

Note from Robert Rodvik:

Long before the proto-Nazi Jesse Helms took over Foreign Relations there was a principled man in charge of US Policy. His name was J. William Fulbright, Chairman Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and as to dissent he had this to say: "To criticize one's country is to do it a service and pay it a compliment . . . it is a compliment because it evidences a belief that the country can do better than it is doing."

--J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power*, Vintage Books; New York, 1966, p.25

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## **The New McCarthyism**

by Matthew Rothschild

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Donna Huanca works as a docent at the Art Car Museum, an avant-garde gallery in Houston. Around 10:30 on the morning of November 7, before she opened the museum, two men wearing suits and carrying leather portfolios came to her door.

"I told them to wait until we opened at 11:00," she recalls. "Then they pulled their badges out." The two men were Terrence Donahue of the FBI and Steven Smith of the Secret Service. "They said they had several reports of anti-American activity going on here and wanted to see the exhibit," she says. The museum was running a show called "Secret Wars," which contains many anti-war statements that were commissioned before September 11.

"They just walked in, so I went through with them and gave them a very detailed tour. I asked them if they were familiar with the artists and what the role of art was at a critical time like this," she says. "They were more interested in where the artists were from. They were taking some notes. They were pointing out things that they thought were negative, like a recent painting by Lynn Randolph of the Houston skyline burning, and a devil dancing around, and with George Bush Sr. in the belly of the devil."

There was a surreal moment when they inspected another element of the exhibit. "We had a piece in the middle of the room, a mock surveillance camera pointed to the door of the museum, and they wondered whether they were being recorded," she says.

All in all, they were there for about an hour. "As they were leaving, they asked me where I went to school, and if my parents knew if I worked at a place like this, and who funded us, and how many people came in to see the exhibit," she says. "I was definitely pale. It was scary because I was alone, and they were really big guys."

Before the agents left the museum, Huanca called Tex Kerschen, the curator of the exhibit. "I had just put down a book on COINTELPRO," he says, referring to the FBI's program of infiltrating leftwing groups in the 1960s. "Donna's call confirmed some of my worst suspicions. Donna was frightened, and we're all a little bit shocked that they were going to

act against a small art space, to bring to bear that kind of menace, an atmosphere of dread. These old mouldy charges of 'anti-American,' 'un-American'--they seem laughable at first, like we can't be accused of anything that silly. But they've started coming down with this."

The director of the Art Car Museum is James Harithas, who served as the director of the Corcoran Art Museum in Washington, D.C., in the late 1960s. "It's unbelievable," he says of the visit from the G-men. "People should be worried that their freedoms are being taken away right and left."

Robert Dogium, a spokesman for the FBI in Houston, says the visit was a routine follow-up on a call "from someone who said there was some material or artwork that was of a threatening nature to the President." He says it was no big thing. "While the work there was not their cup of tea, it was not considered of a threatening nature to anybody or terrorism or anything."

She is a freshman at Durham Tech in North Carolina. Her name is A.J. Brown. She's gotten a scholarship from the ACLU to help her attend college. But that didn't prepare her for the knock on the door that came on October 26. "It was 5:00 on Friday, and I was getting ready for a date," she says. When she heard the knock, she opened the door. Here's her account.

"Hi, we're from the Raleigh branch of the Secret Service," two agents said. "And they flip out their little ID cards, and I was like, 'What?' "And they say, 'We're here because we have a report that you have un-American material in your apartment.' And I was like, 'What? No, I don't have anything like that.' " 'Are you sure? Because we got a report that you've got a poster that's anti-American.' "And I said no."

They asked if they could come into the apartment. "Do you have a warrant?" Brown asked. "And they said no, they didn't have a warrant, but they wanted to just come in and look around. And I said, 'Sorry, you're not coming in.'"

One of the agents told Brown, "We already know what it is. It's a poster of Bush hanging himself," she recalls. "And I said no, and she was like, 'Well, then, it's a poster with a target on Bush's head,' and I was like, nope."

The poster they seemed interested in was one that depicted Bush holding a rope, with the words: "We Hang on Your Every Word. George Bush, Wanted: 152 Dead." The poster has sketches of people being hanged, and it refers to the number who were put to death in Texas while Bush was governor, she explains.

Ultimately, Brown agreed to open her door so that the agents could see the poster on the wall of her apartment, though she did not let them enter. "They just kept looking at the wall," which contained political posters from the Bush counter-inaugural, a "Free Mumia" poster, a picture of Jesse Jackson, and a Pink Floyd poster with the quotation: "Mother, should I trust the government?"

At one point in the conversation, one of the agents mentioned Brown's mother, saying, "She's in the armed forces, isn't she?" (Her mother, in fact, is in the Army Reserve.)

