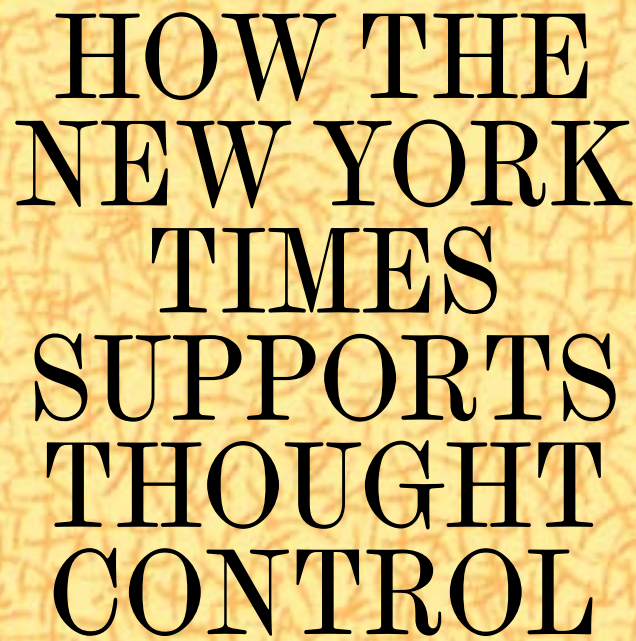


HOW THE  
NEW YORK  
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THOUGHT  
CONTROL

EDWARD S. HERMAN



# HOW THE NEW YORK TIMES SUPPORTS THOUGHT CONTROL


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The New York Times has never been a very courageous newspaper in times of political hysteria and threats to civil liberties. When Bertrand Russell was denied the right to fill his appointment at CCNY in 1940, following an ugly campaign by a rightwing Catholic faction opposed to his positions on divorce and marriage, the paper not only failed to defend him, its belated editorial called the appointment “impolitic and unwise” and criticized him for not withdrawing when the going got hot (“The Russell Case,” April 20, 1940). Russell pointed out in a published reply something the editors had missed: that there was a serious matter of principle at stake; that a withdrawal would have been “cowardly and selfish” and would have “tacitly assented to the proposition...that substantial groups should be allowed to drive out of public office individuals whose opinions, race or nationality they find repugnant” (April 26, 1940).

During the McCarthy era also the Times failed to stand by its ex-Communist employees who were willing to tell all to the Times officials, but not turn informers. They were fired, and in its news and editorials the paper failed to oppose the witchhunt with vigor and on the basis of principle. Publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger himself wrote an editorial assailing the use of the Fifth Amendment in appearances before the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities (August 6, 1948).

We are in another period of escalating attacks on civil liberties, with

## EDWARD S. HERMAN

the Patriot Act, a lawless rightwing administration, open threats to retaliate against judicial failures to follow rightwing dictates, and perpetual aggression to create the justification for repressive policies at home. An important additional factor is the steadily increasing aggressiveness of pro-Zionist forces, both in the United States and elsewhere, who have fought to contain criticism of Israeli policies by any means, including harassment, intimidation, threats, boycotts, claims of “anti-semitism,” occasional resort to violence, and other forms of pressure. While sometimes allegedly based on the need for fairness, balance and truthfulness, these campaigns are completely one-sided and are invariably aimed at suppressing alternative views and inconvenient facts.

Attacks on critics of Israel are of long standing – individuals like Edward Said and Noam Chomsky have been vilified and threatened for years, and both frequently needed police protection at speech venues, at work or at home. The situation has worsened in the Bush-2 era, in good part because of the cultivated hysteria of the “war on terror” and congenial environment provided by Bush, the strengthening of the rightwing media, and the demands imposed by Israeli policies. On the latter point, it has long been noted that increased Israeli violence and land seizure, which causes greater international hostility to Israel, induces a new protective response by “defenders of Israel.” In recent years nobody who criticizes Israeli policies has escaped attack – not attack by intellectual argument, but by ad hominem assault, spam invasions, the use of stolen addresses to embarrass, threats, and campaigns to discredit and silence. For these attackers the end justifies any means, including, of course, lies (for one episode in the extensive lying career of Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, see the letter exchange between him and Noam Chomsky, *Boston Globe*, May 17, May 25 and June 5, 1973).

The Bush-Sharon era has witnessed the emergence of McCarthyite institutions like Campus Watch and the David Project, designed to police academic Middle East studies for un-Israeli-patriotic thoughts, putting pressure on academics and administrators to intellectually cleanse, and providing targets for vigilantism. There are even current proposals to legislate for “balance” and “fairness” in Middle East studies both at the state and

## EDWARD S. HERMAN

federal level. These vigilante efforts and attempts to politicize the university pose serious threats to free speech, academic freedom, and the independence of the university. They are also threats to integrity and truth, with the main target criticism of Israeli policy and with the aim of making the official Israeli version of history the sole legitimate narrative.

