia Rutz**, chair of the Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults at the University of Chicago, argued that the prospect of expanded enrollment could help convince administrators of the merits of bringing Great Books to non-traditional audiences of adult learners. **Margaret Downes**, director of the Humanities Program of the University of North Carolina at Asheville, said that the cooperative spirit of faculty, and the maturity and enthusiasm of an older-than-average student body, contributed to the persistent success of her institution's program. **Donald H. Whitfield**, Director of Higher Education Programs at the Great Books Foundation in Chicago, described how, until recently, his organization had largely focused on introducing students in K-12 to the Great Books, but was now beginning to extend

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VAS Annual Meeting

The Virginia Association of Scholars' annual meeting was held at the Omni Richmond Hotel on November 4, 2000. During the afternoon, the VAS co-sponsored, with the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, a panel discussion on affirmative action in higher education admissions. Speakers included **Abigail Thernstrom**, president of the Massachusetts Association of Scholars and senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute; **Roger Clegg** of the Center for Equal Opportunity; and **Jeff Brown**, Virginia's Commissioner of Labor and Industry. In the evening, George Mason University Rector and former U.S. Attorney General **Edwin Meese III** delivered an after-dinner speech on the core curriculum challenge at George Mason. The member meeting and board meeting on Sunday morning both focused on future projects and on ways of dealing with the anti-discrimination lawsuits and general administrative chaos at Virginia State University. Ω

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its reach to the undergraduate level, an effort that exactly coincided with the conference's goal.

Later in the afternoon, NAS president **Steve Balch** moderated a panel on "Great Books and the Public Interest" composed of **Jerry L. Martin**, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, **Chris Nelson**, and **Jeffrey Wallin**, president of the American Academy for Liberal Education (AALE). Martin recounted his organization's many battles to ensure sound undergraduate education by urging the study of Shakespeare in particular, and Western culture in general. Nelson picked up on the theme of undergraduate preparation by arguing that study of the Great Books produced energetic, inquiring, and liberally educated minds. Wallin told how the AALE is regularly increasing the number and scope of approved liberal arts programs through its certification process.

On Sunday morning, two concurrent sessions convened. **Chris Nelson** led a Great Books seminar on the allegory of the cave in Plato's *Republic*, while **Steve Balch** moderated a discussion of "Great Books and Graduate Education" in which **Paul Cantor** of the University of Virginia, and **Martin Trow** of the University of California at Berkeley, described how the narrowing and fragmentation of university education was depleting the number of new PhDs interested in, or prepared for, Great Books teaching.

The working portion of the conference terminated with a plenary session eliciting directions for the future. Suggestions included establishing a listserv

for conference participants to communicate plans and progress among themselves and a website listing available Great Books programs nationwide, both of which the NAS intends to pursue. Other participants were planning projects of their own, suggesting that the impact of the Wingspread meeting would continue to spread, planting Great Books programs in institutions where few ever expected to see them. Ω

Members in the News

On October 14, 2000, **Robert Rosthal**, president of the North Carolina Association of Scholars, moderated the panel, "The Pros and Cons of the Higher Education Bond Proposal" at the Pope Center for Higher Education Policy's Second Annual Higher Education Conference. **Stephen H. Balch**, president of the NAS, appeared at the same conference on the panel "How Can We Improve Higher Education?," where he spoke on "Academic Pluralism and Charter Colleges."

Balch also participated in the Conference on Charter Colleges hosted by the Empire Foundation for Policy Research on October 23, 2000, where he again addressed "Academic Pluralism and Charter Colleges." In a television program aired on December 16, 2000, Balch was interviewed by *NBC Nightly News* on the topic of "Disability Studies."

George W. Dent, president of the Ohio Association of Scholars, appeared with **Edward Crenshaw**, professor of sociology at Ohio State University, on *Viewpoint*, a production of WOSU public television in Columbus, Ohio. During a discussion session held on November 15, 2000 and due to air in January 2001, both members presented objections to discriminatory college diversity plans, while **Carole Anderson**, Dean of the Ohio State University College of Engineering, and **Wynona Slaughter**, a private consultant on affirmative action, supported diversity programs in higher education. Ω

Recent Event

CUNY ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS

(co-sponsored by the Association for the American Founding)

Date: November 12, 2000
Speaker: John Patrick Diggins
Place: At the home of Nahma Sandrow and William Meyers
Topic: *On Hallowed Ground: Abraham Lincoln and the Foundations of American History*

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