

The Dangerous Study of Peace and the Risk to Academic Freedom

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In the past few years, university programs that focus on the study of peace and conflict have come under attack by certain people who seem to think that peace itself is a bad word. Their efforts pose a threat to academic freedom, to the ability of teachers and scholars to do work that is important for promoting an informed citizenry and providing information and analysis essential for the conduct of a sensible foreign policy in a dangerous world. That is my basic argument, which I hope to substantiate by drawing on some personal examples related to my position as director of the interdisciplinary Peace Studies Program at Cornell University.

The Peace Studies directorship is a rotating position (I am serving my second and last 3-year term) involving mainly administration and fund-raising. In compensation, I have received from Cornell a small reduction in my teaching load and from David Horowitz a place on his list of “dangerous” professors. I assume it was this part-time job that made me fit Horowitz’s selection criteria, because his list includes several other directors of peace-studies programs and his website has posted articles with titles such as “Peace Studies’ War against America” that seem to signal a general campaign. Most of my remarks, then, will be focused on the relationship of academic freedom to the study of war and peace. I should acknowledge, however, that in addition to directing a peace-studies program, I also fit the category of what *Publishers’ Weekly*, in a review of Horowitz’s book, called “professors who disagree with his personal political opinions,” presumably on matters also unrelated to peace studies. Unlike some of Horowitz’s targets, I do not have a high profile as a “public intellectual.” But the few public criticisms I have made of recent U.S. foreign policy are available to anyone with a good internet search engine and a few minutes of spare time—and that seems to sum up the research methods of the people who work for Horowitz.

Most of what I say or write is not particularly controversial and these remarks should not be an exception. My overall theme is the importance of academic freedom: on the research side, for creating independent, nongovernmental analyses of foreign and security policy, and, on the teaching side, for fostering critical thinking among our students. By critical thinking, I don’t mean “ability to criticize,” as in “I criticize my government because my taxes are too high.” Anyone can do that, with or without a college education. I mean, among other things, the ability to assess evidence, to relate evidence to arguments, to consider alternative perspectives. A college degree is not a prerequisite to honing that ability either, but most of us think critical thinking should be one of the main goals and results of a liberal education. This is not a controversial position, nor are the related arguments, such as: a free press is necessary for the healthy functioning of a democracy. Yet these days the editors of the *New York Times* and other newspapers have found themselves obliged to publish open letters to their

readers and their critics on the importance of freedom of the press, even when it means divulging “secrets” about potential war crimes or government violations of the Constitution. Defending basic freedoms in a time of war seems to require explaining and justifying many things that we take for granted in normal times.

Let me start by offering some evidence for my opening claim that peace has become a bad word in certain circles. This first example also relates to my general theme of the need for independent analysis. In December 2002 I participated in a meeting in Washington, DC, organized by a major U.S. foundation interested in providing scientific and technological expertise from university-based specialists to U.S. policymakers, particularly in the legislative branch. Congress used to have a nonpartisan analytical agency, known as the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), mandated to provide such expertise, but legislators voted to eliminate its funding and shut it down in September 1995. The foundation, working with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), put forward what it called the International Peace and Security Initiative, essentially to have university researchers provide for free the analysis that the federal budget used to fund. This type of volunteerism, substituting for a crucial government service, emerged already with the demise of the OTA. If you want access to any of the reports produced during the OTA’s 23 years of service you can find them on a website maintained by Princeton University, established through the donation of the university’s computer equipment and expertise.

The foundation and the AAAS invited, among others, congressional staffers from both main parties to discuss their initiative and there was general agreement on its merits. The basic argument should not be controversial: well-informed public policy is better than ill-informed public policy. (The question of whether the government should fund such analysis, as it did with the OTA, is another matter.) The only dissonant note came from a young Republican staffer who suggested that the word “peace” in the International Peace and Security Initiative might pose problems for members of her party, given the current climate. It might be best, she suggested, if the name of the proposed center could avoid that word.