After they were done inspecting the wall, one of the agents "pulled out his little slip of paper, and he asked me some really stupid questions, like, my name, my Social Security number, my phone number," she says. "Then they asked, 'Do you have any pro-Taliban stuff in your apartment, any posters, any maps?'"

"I was like, 'No, I don't, and personally, I think the Taliban is just a bunch of assholes.'" "

With that, they left. They had been at her apartment for forty minutes. "They called me two days later to make sure my information was correct: where I lived, my phone number (hello!), and my nicknames," she says.

Brown says she's "really annoyed" about the Secret Service visit. "Obviously, I'm on some list somewhere."

Welcome to the New McCarthyism. A chill is descending across the country and it's frostbiting immigrants, students, journalists, academics and booksellers.

"I'm terrified," says Ellen Schrecker, author of *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton University, 1999). "What concerns me is we're not seeing an enormous outcry against this whole structure of repression that's being rushed into place by the Bush Administration."

"I've been talking a lot about the parallels between what we're going through now and McCarthyism," says Nadine Strossen, president of the ACLU. "The term 'terrorism' is taking on the same kind of characteristics as the term 'communism' did in the 1950s. It stops people in their tracks, and they're willing to give up their freedoms. People are too quickly panicked. They are too willing to give up their rights and to scapegoat people, especially immigrants and people who criticize the war."

Attorney General John Ashcroft is rounding up or interrogating thousands of immigrants in what will go down in history as the Ashcroft Raids. The FBI and Secret Service are harassing artists and activists. Publishers are firing anti-war columnists and cartoonists. University presidents are scolding dissident faculty members. And rightwing citizen's groups are demanding conformity.

In this article, I focus on the threats to free speech, which go well beyond the much-publicized attack on Bill Maher of *Politically Incorrect*. These threats are real. They are frightening people. They are ruining some livelihoods. And they may be just a taste of sour things to come.

Barbara Wien worked as a program officer and a conflict resolution trainer at the United States Institute of Peace for five years. She doesn't work there anymore.

On September 11, while at an official function of the Institute, Wien spoke out. "I said that I would hope that the United States would not resort to military retaliation and that we need to do a great deal of soul-searching in this country about how U.S. policies might have contributed to the emergence of terrorist policies," she recalls. Her comments were not well received. "My conservative colleagues became outraged and said, 'You're the most leftwing

person we've ever met, and you should not be leading any trainings here. While the buildings are still smouldering, you're blaming the U.S.'"

This wasn't the first time Wien had raised hackles inside the Institute, which is, according to its web site, "an independent, non-partisan federal institution created and funded by Congress to strengthen the nation's capacity to promote the peaceful resolution of international conflict." She had clashed with her colleagues before over U.S. policy regarding sanctions on Iraq, Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the Sudan, and the bombing of Belgrade, she says.

"There was generally a hostile work environment for my peaceful activism at the Institute," she says. After her colleagues jumped all over her on September 11, Wien objected. "I went to the management and said a pacifist position here is being punished, and they said, 'It's time for you to go, Barbara. You don't fit into the culture,' " she recalls. "Then they basically hounded me for about two weeks for my letter of resignation, so I finally caved under duress."

Harriet Hentges is the executive vice president of the United States Institute of Peace. "She submitted a letter of resignation to me October 17, and beyond that I don't have a comment," says Hentges. "But we would never make an individual staff member's personal views a litmus test for employment."

You are no longer free to patronise a bookstore without fear of government scrutiny. On November 1, the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression (ABFFE) sent a disturbing letter to its members.

"Dear Bookseller," it begins. "Last week, President Bush signed into law an antiterrorism bill that gives the federal government expanded authority to search your business records, including the titles of the books purchased by your customers. ... There is no opportunity for you or your lawyer to object in court. You cannot object publicly, either. The new law includes a gag order that prevents you from disclosing 'to any person' the fact that you have received an order to produce documents."

The letter recommends that booksellers who get hit with such an order should call their attorney or the foundation, but "because of the gag order ... you should not tell ABFFE that you have received a court order. ... You can simply tell us that you need to contact ABFFE's legal counsel."

Marsha Rummel of Rainbow Bookstore Co-operative in Madison, Wisconsin, denounces this new government policy as a "terrifying encroachment on the privacy rights of citizens." Noting that "the danger to booksellers is just one small part of this new landscape," she says, "We must collectively take a stand to defend our democratic rights, including the right to protest our government and oppose the war, and the right to read whatever we like."

Katie Sierra is a fifteen-year-old sophomore at Sissonville High School in West Virginia. On October 22, she notified her principal, Forrest Mann, that she wanted to form an anarchist club. He denied her request. It was the only club he has ever disallowed, according to the lawsuit Sierra and her mother filed against the school.

