

SYMPOSIUM: NAS LAUREATES, 2006

*Robert P. George, Donald Alexander Downs, and
Candace de Russy*

At general conferences around the country, the National Association of Scholars regularly recognizes individuals who have advanced the ideals and realized the goals that define our mission. We honor these stalwart warriors in the campaign for educational reform with prizes given in the memory of distinguished NAS heroes of the past: Sidney Hook, Peter Shaw, and Barry Gross. The most recent award bestowal ceremony took place on Saturday, 18 November 2006, in Cambridge, MA, during the twelfth gathering of the general membership. *Academic Questions* is pleased to print remarks of our officers who presented the awards and the acceptance addresses of the distinguished prize winners.

The Sidney Hook Memorial Award Presentation Address: A Leader of Enduring Civility

*Stephen H. Balch,
President of the National Association of Scholars*

The Sidney Hook Award is the premier accolade bestowed by the National Association of Scholars. Its first recipient was the distinguished sociologist, James Coleman. Harvey Mansfield, Donald Kagan, and many others of great weight and standing in American higher education have earned it for distinguished contributions to the freedom and integrity of the academy.

Clearly, the creation of a well-rounded individual—a person endowed with all the capabilities and all the arts needed for free and vigorous citizenship—is the singular objective of a liberal education. And, while liberal education, well done, does indeed produce such individuals, it is a strange fact that there are exceptionally few of them in academic life, itself. We find, to be sure, plenty of bright, articulate, and book-learned individuals, but not many who, in addition to these attributes, also possess the qualities of character, temperament, and the consistently sober, serious, and penetrating judgment that a genuinely good education can produce.

Our recipient this year is someone who, in remarkable degree, does own this classic roundedness of intellect and character. I think those who know Robert George and have watched him at work are often stunned by the extent to which he not only projects pure intellectual brilliance, but also communicates an authority of leadership

rarely equaled by others. What so specially justifies this year's Sidney Hook Award is the application of these enormous talents to the great benefit of academic life.

We've spoken much about the importance of creating niches, programs, and institutional entities of various kinds that not only bring fresh perspectives to campus discourse, but also exemplify the principles of a free and open marketplace of ideas. All this has been superlatively true of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, founded in 2000 by Professor George at one of the country's, and the world's, premier institutions of learning.

When Robby talks about the Madison Program and its goals, he is fond of repeating, "We practice what they preach"—meaning that while the Madison Program has indeed sought to bring to the Princeton community voices that the university would think of, sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly, as "conservative," it has also sought consistently, actively, and creatively to engage other views at Princeton in a way that exemplifies collegiality and civility. (And, I might add, the very same can be said of Robby George, with respect to the way he conducts himself as an individual.)

The James Madison Program operates on many levels in the service of academic reform. It is creating a more pluralist intellectual environment at Princeton. It is exemplifying the norms of reason, open discourse, collegiality, and rational debate. It is also demonstrating to every member of the American academy, including very importantly, the members in our own embattled sector, how materially successful a program committed to high intellectual ideals can be. This success has been displayed in more than just the raising of money. It is evident in the return to involvement in the life of Princeton University of all sorts of distinguished alumni who had written off, or become discouraged, with their alma mater.

In consequence, people observing the Madison Program around the country have asked themselves: if it can be done in Princeton, why can't it be done on my own campus, as well? And such reactions have not only been forthcoming from faculty members at various campuses, they have also been observed among donors and even—though they may prefer to work behind the scenes—among individuals in the higher echelons of university administration. That's a tremendous contribution to the greater good of academe, as well as the greater good of America as a whole.

It doesn't come to many to have the chance to do such ground-breaking work, and certainly doesn't come to many to do it as well as has Robby George. Thus, let me now present the eleventh Sidney Hook Award to Professor Robert George of Princeton University.