I provide that anecdote by way of background for my discussion of academic freedom in a time of war. The invasion of Iraq, launched by the United States in March 2003, was so controversial, and George W. Bush has staked so much on his reputation as a “war president,” that debates on issues of war and peace are understandably highly charged. Partisans of President Bush are particularly sensitive to criticism, given how unsubstantiated the reasons for going to war turned out to be. Some of the administration’s defenders have tended to focus their criticism on the community of academic analysts whose professional responsibilities include the study and teaching of foreign and security policy. And because the word peace itself raises a red flag for certain people, programs in peace and conflict studies have become a particular target of criticism.

Among my colleagues, I was probably a little late in recognizing that we were under attack. Perhaps an occupational hazard of directing a peace-studies program is that one becomes insufficiently vigilant in recognizing genuine threats. In September 2003, half a year into the Iraq War, and several months after the presidential announcement of victory, a local Ithaca resident sent us an editorial from a newspaper in Jacksonville, Florida, criticizing Cornell’s Peace Studies Program (“Potential Wasted” 2003). The editors began by suggesting that “there is a great deal of potential in the ‘peace studies’ programs offered at about 250 colleges and universities.” But they quickly concluded that “unfortunately, however, many seem to see anti-American indoctrination as their mission.” What was their evidence? The titles of a few of our weekly seminar talks, including one that Robert Jervis gave called “An Empire If You Can Keep It”—a

play on Benjamin Franklin's remarks on leaving the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Another specialist on international security policy, Harvard's Stephen Rosen, also chose that title for an article he wrote in *The National Interest*, and a third used it for the title of his textbook on U.S. foreign policy (Rosen 2003; Magstad 2004). My point is a simple one. The title does not provide any evidence about the content of the seminar or the political views of the speaker any more than it does about the article or the book or the political views of their authors. Yet an editorial writer in Florida decided to criticize our program for engaging in anti-American indoctrination on evidence that flimsy. I would be reaching beyond my own evidence if I claimed that the Florida editorialist was connected in any way with David Horowitz's campaign against peace-studies programs. So far I only note a similarity in their research skills—ability to find the website with our list of seminar titles—and their use of innuendo.

Some critics of peace-studies programs appear to object to the idea of orienting programs towards the understanding and prevention of conflict and war—or even to deny that that is their purpose. An article on Horowitz's website, for example, singles out the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Columbia University's Teachers College, founded in 1986, for particular criticism. The website devotes hundreds of words to describing its Mission, its Objectives, its History, and its General Approach, but the author selects six of them—"destructive conflict gives rise to injustice"—for particular scorn. It is "a completely counter-historical assertion," he insists. "'Destructive conflict' can often give rise to justice. Look at the Second World War, which successfully crushed German fascism and halted their [*sic*] ongoing genocide. Look at the recent conflict in Iraq, which freed the political prisoners and closed the torture chambers" (Yardley 2003).

If the author had done only a slightly more extensive web search, he might have found the site for an older Columbia University institution, the Institute of War and Peace Studies, founded in 1951, now known as the Saltzman Institute. According to its website, the institute was created to promote understanding of the "disastrous consequences of war upon man's spiritual, intellectual, and material progress" (see <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/siwps/>). I imagine the author would have been tempted to ridicule such naïve aspirations that appear to deny the positive effects of good wars against injustice and the great progress of reconstruction that followed the devastation of World War II in Europe. But he would have hesitated, because these words were uttered by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of allied forces during the war, then president of Columbia University, and founder of the Institute for War and Peace Studies. My point is that the critics of peace-studies programs are not really interested in intellectual debate about issues of war and peace. They simply want to intimidate people who disagree with them, in order to silence them. How else to account for this same author's claim that "throughout its history, Peace Studies has been a response to attempts by the West to defend itself from attack." In other words, the real purpose of peace-studies programs is appeasement and treason. That is not an argument; it is a libel.

I regret devoting so much time to citing and criticizing people such as Horowitz and his followers. They are not engaged in the same enterprise as teachers and scholars are. Consider Andrew Chrucky's definition of the aim of liberal education: "to create persons who have the ability and the disposition to try to reach agreements on matters of fact, theory, and actions through rational discussions" (Chrucky's 2003). That is not what Horowitz is about. Two of the main criticisms he has launched against professors with whom he disagrees are that they seek: (1) to indoctrinate their students and (2) to populate their departments and universities with people who share their political views. Both criticisms are founded on misguided assumptions.

