

Curriculum Wars and Cold War Politics: The Struggle for Academic Freedom in Higher Education

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During the early 1960s, in the formative years of Florida's newest university, the University of South Florida located in Tampa, the Florida Investigative Committee in true McCarthy-era style, set up its "Star Chamber" interviews with students and "others" at local motels near the University. The purpose of these "interviews" was to ferret out information about university administrators and instructors which would point to either their innocence or their guilt in terms of communist party membership, homosexuality, or the teaching of atheism. After an exhaustive process which left the intellectual community on Florida's West Coast shaken and dismayed at what it collectively believed was a misguided mission and waste of taxpayer dollars, academic communities in other university towns throughout Florida responded with outrage over the intrusion of politicians and perceived anti-intellectuals into the "business" of higher education. Some had already run the investigative committee's gauntlet, others likely feared they would follow. In what could have resulted in the sudden demise of the infant university, its leaders and faculty emerged from the experience, not as victors, but rather as survivors of a bitter battle over academic freedom. This study serves to fill the growing body of research on the McCarthy era and its influence on education. It will cover as a case study the entire struggle of the university over the issue of academic freedom and the attempts of "well-meaning" citizens to control what is taught and in what way it is taught at the most sacred of investigative places--the university.

Methodology

This paper is based on both the Egerton papers, housed in the Special Collections Department at the University of South Florida, and corroborating evidence from the State of Florida Archives in Tallahassee, Florida. The evidence includes more than 1000 papers from these two collections. The methodology employs document analysis, review of secondary sources, and newspaper accounts. In addition to

the central issue of academic freedom during the McCarthy era, the story of this university's struggle is also set against the backdrop of academic freedom as a principle of university teaching and learning. Thus, the contest over academic freedom on the USF campus is juxtaposed against experiences on other campuses at other times of political strife and unrest. It also covers the battle lines drawn between those who believed in curriculum control versus those who believed in academic freedom without constraints. The secondary literature consulted for this paper reveals the tone and tenor of such battles, many of which were fought in professional journals.

Background to the Issue of Academic Freedom

According to Carman (1957), the accepted role of higher education evolved from simple conservation and transmission of knowledge to that of questioning accepted doctrines. Hence, the birth of the university from its medieval origins and its acceptance of Aristotelian philosophy, combined with Church doctrine, gave way to the Renaissance idea that the learner's role was more than that of passive receiver. This newer role was to search for truth and to challenge accepted doctrines, a tradition which can be traced to Abelard's quest to introduce his students to contradictions in church doctrine, which to him, "...should lead to zealous inquiry into truth" (Gutek, 1995, 108). At its most basic, then, academic freedom is the right of educators and students to pursue "truth" regardless of direction. This would include, for educators, the freedom to teach, to think, and to learn without fear of censure or loss of employment. In fact, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), an agency that often speaks for the collective body of the professorate, defines academic freedom as "the freedom to teach and to think," explaining that this freedom benefits the public based on the belief that "the common good and future of society depend on the quest for and advancement of truth" (in Schier, 1982, 331).

As simple and obvious as this definition appears, when we review the controversy surrounding the nature of academic freedom, we find that it has repeatedly divided schools and communities, administrators and faculty, and, the intelligentsia and the public. For example, in one early case, 1870, Vanderbilt University removed Alexander Winchell, a geologist, for espousing evolution. In another, students along with the public-at-large verbally attacked University of Michigan eminent historian, Ulrich Phillips, in 1928, for his defense of the Southern position during the Civil War (Engel, 1956). While these examples speak to controversies over specific issues, academic freedom has also been shoved aside over perceived threats to the body politic, such as the suspension of academic freedom on the campus of Columbia University during World War I.

It appears that Columbia's Board of Trustees earned the distinction of becoming the first private governing board to set up an investigation committee in order to ascertain whether or not any of the University's programs or professors, teaching or in positions of administration, could be considered subversive (Howlett, 1984). The task of the Committee of Nine, five deans and four faculty, was to examine the faculty's teaching proclivities. While *The Nation* scorned the actions of Columbia's loyalty police, influential faculty members registered their outrage in an angry letter to trustees. In the end, President Nicholas Murray Butler became one of the few university presidents to "formally withdr[a]w the privilege of academic freedom for the entire duration of the war" (Howlett, 1984, 45). So unrelenting was Columbia's campaign to rid itself of anti-American sentiment within the professorate that its Board of Trustees hauled the distinguished historian Charles A. Beard before its "star chamber" panel in order to question him about a speaker he supported who allegedly uttered "'To Hell with the flag.'" Beard resigned stating flatly, "Having observed closely the inner life of Columbia for many years, I have been driven to the conclusion that the University is really under the control of a small and active group of trustees who have no standing in the world of education, who are reactionary and visionless in politics, narrow and medieval in religion..." (Howlett, 48).