Sierra had already made up fliers for the club, which she wasn't able to distribute. The fliers said: "Anarchist club. Anarchism preaches to love all humans, not just of one country. Start a newspaper, a food-not-bombs group, a book discussion group. Speak your point of view, and hear others. Please join." The next day, Sierra came to school with a T-shirt on that said, "Racism, Sexism, Homophobia, I'm So Proud of People in the Land of the So-Called Free." The principal suspended her for three days.

"I've never been in trouble before," Sierra says. "I was kind of upset at first: How could he? Then I was crying. How could he suspend me for something so ridiculous as that?"

On October 29, she was told that before she could come back to school, she would have to provide the principal with authorisation to obtain her medical records, she would have to meet with a school psychologist, and she couldn't wear T-shirts like the one she wore or organise her anarchist club.

At a school board meeting on October 29, the school board president, Bill Raglin, said, "What in the hell is wrong with a kid like that?" Another school board member, John Luoni, accused her of treason, according to her court papers.

To make matters worse, says Sierra, Principal Mann mischaracterised her T-shirt in the *Charleston Gazette*, falsely stating it included statements such as "I hope Afghanistan wins" and "America should burn."

As a result, students at school ganged up on her. "I got shoved against lockers," she says. "People made pictures of me with bullet holes through my head and posted them on, like, the doors in the school. They said some really harsh things. It was scary."

Sierra and her mother sued the school district but lost in the lower courts and in the state supreme court by a 3-to-2 vote. "We sought an injunction to force the principal to allow her to form the anarchy club and wear her peace T-shirts and void her suspension," her attorney, Roger Forman, says. Forman, a former president of the West Virginia ACLU, says her free speech rights have been violated.

Sierra plans to appeal. "I'm really disgusted with the courts right now, and with the school," she says. "I'm being punished for being myself." Because she felt unsafe at Sissonville High, Sierra is now being home-schooled.

Until recently, Jackie Anderson was a staff reporter for the *Sun Advocate* in Price, Utah. She had worked there for three years, and she was encouraged to write editorial columns as part of her job. So, on September 18, she wrote a column that said, "War is not the only action available to us. Seeking justice is action. Making peace is action."

The column never ran, though several pro-war columns did. Six days after filing her column, Anderson says she asked her editor, Lynnda Johnson, whom she considered a good friend, why it wasn't running, and Johnson told her to talk to the publisher, Kevin Ashby. "This is not the direction I want my newspaper to go in," he told her, as Anderson recalls it.

"Well, I don't know if I can continue to work here, and I certainly can't continue this

afternoon," she says she told him, adding that she got permission from her editor to take a personal day.

The next day I went in to work, I was called into the publisher's office, and he asked me to clear my desk," she recalls. "I asked him if I was being fired, and he said, 'No, you quit. I'm accepting your resignation.' And I said, 'I didn't quit.' "

Johnson explains the paper's side. "Look, this is a personnel issue," she says. "The bottom line is Jackie Anderson walked out on a production day and said she couldn't work here anymore. Period. She quit." As to not running the column, Johnson says, "She was not told it wouldn't run. She was told there were problems with it. I'm not going to discuss this. This was a personnel issue. She said she quit her job and then decided she could unquit at her convenience."

Anderson is now collecting unemployment. "My options are very, very limited," she says. "This is a depressed economy. There aren't many other jobs in journalism. And it's put stress on my husband, who is a coal miner, which is why we are very limited as to where we can go."

"This was a job that I loved and believed in. I thought journalists were warriors for freedom in at least as significant a way, if not a greater way, than a soldier in the military. If people can lose their jobs for their opinions this early on, then it does not bode well."

At least two other journalists have been fired for their columns. Both received some attention in the media. Dan Guthrie worked at the Grants Pass *Daily Courier* in Oregon for ten years and was a columnist, on and off, for seven of them. "During that time, I'd won quite a few awards, including best columnist in Oregon," he says. But one recent column cost him his job. It was called, "When the Going Gets Tough, the Tender Turn Tail," and it ran September 15.

Guthrie was the columnist who said Bush "skedaddled" on September 11. "The picture of Bush hiding in a Nebraska hole" was "an embarrassment," he wrote. "The President's men are frantically glossing over his cowardice."

A week later, the publisher fired him, even though the city editor and the editor had signed off on the piece, Guthrie says. "I told them this was going to be hot, and they approved it as it stood." A few days later, the editor, Dennis Roler, issued a front-page apology, entitled, "This Is No Time to Criticise the Nation's Leader: Apology for Printing Column." The final paragraph reads: "In this critical time, the nation needs to come together behind the President. Politics and destructive criticism need to be put aside for the country's good. Unfortunately, my lapse in judgement hurt that positive effort, and I apologise."