The first criticism relies on an underestimation of the intelligence and independent-mindedness of our students. Teachers know very well that the surest way to get students to reject our views is to come across as preachy or doctrinaire. In February 2006, a couple of students at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in Maryland tried to ban a course on Peace Studies taught by the former *Washington Post* journalist Colman McCarthy, on the grounds that he presented only one point of view and sought to indoctrinate the students to accept it. These particular individuals had never taken the course, but Megan Andrews, a 17-year-old student in McCarthy's class, told a reporter what she thought of the charge: "We're all mature enough to take it all in with a hint of skepticism. We respect Mr. McCarthy's views, but we don't absorb them like sponges" (Aratani 2006:C6). If a high school student can exhibit such a degree of maturity and perspective, those qualities are presumably even more widespread among our college students.

The second criticism relies on the assumption that professors are mainly interested in propagating their political views—that faculty members make decisions on hiring and promotion according to political criteria, essentially seeking to fill positions with people sharing their own political views. Thus, the remedy, for Horowitz and other proponents of an Academic Bill of Rights, is in effect a quota system to make sure that any given faculty includes people with a range of political views. There are many faulty assumptions underlying this diagnosis and prescription. First, where is the evidence that professors seek to replicate their political views in their department? Why would they not seek to promote their methodological or substantive preferences within their field of study? Or how about this possibility—evidently never considered by the proponents of an Academic Bill of Rights—that professors might have the greater interests of their department, institution, and students at heart, and not be promoting particularistic interests of any kind? Why the assumption that people who have chosen scholarship and teaching as their career are really primarily interested in political activity? Why would they not go directly into politics?

Presumably a faculty that represents a range of political views can bring a diversity of perspectives to the study of politics, even if its members eschew, as they must, political indoctrination as one of their pedagogical objectives. At Cornell, one of my colleagues in the Department of Government recently left to join the faculty of a law school which offered him a much higher salary and proximity to Washington, DC, where he could pursue his interests in public policy. Many of us regretted this colleague's departure, on several grounds. Among all my colleagues, his work on the laws of war was closest to my own intellectual interests, but his perspective was often very different from mine, and we have had many useful discussions over coffee and by email. An important factor, as students and others who will miss his presence on campus have pointed out, is that he was the only outspoken conservative Republican on our faculty. One internet commentator, revealing his own political orientation, reacted to the news by asking, "Does this leave Cornell without any persons of sense? Is affirmative action required?" (Scheidegger 2007). Many have already pointed out the irony of conservatives such as Horowitz in effect advocating a policy that has long served as one of their favorite targets. My colleagues and I would like to foster a diversity of political views on our faculty. But how would advocates of an Academic Bill of Rights recommend that we do so? Would they suggest that we put in our job description that the preferred candidate must, for example, be skeptical of Europeans or a strong supporter of Israel?

This raises a general question for the promoters of an Academic Bill of Rights. If they get their way, and convince state legislatures, for example, that diversity of political orientation should be legally mandated, how would the relevant regulatory agencies determine a given faculty member's political views?

Would they use the methods favored by the *Florida Times-Union* and David Horowitz, and simply judge by the titles of lectures and courses? I teach a course, for example, called “Gender, Nationalism, and War.” Horowitz’s website quotes a couple of phrases from my description of the course—that it addresses the “relevance of gender to nationalism, conflict, and war,” and explores the “political formation of gender identity.” From that it boldly asserts that “the entire foundation of the course is not academic inquiry but a narrowly conceived brand of left-wing identity politics. One does not have to sit in on Professor Evangelista’s course to learn that obvious fact” (Laksin 2006). My choice of course title and description appears to assign me to one particular political orientation, so in the interest of balance and academic freedom our department should hire teachers whose course titles and descriptions designate them as representing another one.