The outcry against Columbia's loyalty and academic freedom policies was immediate and fierce. One Columbia graduate believed that the University's position could be likened to the corporate attitude which "'naturally discounts the opinions of the non-investing public'" (Howlett, 49). This alumnus went on to declare that the university-as-a-corporation-model cannot succeed without a supply of revenue. This revenue, he claimed, is largely acquired through graduates, their parents, alumni, and the business sector. Hence, parents whose vague complaints spoke of irreligion and sedition emanating from the halls of academe, combined with the complaints of influential

businessmen who guard against the anti-capitalist rhetoric of "rose-tinted professors," acted together in the end as powerful checks against free speech.

Some forty years later, during the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, pressure was brought to bear on the faculty of Emory University to defend the University's conservative stand regarding integration by incorporating in the Emory University Board of Trustees Statement of Principles governing faculty relationships the following language regarding academic freedom:

Nor is the principle of academic freedom to 'be interpreted to mean that one has the right to be protected by this principle if he teaches or advocates the overthrow of principles of the system out of which it springs.' There can be no place in the University Faculty for those whose integrity cannot be relied upon or for those who are committed to doctrines hostile to the form and spirit of American democracy and to the University's Christian commitment (Bowden, 1961,4).

One might note that at the time, this position was meant as a defense of segregation by Emory University's Board of Trustees. But, despite issues creating tension over academic freedom and integration during the Civil Rights period, the most hostile battles during the late 1950s and early 1960s concerning academic freedom stemmed from Cold War politics and the hunt for "Red" teachers.

The issue of academic freedom versus communists on the university campus was a full fledged political battle waged not only on the campus itself, but in the press, in state legislatures, and at times, in the courts. While there is no explicit constitutional protection for academic freedom, the concept has traditionally been paired with the first amendment right to free speech. United States Supreme Court Justice Frankfurter's 1957 concurring opinion in *Sweezy V. New Hampshire* states that the interest of the university is to provide an atmosphere free for speculation, experiment, and creation. Thus, the university (also interpreted as referring to an individual professor) has four essential freedoms: "to determine for itself who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study" (Rutgers Law Review, 1990,1098). Despite Frankfurter's widely accepted opinion, controversy over who would be allowed to remain in the professorate in the wake of the Red Scare and McCarthyism continued to plague numerous institutions of higher education.

Two warring camps emerged over the issue of academic freedom and its protection of perceived subversive teachers. According to Carman (1957, 447), "two diametrically opposed camps of opinion developed over the question of whether a member of the Communist Party, if a teacher, should enjoy the protection of academic freedom." One of these camps takes the negative position that no member of the

Communist Party should enjoy protection under the guise of academic freedom and therefore, should not be permitted to teach. While most hardline members of this position, represented by individuals such as Sidney Hook, based their beliefs on heresy and conspiracy theory and likely painted all suspected teachers with the same brush, more moderate members of this group believed that the academic discipline of the professor in question was the key. In other words, mathematicians and natural scientists could keep their jobs, but social scientists and professors in the humanities should not be allowed to teach (Carman, 1957; Ruja, 1961; MacIver, 1957; Draper, 1992; Schlesinger, 1987).

In general, the idea is that if one is committed to a political philosophy that runs counter to American ideals and values, e.g., preaching atheism, the evils of industrial capitalism, and/or advocating violent overthrow of the government, that person should not be teaching. As the course content of natural sciences and math would likely not cover these topics, those academic disciplines were viewed as less threatening. However, professors, as role models for students, could be removed from the campus regardless of area of study, if they were suspected of spreading subversive ideology. In the climate of the times, even refusal to swear a loyalty oath made one suspect (Bowden, 1961).

The other camp of opinion holds that for an atmosphere of intellectual growth to survive, the university must allow for a climate that welcomes all academic positions as open for study. In terms of controversial ideas, including communism, this position supports the notion that students can be exposed to and examine the beliefs of communism as long as the professor is not indoctrinating students. The central point is that teaching is related to fostering critical thinking, choice, and decision-making on the part of students, not memorization and regurgitation of doctrinal positions. Moreover, it becomes the role of professional societies, such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to rise up and protect the professorate from attacks on their academic freedom not only from the public and government, but also, at times, from university administration (Ingraham, 1957; Stein, 1960; Taylor, 1957; Egerton, 1996). In the final analysis, this position supports the notion that it is the role of professors to challenge students to confront ideas and beliefs that they have not previously encountered, in an atmosphere that fosters the pursuit of truth.

The *Sturm und Drang* throughout the McCarthy era over the issue of who controls the curriculum and who should teach reached its zenith in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Yet, we might pause and ask ourselves to what extent were teachers and professors genuinely concerned over their course content and afraid of being accused as a communist teacher during a period of time labeled "the difficult years" (Lazarsfeld and Thielens, 1957/58; Kelman, 1959; Whalen,

1959)? In one study, Lazarsfeld and Thielens, (1957/58) surveyed social science professors from a stratified sample of 900 accredited colleges applying a tool they developed named the "index of apprehension." What the researchers wanted to learn was the degree to which these professors felt comfortable presenting controversial ideas, especially when they concerned freedom of thought, including aspects of communism. According to the results of the study, more than three-quarters of the professors surveyed "consider[ed] a better society an urgent or quite important goal of their teaching." So, despite the alarm, Lazarsfeld and Thielens, Jr., (1957/58) found that on the part of the professorate, "fear for one's job security," was tempered by a "general concern about the state of academic freedom," and more interestingly, by "defiant resistance to the prevailing attacks" (244). However, some educators in the Lazarsfeld and Thielens study reported that they were more guarded in what they presented in class, while others went so far as to withdraw entirely from political activity or other similar organizations.