Today, Guthrie is picking up unemployment, and he's almost philosophical about journalism: "You wish newspapers would be better than they are. You think they have this covenant with the First Amendment. But they don't, especially in times of crisis."

Tom Gutting worked for the *Texas City Sun*, and on September 22, he, like Guthrie, criticized Bush for not returning to Washington on September 11. "There was W. flying

around the country like a scared child seeking refuge in his mother's bed after having a nightmare," he wrote, adding: "What we are stuck with is a crippled President who continues to be controlled by his advisers. He's not a leader. He's a puppet."

The day the piece ran, says Gutting, "the publisher assured me straight away that he wouldn't fire me." But a few days later, the publisher, Les Daughtry Jr., changed his mind. Daughtry, too, issued a front-page apology, saying Gutting's column was "not appropriate to publish during this time."

Gutting is unemployed. "I'm still looking for a job," he says. "I'm hoping it will end soon. I think I've been pretty much blacklisted from the small papers the company owns."

The St. George, Utah, newspaper, *The Spectrum*, apologised on November 13 for a cartoon it ran the previous day from Pulitzer prize-winner Steve Benson. The cartoon depicted President Bush dropping bombs that carried scrawled messages, such as "starving millions of Afghans" and "killing innocent civilians." Many local veterans descended on the paper, threatening to cancel their subscriptions if it didn't issue an apology, according to *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

Aaron McGruder, who draws *The Boondocks*, has seen his strip taken out of many papers after September 11 for its anti-war content. And lesser known cartoonists may be especially vulnerable.

Todd Persche drew a cartoon for the *Baraboo News Republic* in Wisconsin once a week for the last three years. Not anymore. After September 11, he drew a couple of cartoons that got him canned. One said, "When the media keeps pounding on the war drum ... it's hard to hear other points of view." Another was about Big Brother "turning our civil rights upside down." Persche says, "In these times, they make you feel like you're not a patriot just because you're dissenting."

At the moment, professors who criticise the U.S. government aren't being fired as they were during the McCarthy days. But some are being taken to the woodshed.

At the University of New Mexico, history professor Richard Berthold made a comment to his class that he now regrets: "Anyone who can blow up the Pentagon gets my vote," he said. The university president has said "he will 'vigorously pursue' disciplinary action" against Berthold, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported.

Robert Jensen, associate professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, wrote a column for the *Houston Chronicle* on September 14 entitled "U.S. just as guilty of committing own violent acts." In it, he said that the terrorist attacks of September 11 "were reprehensible and indefensible ... but this act was no more despicable [than] the massive acts of terrorism -- the deliberate killing of civilians for political purposes -- that the U.S. government has committed during my lifetime."

For this, Jensen was publicly ridiculed by the school president, Larry R. Faulkner, who wrote a letter to the *Houston Chronicle*, which was published on September 19. "Jensen is not only misguided, but has become a fountain of undiluted foolishness on issues of public policy,"

he said. "I've been marginalised on this campus," Jensen says. But he takes pains not to exaggerate the threat against him. "I'm a tenured white male professor at a major university. I'm so protected I have no fears. But an untenured brown professor is not so protected."

Jensen worries that untenured faculty may censor themselves, and he and many others are concerned about Lynne Cheney's group, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, which she co-founded in 1995 with Senator Joseph Lieberman, Democrat of Connecticut.

That group issued a report after September 11 called "Defending Civilisation: How Our Universities Are Failing America, and What Can Be Done About It." It said, "When a nation's intellectuals are unwilling to defend its civilisation, they give comfort to its adversaries." And it cited more than 100 examples of what it considers unpatriotic acts by specific academics.

"What's analogous to McCarthyism is the self-appointed guardians who are engaging in private blacklisting," says Eric Foner, professor of history at Columbia University. "That's why the Lynne Cheney thing is so disturbing: Her group is trying to intimidate individuals who hold different points of view. There aren't loyalty oaths being demanded of teachers yet, but we seem to be at the beginning of a process that could get a lot worse and is already cause for considerable alarm."

We've been here before. From the Alien and Sedition Acts to Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus and his imprisonment of anti-war editors, from the suppression of speech during World War I and the Palmer Raids to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the repression of the McCarthy days, the government has seized upon times of peril to scapegoat immigrants and to suppress liberties. "We're talking about exactly the same phenomenon," says the ACLU's Strossen.

"No analogy is ever perfect, and history doesn't repeat itself exactly, but there's a pattern of the government restricting freedom of expression and running roughshod over traditional protections for the accused," Foner says. "Anybody concerned with freedom of expression and civil liberties should be very, very concerned."

Matthew Rothschild is Editor of *The Progressive*.

See *The Progressive*'s McCarthyism Watch section containing examples of the New McCarthyism that is sweeping the country.

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