Consider this response to the facile association of course topics with political agendas, using my course as an example: in the United States in the past decade women have played a considerable role in issues related to war and peace. Women make up more than 15% of the U.S. armed forces, on active duty and in the reserves and National Guard. They have occupied the office of secretary of state and national security adviser in Democratic and Republican administrations. They have served in Iraq as heroines and victims, sometimes at the same time, as in the case of Jessica Lynch. At Abu Ghraib prison women have held positions ranging from the prison commandant, General Janis Karpinski, to rank-and-file torturer, Lynndie England, and as prominent scapegoats for the crimes committed there and by their superiors. From the Tailhook scandal to “don’t ask, don’t tell,” one can hardly avoid the issue of gender and war, and that is only in the U.S. military. Outside the United States, women have played key roles as guerrilla fighters and suicide bombers, as peace activists, peace keepers, mediators, and judges presiding over international tribunals for bringing war criminals to justice. It is no wonder that the topic of gender and war has attracted the attention not only of feminist scholars, who have long been interested in it, but also of people such as Fukuyama (1998), writing in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, and Stephen Rosen, whose book, *War and Human Nature* (2004), devote considerable attention to the role of testosterone levels and sexual selection as sources of conflict. These writers are usually placed on the (neo-) conservative and hawkish side of the political spectrum. The claim that studying or teaching this topic implies a particular political orientation, let alone a program of indoctrination, seems doubtful.

On the question of research, there is no single standard for people working in the field of peace and conflict studies. Some scholars seek to challenge the fundamental concepts that undergird the international system, whereas others undertake analysis within the bounds of the existing discourse. The range of methods is equally broad, from formal mathematical and statistical studies to qualitative historical research to anthropological explorations to philosophical and legal investigation (Just War Theory and International Humanitarian Law, for example). The degree to which scholars intend to draw policy conclusions from their work also varies. As an interdisciplinary program that sponsors research mainly by providing fellowships to graduate students working on their dissertations, Cornell’s Peace Studies Program does not seek to impose any standards beyond those of the students’ own fields—except that the work must be relevant to the broad range of research areas that constitute the field.¹

¹These are listed at <http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/PeaceProgram/funding/fellowships.asp>.

Our program also organizes a weekly lunchtime seminar and invites outside speakers as well as local ones. Some people argue that each of our seminars should present both sides of a given issue. Thanks to Jon Stewart and *The Daily Show*, many people are now aware that a lot of issues have more than two sides, and some have less. To me it seems silly to try to insure that all perspectives are represented in each seminar. Our format is such that we devote nearly as much time to questions and discussion as to the speaker's presentation, so that seems a reasonably good guarantee that a range of views will be aired. Over the course of the year, we do strive to attain a certain diversity, but we do not ask our speakers whether they are Republicans or Democrats in order to ensure a balance. Not only would that be unfair to the Greens and the Libertarians and the nonpartisans and the nonvoters, thinking about diversity only on an ideological spectrum is rather limiting and inadequate for our purposes. Consider these names among some of our past and future visitors: Reuben Brigety, Cynthia Enloe, Robert Jarvis, Sarah Mendelson, Stephen Rosen. Do they meet our criteria for diversity? Not really. They are all political scientists, and we run an interdisciplinary program. We are supposed to invite anthropologists and physicists too.

The Horowitz criteria for academic freedom and diversity amount to *pro* or *contra* the Bush administration. That is not any way to organize scholarship or pedagogy, not least because it misses a lot of other sources of productive disagreement. Consider another Cornell example from the fall of 2002, when the invasion of Iraq was already in prospect. During our regular Peace Studies seminar slot, we sometimes hold what we call a current-events roundtable to discuss an issue in the news. In September 2002, the Bush administration had released a document outlining its new National Security Strategy, which advocated preventive war (under the guise of pre-emptive war). We thought it would be worth discussing in the context of the impending war in Iraq. Our panel included a critic of the new strategy and the forthcoming war and a supporter of the Bush administration's overall approach to the Middle East and, tentatively, of the war. But the more interesting disagreement came over the nature of the new strategy—was it really new or did it represent a considerable degree of continuity with past U.S. practice? By staging an event according to the Horowitz criteria, pro- or anti-Bush, Democrat vs. Republican, we would have missed out on a much more fruitful intellectual exchange (Kirshner, Strauss, Fanis, and Evangelista 2003).