The noblest of educational goals notwithstanding, a social education approach to university studies, particularly in Florida schools during the 1950s, met stiff resistance from a lay public already media shocked by the McCarthy hearings into believing that a communist infiltrator lurked behind every red-blooded American tree. Thus, the Lazarsfeld and Thielens (1957/58) research study gives us a national picture over the issue of academic freedom during the Cold War era and provides a backdrop from which we can view the events of the early 1960s on the South Florida campus. The decades since the debacle on the campus of Columbia University and leading up to the McCarthy investigations into un-American activities had created a climate of fear and trepidation among university faculty regarding academic freedom.

It is within this context of McCarthy era politics that the chronicle of events surrounding academic freedom at the University of South Florida is set. And, while much has already been written about the general state of education and the role of teachers during the early days of the Cold War, few studies, if any, document the struggle for academic freedom in higher education classrooms on such a personal or intimate level as the story of the curriculum wars on the campus of the University of South Florida. Its cast of characters is colorful and their actions at times almost unbelievable. Yet, one must not lose sight of the fact that for those that dwell outside of academe, and even some who dwell within, the concept of an unbridled search for truth is frightening. Thus, as the 1960's dawned, armies of American patriots rushed to shore up "the American way of life," which they believed was in grave danger owing to the seductive forces of Communism, a growing

immorality in the American social fabric, and America's drift toward atheism, examples of which could be found on those bastions of liberal thought called university campuses. Nowhere was the battle more intense than in Florida and on the campus of its newest university.

The Struggle for Academic Freedom at the University of South Florida, a Case Study

Florida, owing to its close proximity to Cuba, was perhaps more susceptible during the McCarthy years to ideological influences from the far right than other states whose borders are more distant. Hence, Florida lawmakers in the 1950s often responded positively to those high-pitched voices and guardians of localism who called for tight controls of the schools, including curriculum decision-making. So strong was this "grass-rootism" that lawmakers and the public alike had a difficult time distinguishing between the role of public schooling and that of higher education. As a result, some viewed the university as a place to dispense "appropriate" knowledge rather than a place to engage in debate. Such was the case at the University of South Florida in its formative years, when a handful of parents, some educators, and other locals of varying stature, sought to influence the role of the new institution out of a myriad of "fears." While hindsight informs us that these fears were both misguided and misplaced, one should not lose sight of the fact that the early 1960s represented a time of great uncertainty brought about by a decade of Red Scare politics.

This uncertainty in turn shaped the perspective of a lay public who had been taught to believe that the United States was in a near-death struggle in the "race for space," and that everyone from Hollywood figures to classroom teachers might be potential communist infiltrators (Foster, 2000). The story unfolds within this context of spies and lies. However, this paper does not seek the often sterility of strict objectivity; rather, the writers wish to place the reader in the midst of the historical drama. Accordingly, one can get a better sense of the extent to which the emotional-laden battle over academic freedom in the early years of the University of South Florida raged in the halls of academe. Therefore, the historical actors through a combination of their own writings, newspaper accounts, and official reports, fill this paper with their actions, words, and deeds.

The story of this war of words and political intrigues is possible owing to the deep involvement of 25 year-old John Egerton, a campus employee in the University Relations Department. Egerton collected newspaper articles, took notes at meetings, copied important press releases and in general found himself in the "cat-bird's seat" during the protracted battle between the Florida Investigative Committee, headed

by Charley Johns, a Florida "good-ole-boy-styled" politician, and local witch hunters, all of whom pitted themselves against the university and its supporters, most notably, the *Tampa Tribune*. After Egerton left the University, he boxed up his papers, including a book-length manuscript in which he outlined the entire debacle, and donated them to the University for preservation in its archives. To open these archival boxes is to unleash a torrent of accusations, unsupported allegations, ill will, and in general, a sea of misery for those professors whose reputations were damaged and whose curricula were dissected. The fate of Florida's youngest institution of higher education hung in the balance.

In a 1996 speech to a USF audience, Egerton recalled the entire struggle, and that when he left after more than five years of service to the university, he felt "a bit like a war veteran, a battle-scarred survivor of an intense and emotional conflict" (Egerton, 1996, 2). In fact, one could assert, that Egerton's involvement was a defining moment in his life and career. Accordingly, Egerton told this audience that he "felt it was historically important for there to be at least one eye-witness account from the scene" (2). The "scene" as he put it began in the spring of 1962 with an "uncoordinated but overlapping assault on the institution" (3). The major players, according to his observations, were Thomas J.B. Wenner, a disgruntled University of South Florida instructor; Jane Tarr Smith, mother of a USF student; George Wickstrom, a small town newspaper man; Sumpter L. Lowry, head of the Florida Coalition of Patriotic Societies; and, Charley Johns, a state politician from rural Florida.

