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**Review of *Academic Repression: Reflections from the Academic-Industrial Complex* edited by Anthony J. Nocella II, Steven Best, and Peter McLaren (AK Press, 2010)**

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*Academic Repression* begins with an almost ninety-page introduction that serves as a comprehensive preview to the book's essays. The introduction covers much of what the essays will then delve into detail about, but the focus of the entire book is quite neatly summed up on the second page of that introduction. Writing about the problems this country has faced since its conception in 1776, the editors state:

Notions such as "freedom" and "equality" hid the fact that the inherently hierarchical and exploitative corporate-state complex of capitalism was a system run by and for capitalists, corporations, and wealthy property owners. Big business and monopoly corporations commandeered the state—the oxymoronic institution of "representative democracy"—to advance and protect their own minority interests, to suppress majority opposition, and to quell dissent by any means necessary. (14)

The book's essays catalog how freedom and democracy, as much as they ever existed, have been systematically squashed from a university system preyed on by the media and big government and left unprotected by administrators with ties to or fear of corporate and/or political bigwigs.

The central argument of this forthcoming collection is that freedom and democracy have never existed in their ideal form and, while not completely eroded, are at even more risk today than ever, threatened by the corporate, military, and industrial complexes and jeopardized by government laws and regulations which make it all-to-easy to stifle any voice of dissent under the guise of national security or moral superiority. The risks to and violations of personal and academic freedom are at the heart of every essay this book includes.

From the introduction of this collection, the slant is evident: there are countless attacks on the Republican right, especially the former members of the Bush administration and conservative representatives heavily featured in the media, such as Ann Coulter, Bill

O'Reilly and Sean Hannity. The Republican talking heads are often belittled for their over-generalized and badly defended assertions about the damage that academic liberals are doing to this country via the college classroom. Even worse than the Fox News talking heads, who promote the squashing of freedom of speech under the guise of political commentary, is the Bush administration, whose post-9/11 policies are often cited as the heart of what is wrong. And, said policies are not, as hoped, being overturned by the current administration. The Obama administration is under fire in this collection as well. The policies created during the Bush/Cheney/Rumsfeld years and continued under the Obama administration, as the essays bear out, allow corporate America to hold large sway in the academy, provide countless means of silencing those with dissenting opinions, and permit academicians to be targeted as much for their actions in their private lives as their professional ones. This book is the evidence of the collective collateral expressed through the individual experience.

The book is divided into six sections which loosely, and with much overlap, divide repressive forces into categories. Section I contains essays which focus on the history of political, military, and legal policies which have allowed academic repression to run rampant and shows how those policies have continued today, focusing especially on how 9/11 allowed the Bush administration to create catch-all laws and regulations under which just about any act can be considered one against the state. The essays sketch the history of repression from early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the McCarthy era, positing in essays like Takis Fotopolous's, that the New World Order (defined as an intersection of economic, political, and military powers with post 9/11 ideology) has exceeded the violations of the McCarthy era because they are coming from so many different directions.

Today, every single individual freedom, including of course academic freedom, has been effectively undermined, both on account of the systemic limitations imposed by the form of the system of market economy developed in neoliberal globalisation, and on account of the corresponding limitations imposed by the semi-totalitarian transformation of representative "democracy" in the aftermath of the 9/11 events. (143)

In Section II, the contributors focus on repressive actions taken by universities against individuals such as Ward Churchill and Norman Finkelstein. This section in particular focuses the reader in on the threats to academic freedom and free speech, often demonstrating how administrations turn their back on those outspoken or controversial professors who make waves in the community, sacrificing the individual for the sake of corporate or political support and at the expense of basic civil rights. Section III also focuses on cases of individual violations, though in these cases it's not those oppressed by the university system but those caught up in the web created by "national security." Largely, the scholarly focus of those written about in this section is Middle Eastern or African studies, creating a case that those who critique United States foreign policy, especially as it relates to Israel, are particularly at risk. Also at risk are those of clear Middle Eastern descent; profiled at airports and placed on national watch lists, many of these prominent scholars have had their visas revoked or have been stopped from

entering the country, turned back despite having positions at universities or invitations to appear as guest lectures. The contributors to section IV focus on gender, race, sex, and abilities, arguing as a whole that the academy tends to hide difference and privilege norms and demonstrating that minorities, including women as Dana Cloud's essay shows, are often subject to critiques and attacks on their (perceived) identity more than on their ideas. Section V takes on the corporatization of the university, containing essays about ways in which entities outside the university, such as big business and prisons, are influencing what we teach and how we teach it. The sum effect of these five sections is to show that academic repression is multi-pronged, a bigger beast to fight than in the McCarthy era when at least the forces of repression seemed to come from one direction.