Let me close with two stories that reflect the aspirations that I think most of the members of our Peace Studies Program hold for what we should be doing. The first dates to 1972 and the second to the early 1980s. Recently we received a request for copyright permission for a study the Peace Studies Program published in 1972 which has long been out of print. It was called *The Air War in Indochina*. This is what the blurb on the back of the version reprinted by Beacon Press says:

In March 1972 a member of the United States Congress asked the President of the United States for a breakdown of the tonnage of bombs dropped as well as the number of sorties flown in South Vietnam, North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. He received a reply from a high official at the Pentagon to the effect that "the sensitivity of the detailed information on sortie rates, tonnages, and target areas which you requested is such that it can only appropriately be discussed in an executive session of the Committee on Armed Services." (Uphoff and Littauer 1972)

A year earlier a team of researchers at Cornell began trying to track down that information. It was not systematically available, but they managed by exhaustive combing of public sources, supplemented by interviews, to put together a plausi-

ble picture. Plausible enough anyhow that the request for permission to reprint the report came from the U.S. Air Force's School of Advanced Air and Space Studies at Maxwell Air Force base, where it is required reading in a course on the history of air power. Were the authors of the report neutral on U.S. involvement in Vietnam? I doubt it. To quote further from the blurb, in addition to the study of the bombing campaign, the authors also "offer insights and necessary information on the ecological impact of the war, the monetary costs, and the war's relation to the United States Constitution—providing the kind of information every thoughtful citizen needs today." From the choice of those topics, we might infer that the authors opposed the war. They probably even participated in the sorts of teach-ins that David Horowitz finds so threatening to academic freedom when they have the Iraq War or a possible war with Iran as their topic. But that did not keep them from conducting research that still has credibility and value, even for representatives of an organization that is in the midst of conducting another unpopular war.

The second story regards the Reagan administration's Strategic Defense Initiative, announced in March 1983, and known by its critics as "Star Wars." Cornell has a strong tradition of physicists working on matters related to national security, starting with the late Hans Bethe, head of the theoretical division at Los Alamos, where the atomic bomb was invented. It was only natural that Cornell physicists would study the technical feasibility of ballistic-missile defense and not surprising that they found it dubious. Many of those physicists were involved in the activities of the Peace Studies Program and some of them, particularly graduate students, become activists in the November 11th Committee, a campus group affiliated with the nationwide organization, United Campuses to Prevent Nuclear War. A couple of them also initiated a campaign to promote a pledge that scientists commit not to engage in work on missile defense, arguing that the efforts would be destabilizing and counterproductive for international security (Cortright 1993:184–186; Evangelista 1999:275). As a result of such activity, the program came under criticism as a haven of anti-SDI sentiment and its seminar series was faulted for not adequately representing the pro-SDI viewpoint. My own view is that one must be sensitive to the risk that one's scholarship or teaching reflects a bias stemming from one's political views. But in this case, the opposite seemed to be the case. Cornell physicists were persuaded by their technical analysis that SDI was a flawed and dangerous program. They stated their opposition publicly and engaged in political efforts to promote their views. But in their public statements, in the classroom, and in the Peace Studies seminars they laid out their arguments clearly and welcomed opposing views and contrary evidence in the best tradition of liberal education.

The 1972 study of the air war in Vietnam would not have been possible without the academic freedom that allowed researchers to investigate a topic that the U.S. government considered too sensitive to discuss in public; without the freedom of the press that allowed the information to be published absent prior censorship by the government; and without the willingness of government officials to be interviewed about a controversial policy so that the researchers could put together the story. The technical analysis of the prospects for ballistic-missile defense, still valid today, would not have been possible without the freedom university physicists enjoyed to pursue controversial matters of public policy. If David Horowitz has his way, researchers pursuing independent analysis of current U.S. policies, or teaching their students to evaluate them critically, would be declared "dangerous" and hounded out of universities—or have their relative influence reduced by the hiring of faculty according to designated political criteria. That approach not only infringes upon our freedoms. By limiting the ability to conduct independent analysis of policy, it also poses a danger to peace and security.

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