Despite Egerton's view that the attack on the University of South Florida was an overlapping of efforts by unconnected individuals or groups disgruntled with the direction of the new university itself, newspaper clippings and personal letters suggest that the USF "affair" was inspired by an earlier event on the nearby campus of the long-established University of Tampa. That event involved Sumpter Lowry, named by Egerton as an instigator of the USF probe which followed the University of Tampa affair by only a few months. On June 16, 1961, the *Palm Beach Times* published an article about the firing of University of Tampa philosophy professor, Thomas P. Hardeman. According to the newspaper, Hardeman believed that his impending dismissal was a result of a letter writing campaign instigated by University of Tampa board member and leader of the Florida Coalition of Patriotic Societies, Sumpter Lowry, along with members of the John Birch society. Hardeman believed his dismissal was a result of his "outside activities," which included repeated attacks on the Bircherites along with other ultra-patriotic groups, and perhaps, his participation as minister at a local Unitarian church.

Other newspapers during the summer and fall of 1961, joined the *Palm Beach Times* in pursuit of the truth behind

Hardeman's firing (*Palm Beach Times*, 6/16/61, 11). One article carried an explanation for Hardeman's dismissal offered by John Scheffer, secretary of the newly organized "Committee for Academic Freedom" in Tampa. According to Scheffer, University of Tampa president, Dr. David Delo gave the following reason for Hardeman's dismissal: his "teaching was not up to standard." Yet, as Scheffer quickly pointed out, not one administrator had visited Hardeman's classroom. More curious than Delo's claim that Hardeman's teaching was not up to standard, was the fact that only two months prior to his firing, the university awarded Hardeman a salary increase ("Tampa Battle Lines Drawn," State of Florida Archives, Series 1486, Carton 14).

The attacks on Hardeman mobilized Tampanians. Letters to the editor of local newspapers decried the firing. Citizens of Tampa responded by asking Delo for an explanation. Repeatedly, Delo responded in the newspapers by stating that the firing was an "internal matter," which had the support of an elected body of the professorate. One reader was moved to write how perplexed he was at Delo's paradoxical actions, which included a well-publicized statement by the President that he had told Hardeman to "keep his mouth shut," regarding the professor's attacks on the ultra-right, yet shortly before his warning, he had uttered words of praise for freedom of thought during a convocation address at the University of Tampa. In reader Hornbrook's copy of this convocation speech, Delo stated that:

he welcomed non-conformity vs. the herd. He welcomed the independent thinkers, saying their arguments bedeck the pages of books and magazines alike, they trouble the schools, they become subjects of political debate. For he who would excel is still suspect, even though he will lead us to salvation . . . our future will depend on people who excel with their minds and personalities who are in a sense non-conformists. ("Completely Empty Promise," State of Florida Archives, Series 1486, Carton 14)

While groups such as the AAUP stated that professors should enjoy the same rights as any other citizen, no clear evidence of wrongdoing on the part of "citizen" Hardeman, which would support Delo's actions, was reported in the press. To the contrary, Hardeman appears to have been targeted for his personal views and not for his conduct in the classroom. Hence, the newspaper wars over Hardeman's dismissal, with questions of academic freedom looming overhead, set the stage for a larger contest on the campus of the University of South Florida some six months later. Fresh from the campus battleground at the University of Tampa, at least one combatant, retired Lt. General Sumpter Lowry, emerged to fight again.

In Egerton's recollections of the investigation at USF, he referred to Lowry as "a retired military officer, ultra-conservative politically, and formerly a candidate for

governor of Florida" (Egerton, 1996). He described him as one of Tampa Bay's best-known and most outspoken anti-communist and right-wing extremists who was alarmed by what he believed was rampant left-wing radicalism at the new university. Egerton reported that other important participants involved in the Florida Investigative Committee's (FIC) probe at USF aside from Lowry, included: Thomas Wenner, a lecturer in "The American Idea," a core undergraduate course; Jane Tarr Smith, mother of a first-year student; George Wickstrom, editor of a Zephyrhills newspaper; and Charley Johns, a state Senator from Starke, Florida and member of Florida's "Pork Chop Gang," an informal association of "good ole boy types" ("David Hits Pork Choppers and Bankers in Talk Here," *Tampa Tribune*, 1962). In Egerton's 1996 speech on the campus of USF, he linked Lowry and three others with Charley Johns, head of the Florida Investigative Committee, all of whom became involved in the investigations on the campus of USF following allegations by one of them, disgruntled professor, Thomas Wenner, (*Tampa Tribune*) who, in April 1962, reported to the committee that the university was soft on communism.