Finally, Section VI does look at possible means of resistance, though not without the caveat that it's a hard road. Bill Ayers, in his essay, poses the critical questions the book wants the reader to answer with a resounding no:

Is a public university the personal fiefdom or the political clubhouse of the governor? Are there things we dare not name if they happen to offend a donor? Do we institute a political litmus test or a background check on every guest lecturer? Do we collapse in fear if a mob gathers with torches at the gates? (492)

But, as the book points out, shouting, or even saying, "no" can have serious consequences. In many instances, the book's contributors blame administrations for giving into powerful boards with influential members sitting on them, sacrificing faculty members, curricula, or students' rights or for ignoring the government's blatant disregard for constitutional rights creating a powerful argument that the university system is willing to sacrifice those who make waves at the expense of integrity and freedom of speech. Ayers distills the conflicts written about in the book to their essential ramification:

[T]his is surely what all the nonsense of demonizing dissident or challenging figures and excluding alternative points of view finally came down to: the right to a mind of one's own, the right to pursue an argument into uncharted spaces, the right to challenge the state or the church and its orthodoxy in the public square. The right to think at all, which is surely in dispute. (496)

While I want to be sympathetic to the cause of this book—in fact, my own leanings make me inclined to want to protest the injustices experienced by many of the contributors and rail against the politicians and talking heads along with them—often, the editors and contributors are guilty of the kind of sweeping generalizations of which they accuse the media and government. It's easy to want to go along with those sweeping generalizations, especially since they often end in an opinion with which I agree. But, there are places where the authors and editors allow the voices of Ann Coulter and Bill O'Reilly to stand in for the entire Republican Party, suggesting that the inflated opinions of media-hyped personalities represent the views of everyone in the Party, or that all

conservatives are complicit in, if not responsible for, encouraging the stifling of academic freedom.

Conservatives encourage students to complain about “being forced” to read leftist literature in class, as if positions opposed to their own are automatically and in all senses invalid, as if students should not encounter as many perspectives as possible [...]. Thus conservatives actually undercut the role of higher education, and the reality behind the appearance of paternal concern for students is that conservative demagogues cynically exploit them as means to their own political ends. (50)

It is these overgeneralizations and conflations which cast doubts about the book’s overall argument because in places the contributors and editors are guilty of the same kind of faulty labeling and exaggeration of which they accuse others. While the authors want to dispel myths such as that there is single, representative “academic left” as a whole (48), many of the essays in the collection, including the introduction, lump together a conservative right as though everyone with that political leaning can be said to think and behave in the same way.

The book calls attention to the threats to academic and personal freedom and is certainly a persuasive argument for becoming watchdogs for and voices against the pitfalls and abuses that corporate, government, and military can bring to bear. But can a series of essays based largely on individual experience and case studies serve as an argument about the general state of affairs in the United States and the world of academia, or are they the anomalies, the extreme cases? Taken en masse, they are disheartening because they suggest a fate for academia, academic freedom, and personal freedom even bleaker than Orwell posed in *1984*. As Marc Bousquet states in the afterward, “the vulnerability of some produces a climate of fear for all” (511). What these authors write about are often individual violations and personal accounts, but they do serve as cautionary tales. The anger and disappointment these scholars feel is openly on the page and it’s impossible to read this book without getting carried away on that emotional rollercoaster. In the end, this collection of essays is a strong cautionary tale, warning us to be vigilant about protecting the academic freedom the ideal academy promises while making the reader all too aware that the ideal, even more threatened now, has never existed.