According to a statement in the *Tampa Tribune* by USF President John Allen, Wenner touched off the Florida Investigative Committee's investigation into homosexuality, godlessness, and communist activity on the campus based on "unfounded and irresponsible charges" ("Politics Denied," 5/22/62). Governor Farris Bryant and President Allen, in separate actions, promptly suspended Wenner. Allen then asked the Board of Control, the governing body of Florida's university system, to dismiss Wenner ("South Florida University Assured," *Pensacola Journal*, 5/20/62). Allen's swift actions may have stemmed from the nature of the investigation as well as Wenner's accusations. The Johns Committee, it seems, had been operating out of a local motel taking secret testimony from parents and students. The committee's investigation began in April 1962 more than a month before Allen was aware of its presence. According to one newspaper account, he did not learn about the investigation until May 15, 1962. Allen's fury regarding the investigation and its clandestine nature led the *Tampa Tribune* to print his version of events along with a strong denial of wrongdoing by Wenner. For Wenner's part, he admitted to the *Tribune*, that he had been giving secret testimony to the Johns Committee since the middle of April, yet denied that it was his actions that launched the investigation in the first place. Curiously, he told the *Tribune* that USF was "soft on communism," and as evidence cited the cancellation of his summer workshop on Americanism vs. Communism for public school teachers ("Politics Denied").

Wenner, however, was not the only "informant" fundamental to the FIC's case against USF, to deny his role as an instigator in the probe. Lowry, in a statement to the *Tampa Tribune* in May, 1962, disavowed any link to the investiga-

tion—one will recall that he was earlier accused by Hardeman in the U. of Tampa affair which he vehemently denied as well. Lowry claimed the following: "I had nothing to do directly or indirectly with the investigation. I know nothing whatsoever about the charges that have been brought" ("Lowry Links Foe to USF Probe; Gibbons Asks Greater Deeds," 5/23/62). He went on to charge that State Senator Samuel Gibbons had knowledge of the malicious rumor that he, Lowry, was responsible for the investigation, a rumor Lowry claims Gibbons knew was false. He cited Gibbons for failing to tell the public about his, Gibbons', own part in the spurious allegations against USF. According to Lowry, it was Gibbons who personally made an appointment with USF President John Allen for a parents' group who had collected evidence against faculty and their teachings. The paper trail—newspapers, letters, memos, and others—is not easy to follow. Accusations were made and denied. Accusers pointed fingers while defenders scurried for cover. Meantime, the press had a heyday.

Egerton proposed a scenario surrounding this web of intrigue that goes something like this: Senator Johns, since the creation of his committee in 1956 was ever diligent in searching for evidence of communism and immorality. Some might say his diligence was a sort of "job insurance," not unlike the precedent set in the 1940s by J. Edgar Hoover's hunt for Japanese and German subversives, or McCarthy's nation-wide hunt for "commies" a decade later. Hence, Johns was poised for "battle" when approached by Wenner and Wickstrom, the Zephyrhills editor, both of whom united in opposition to a proposed visiting speaker who allegedly had been labeled a subversive by the U.S. Attorney General. They were joined in their zeal by Jane Tarr Smith whose son attended USF and regularly complained about the immoral and atheistic teachings of his instructors. General Lowry, reported Egerton, encouraged Mrs. Smith to notify the Johns' committee. Meanwhile, Wenner leaked news of the investigation to the *St. Petersburg Times* in the hopes of receiving credit for exposing his university as a 'campus of evil.' So sure was he of success that he stated that he had been 'working hard every night on this,' and that he was 'committed to assist in this cleanup,' which, he added, 'will be one of the most thorough house-cleanings in American educational history.' According to Wenner, there were many on this "campus of evil" who were aware of communist leanings, but no one, until he and his compatriots became involved, had the courage to take a stand. Wenner announced that "it would all come out...when the Johns Committee began a public hearing in Tampa about ten days hence" (Egerton, 1996, 5). Whether Wenner blew the whistle to Johns committee first, or Jane Tarr Smith along with Ret. Lt General Lowry were the first to inform the committee of the evils on the campus of the University of South Florida,

accusations were hurled at several faculty members. Either way, English professor, Dr. Sheldon Grebstein, bore the brunt of the Johns committee's enthusiastic hunt.

The committee accused the 34-year-old Grebstein, a new assistant professor, of using "salacious material in his class," leading to his suspension by USF President Allen ("USF Committee to file Report," *Florida Times Union*, 11/2/62, 29). At the heart of the charges against Grebstein was his selection of an essay exposing the baseness and emptiness of "beatnik" literature. The essay in question was contained in a textbook not in use at USF, but used at more than 100 other colleges and universities, including Louisiana State, Duke, and the University of Virginia ("Shadow on the Campus," editorial, *Tampa Tribune*, 4-B). Despite the good intentions of the *Tribune's* editorial in putting the question of Grebstein's solid teaching record from the University of Kentucky before the public while positing the following thoughts: "[I]maginative teachers will depart at the first opportunity; top professors in other institutions will shun Florida as the plague; and the remaining faculty members will be so careful to toe the line of the conventional and non-controversial that freedom of inquiry will steadily shrink" (Shadow on the Campus, *Tampa Tribune*), the editor weakened his own argument by suggesting that perhaps Grebstein used poor judgement in not omitting the repugnant quotations.

The beleaguered Grebstein came to his position at the University of South Florida with enviable credentials. He received his B.A. degree from the University of Southern California where he graduated cum laude. He went on to Columbia where he took an M.A. with distinction, and graduate from Michigan State with his Ph.D. As a beginning professor, he had published seven articles, one textbook, one scholarly book, several essays, two scholarly reviews and 125 newspaper reviews. The essay he chose for his English course, which had come under heavy attack by a handful of parents, was entitled "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," by Norman Podhoretz, editor of the intellectual journal, *Commentary*. According to Grebstein, "Bohemians," struck him as one of the clearest, most vigorous, most forceful pieces of its kind. The essay begins as a book review of two of Jack Kerouac's novels, but it quickly turns into an indictment of the "Beat Generation," with its low moral tone and emphasis on sex. Grebstein wanted his students to engage with works that contained in-depth critical writing. He also took them through the rigors of writing in "normal" English, old fashioned rhetoric, and in a style that an ignorant writer would use. He said that he chose the article in question 'because it seemed to illustrate everything we were doing: It was a fine example of mixed language levels, with the author's skillful style contrasted to the poor work of those he was attacking; it was an excellent illustration of how effectively connotative language could be employed, and it was a typical review of the kind

which appears in some of the most respected magazines' ("High Cost of Snooping," *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, 12/17/62, no. 7). Grebstein was quick to point out that the article was not suitable for children, but that he did not regard university students as children or himself a teacher of children, but rather a member of an adult intellectual community.

His measured and logical explanation stands in stark contrast to the actions taken by the few complaining parents; the fired lecturer, Tom Wenner, Wickstrom, the ultra-right journalist from a hamlet on the outskirts of Tampa, and Lowry, the retired Lt. General, who, you may recall was equally accused along with Wenner of launching the investigation in the first place, actions which included clandestine meetings and informal inquiries, all of which led to unfounded accusations. In the shadow of the University's turmoil, Grebstein mused that "A state builds a beautiful institution at a cost of millions of dollars, and then sits back and permits the viciousness of some people to destroy it as surely as though they had planted bombs beside its foundations" (*Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, 12/17/62). He also held the belief that the objections to his choice of the Podhoretz article overstepped the bounds of common decency.

Grebstein was not the only faculty member at USF to come under attack. Dramatics professor John Caldwell was suspended, in part, for not reporting a homosexual advance made by an individual to a student. He subsequently produced a witness who supported his claims that he did indeed report the advance. Caldwell was reinstated by President Allen, a move which sparked a "stinging denunciation of the University's President by Charley Johns. Johns' actions prompted Caldwell to resign citing: These police state methods have made me and my colleagues almost physically ill and I can't tell you the contempt I feel as a result...I find I can't work in a system where such reckless pursuit of a teacher can take place. Since I am unwilling to suffer such vilification and slander from a source immune from prosecution, I have no choice except to resign from the field of higher education in the State of Florida" ("High Cost of Snooping," #4). He concluded his resignation by saying, 'Florida's state universities can't hope to attain greatness under the withering scrutiny of reckless investigations, for no teacher of stature will be willing to subject himself to such irresponsible attack' ("High Cost of Snooping," #4).

Teaching professors were not the only targets of the Johns Committee. Dean Russell Cooper had invited Dr. Jerome Davis, the son of a missionary in China and a former professor at the Yale Divinity School to speak to his sophomore class in "The American Idea." According to the *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, a professor (Wenner) from Zephyrhills—a small community on the outskirts of Tampa—along with an ultra-right small country newspaper

editor (Wickstrom) objected to Davis' talk on the grounds that he was allegedly a communist. Dean Cooper vigorously defended his choice of Davis by stating that the Western position had been well discussed, but that no staff member could adequately present a critical look at American institutions ("High Cost of Snooping," #5). Davis, author of the book *Capitalism and Its Culture*, already the victor of a libel suit against the *Saturday Evening Post*, possessed the depth of knowledge on the subject of communism which Cooper believed would help his students evaluate the merits and fallacies of both systems, (High Cost of Snooping, #5) an endeavor he likely believed was an aim of a university education. The attack upon Davis by Professor Wenner and Wickstrom was only one way in which these two communist hunters sought to influence matters at the University of South Florida.

In a ten-series probe into the investigations at USF by the *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, editor Mabel Chesley uncovered what can only be called "unsavory background information." It seems as though Wenner had summoned a USF female student to his home for what he called 'an evening.' Once there, she discovered other students entering and leaving a room one by one. She described her classmates as leaving the room either with shocked expressions on their faces, or some with "smug expressions." When it was her turn, she quickly discovered that she had been invited to a small inquisition in which she was to "tell tales on her professors." Inquirers posed such questions as "Did she think that any of her professor had any 'Communist ideas?' Had she ever noted anything that was 'queer' in their behavior?" And, were teaching materials chosen by any of her professors 'lewd?'" ("High Cost of Snooping," 2, article F). She left sickened. This informal inquisition was replaced a few weeks later by the formal Johns Committee investigation whose members summoned "students [who] were taken to motel rooms in Tampa and queried about their professors and their curriculum, and heavens knows what else" ("High Cost of Snooping," #9).

Further evidence of unsavory conduct by the Johns Committee was reported by the *Pittsburgh Courier* in its May 1963 issue. Newspaper writers for this paper exposed a sex entrapment scheme organized by R.J. Strickland, former Tallahassee policeman and chief investigator for Charley Johns. Strickland apparently hired a night club singer to invite an *Orlando Sentinel* reporter assigned to cover events in Tallahassee to her room. When the reporter entered the room, the singer-turned-informant, as he recalled, 'was wearing a robe open at the waist . . . I went in, and she turned out the lights.' 'I was sitting on the edge of the bed when everything happened at once.' The reporter described how the women pushed his head down at the same time a flash bulb went off followed by shouts of

"I caught you at last." According to the *Courier*, "the motel room had been reserved by Strickland, who was in on the kill also. Good ole Johns Committee, strictly on the job. No telling where Florida would be without it" ("Florida Witch-Hunters Seeking More \$\$\$," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5/4/63). The irony of the Johns Committee hunting for examples of immorality in the halls of academe cannot be missed, but where did the commission get the idea in the first place that USF was a hot-bed of immorality?

Perhaps a look at the actions of Jane Tarr Smith, mother of a USF student and early whistle blower, can shed light on this aspect of the investigation. Smith, who usually signed her letters Mrs. Stockton Smith, wrote a lengthy explanation of the whole affair. Her 30 plus page letter arrived on Egerton's desk in June 1962, shortly after news of the USF probe hit the stands, although by her own admission she had placed the letter on file with the State Investigating Committee in the latter part of April, 1962. According to the letter, her son "Skipper," an outstanding former student at Washington and Lee University, now attending the new University of South Florida in his hometown, commented to his mother that "he felt that higher education should encourage good morals, faith, and patriotism, but that everything he had studied would tend to destroy these things." Smith was quick to observe that these accusations should be taken seriously as they came from her son, who was "a well rounded student, having a background of varsity football in high school and college, [and] being voted the most popular male student in his graduating class of 500, and receiving the Danforth award for leadership, one of the two awards given in the graduating class" (Letter from Mrs. Jane Tarr Smith, Egerton Collection). She then launched into her rationale for intervening in what she believed to be a "bad situation" on the campus.

However, she failed to present a line of reasoning that one could easily follow. Her words and analogies seemed more appropriate as testimony for a revival meeting than as a serious outline of events. She claimed the following: "The student is admonished to cast aside all previous beliefs and convictions, and through required reading material, and classroom discussion, by the vile approach to sex, destruction of faith in God, and extolling of ideas that are of socialist and communist origin, he would no longer have a choice in a way of life. His indoctrination in the teachings at the university would be complete, whatever they might be" (Smith letter, 2).

Smith took her objections to Deans French and Cooper, and, three other faculty members. The mother of another student joined her in this endeavor. After the mothers presented their case regarding vulgar readings and exposure to communist ideology, the academicians accused them of witch hunting and promptly dismissed them. Smith,

however, was not finished. According to her own chronology of events which are guarded and somewhat sketchy, she continued to make contact with other parents and began to formulate a plan to bring a number of issues regarding the curriculum at USF before President Allen. Sometime in the spring of 1962, she and her husband, along with two other couples, sent letters to some 50 other couples in Tampa whom she described as "responsible citizens, interested in the affairs of our community." Smith's "Dear Friends" letter spoke of communist front activities on campus in addition to "the daily problem of extreme, liberal, atheistic teaching by those who feel they have a monopoly on the cry for 'academic freedom.'" She invited representatives from two area newspapers, but they declined her invitation. Mayor Julian Lane, however, volunteered to speak for the group. Apparently he contacted Charley Johns on their behalf, along with Harrison, Chairman of the State Board of Control. They were advised to present their evidence to Allen, but did not do so because as Smith put it, "they had already been caught up in the investigation through efforts outside their own" (Smith letter, 4). Now, Smith could cast her name in the I-am-not-responsible-for-the investigation-ring along with those of Lowry and Wenner.

Smith took particular aim at instructional strategies and curriculum choice. Accordingly, she looked over the first semester English program and noticed that the bulk of material was on evolution, which she claimed was taught more as fact than theory. While she did not mention English professor Grebstein by name, much of his work, including a book, was on the Scopes Monkey Trial, a perfect irony. In any event, Smith cast her net wide and hauled in material such as *Patterns of Culture*, prefaced by anthropologist Margaret Mead, which Smith described as a book that dealt with the sex life of African tribes. The author of *Patterns of Culture*, according to Smith, claimed that "there is no right or wrong behavior that it is whatever the culture or civilization determines it to be at the time—that homosexuality is determined right or wrong in the same manner; that, in some cases it is a sign of greatness or special talent." As for Mead, Smith interpreted the message in her book, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935), a required text in USF's Human Behavior course, as simply a matter of making a behavior legal in order to make it OK, such as murder (See Jane Smith letter in Egerton collection, 13). She went on to describe Aldous Huxley's, *Brave New World*, as "a waste of time," saying that it was "stupid and boring as well as immoral, but still required" (Smith letter, 7).

Perhaps most frightening of all Smith's remarks was her own admission that "What little I know about Communism, I have learned just recently." Yet, Smith clearly viewed herself as an authority on what should be considered good and proper for all, including views on communism. She said

about her role in bringing the issues of communism, immorality, and atheism forward that:

[her] interest in all this is motivated by a desire to preserve that which I have found good, so that others may have a choice of belief and way of life. If they do not so choose [to follow her lead], that is their concern. They will have had an opportunity. I am interested in preserving Christianity, and in so doing preserve democracy, for Christianity is the author of individual rights, as God is the Father of liberty. (Smith letter, 14)

Throughout Smith's often rambling letter, she offered quotes from speeches or writings made by J. Edgar Hoover in support of her ideas and actions. For example, in support of her criticism of academic freedom, she quoted Hoover in the following clause as saying: "I do fear so long as school boards and parents tolerate conditions whereby Communists and fellow-travelers under the guise of academic freedom can teach our youth a way of life that eventually will destroy the sanctity of the home, that undermines faith in God, that causes them to scorn respect for constituted authority, and sabotage our revered Constitution" (Smith letter).

The tragedy of this soap-opera event is that it was real. Tom Wenner really did turn on his university and colleagues based on perceptions that USF was a hot-bed of communism; Lt. Gen. (RET) Lowry really did participate in both the University of Tampa debacle and the probe at the University of South Florida; Jane Tarr Smith really did "put her oar in the water" based on suppositions from her son Skipper who "chose" to come home to Tampa and attend the new university rather than remain at Washington and Lee; and, Senator Charley Johns really was the head of the Florida Investigative Committee which "terrorized" university campuses throughout the state of Florida for a decade.

Conclusion

The principle of academic freedom in the 20th century on university campuses in the United States has enjoyed an uneven track record. While some university leaders promoted the idea that the university is a special place where ideas are open to public debate, others such as the President at Columbia University during and directly following World War I, took a more "politically correct" position and viewed ideas contrary to mainstream patriotic thinking as anti-American, and therefore, subversive and suspect. Certainly, a solid number of ideas contrary to mainstream political thinking were anti-American in substance. After all, numerous individuals were vocal in proclaiming their admiration of socialism, while others eagerly joined communist organizations. In opposition, the outcry from patriotic organizations was loud. Their cries fell on receptive ears, particularly those of politicians. In their zeal to "clean up" America,

politicians naturally looked at educational institutions as breeding grounds for subversive thinking. Not wanting to be included in the anti-American "pot," a number of university presidents caved in and actually joined forces with the patriot-minded who looked over faculty syllabi in hopes of finding a communist infiltrator or an individual whose immoral thinking was apparent as judged by his or her course reading material. Others, such as John Allen at the University of South Florida, stood behind faculty, as when he attempted to rid his campus of the onerous Johns Committee.

For Allen and others like him, they seemed to understand that professors who openly encouraged students to debate, question, and inform themselves, did not necessarily constitute a fifth column. But the question remains, under what conditions should academic freedom on the university campus as a guiding principle be upheld? For some, academic freedom should be suspended at the first sign of any anti-American sentiment. For others, freedom of thought on the university campus is a sacred right. Few take a neutral position on the topic. Although outside of the scope of this paper, one cannot help but to ponder over the trials and tribulations faced on college and university campuses in the late 1960s and 1970s as students not only protested, but also waged ideological warfare regarding freedom of speech and freedom of thought. Perhaps they sought to cast off the oppressive decades of their parents which on the surface appeared as snippets of *Leave it to Beaver* or *Happy Days*, but which in reality were dominated by dark thoughts of foreign infiltrators poised to bring down one of the strongest nations in the western world. In any event, these young protesters turned the university campus and freedom of thought, at least for some ten years, on its head.

Despite the dark days of Florida's witch hunts, a few actors on the historical stage emerged with integrity somewhat intact. Certainly, press organs of the 1960s that carried stories to inform the public about the travails on Florida campuses, and support the idea of academic freedom, did so despite the then prevailing ultra-conservative climate. Professors whose curriculum and teaching methods came under attack, such as Sheldon Grebstein's, who later assumed the Presidency of New York State at Purchase, went on to distinguish themselves at other institutions. And John Egerton, who helped create our "looking glass," is recognized today as one of the leading writers on the South. Yet, the purpose of this paper is not to show that "every cloud has a silver lining," but rather to examine the historical stage and its actors regarding Florida's "porkchop" politics, conservative public, and the struggle of one university to not only survive but also to support and to encourage its faculty and students in the pursuit of investigation, and freedom of thought in a South that Will Rogers once described as "staggering to the polls to vote for Prohibition."

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Note: This study was supported in part, by a grant-in-aid from Auburn University at Montgomery.