It is in this context that we must evaluate the Joseph Massad case, Columbia University's handling of that case, and the New York Times' editorial on "Intimidation at Columbia" (April 7, 2005). Massad, who teaches courses in Middle Eastern studies at Columbia, and is critical of Israeli policies in Palestine, has been under assault from pro-Zionist forces, in class and outside, for years, although running an open class, tolerating hostile and often irrelevant questions, many times by outsiders and "auditors," and with a record of having never thrown anybody out of class for harassment (for documents by Massad and others bearing on this record, see the links provided at the end of this article).

In a decent and honest environment, concern about "intimidation" would focus on the intimidation of Joseph Massad, whose life has been made very stressful and whose freedom to teach and effectiveness as a teacher has been threatened by this campaign of harassment – and Massad and his students are not alone in victimization by this campaign for the hegemony of an official truth.

But in the indecent and post-Orwellian world in which we live, Massad is the intimidator, several students he allegedly treated harshly are the true victims, and justice demands an inquiry on this alleged intimidation and a possible disciplining or firing of this intimidator. Thus, Columbia University's administration, responding to the hegemony campaign in the Daily News, New York Post, Wall Street Journal, and by other organized groups and individuals, appointed a grievance committee to look into the allegations of intimidation of students by Massad and a colleague who have failed to follow the official narrative. But this committee had no instruction to consider the intimidation of Massad et al., although both the committee and New York Times acknowledge that he and others have had their classes "infiltrated by hecklers and surreptitious monitors, and they received hate mail and death threats" ("Intimidation at Columbia").

## EDWARD S. HERMAN

Put otherwise, the admitted systematic intimidation of the faculty, clearly a threat to academic freedom and the possibility of honest teaching and research, is off the agenda for an inquiry into intimidation; claims by several students that are disputed and clearly part of a larger campaign of intimidation involving Campus Watch, David Horowitz and other nationally-based intimidators, must be taken seriously.

The Columbia grievance committee displayed bias by its willingness to accept a one-sided assignment in which only student intimidation was at issue. Their bias was also evident in their handling of the student complaints. The two complaints about Massad were declared “credible” although made belatedly and contested by Massad. The committee does not state explicitly that Massad’s denial in the classroom case was “incredible” and that Massad (and his three student witnesses) lied, so “credible,” undefined, appears to mean not disproved and theoretically possible, and the committee’s finding is therefore not only asinine and damaging to Massad, it opens a Pandora’s box to future accusations of intimidation.

The “most serious” student accusation, which dates back to the Spring of 2002, was that Massad said to a student “If you are going to deny the atrocities being committed against Palestinians, then you can get out of my classroom.” This statement was confirmed by one student and an outsider allegedly present but unnoticed by others. Massad denied the accusation and was supported by three students. The committee noted that the accusing student didn’t leave the classroom, and expulsion was contrary to Massad’s policy (with no such case ever reported). The student failed to complain in 2002 and did not mention the incident in her evaluation sheet for the course. The other student accusation was not in a classroom, the time and place were vague, and the alleged statement by Massad, while harsh was conceivable in the heat of a private argument; but the student and incident were not recollected by Massad. These incidents might have happened, but they might not, and actual incidents might have been rewritten to serve a political agenda. The grievance committee doesn’t even mention these possibilities, nor does it place them in the context of continuous harassment and intimidation from the side of the purported victims that might be considered to reduce their “credibility.”

## EDWARD S. HERMAN

A third demonstration of the grievance committee's bias is its suggestion that the failure of the student victims to complain earlier resulted from a deficient grievance procedure at Columbia. The committee said that it was only a "result of these failures that outside advocacy groups devoted to purposes tangential to those of the University were able to intervene to take up complaints expressed by some students." But not only is this a fallacy in that there were several routes to complaint at the time these incidents occurred, which the students failed to tap, the committee fails to note the possibility that the absence of earlier complaints might be because the incident or incidents didn't happen or were later inflated in seriousness, constructed or made serious only as part of the escalating attacks on Massad and other dissidents from the official line. The committee premises the truthfulness of the complainants and ignores their possible role in a larger campaign of suppression – that is, they fail to recognize that the belated complaints may be part of the process by which "advocacy groups devoted to purposes tangential to those of the university" have been able to accomplish their ends.

Turning to the New York Times editorial, although noting in the penultimate paragraph that the accused faculty members had had their classes infiltrated, disrupted, and monitored by outsiders, and had been recipients of hate mail and death threats, the editors do not criticize Columbia for failing to act to prevent these numerous abuses threatening academic freedom, nor do they even hint that any remedy was called for. This was apparently acceptable intimidation, coincidentally carried out against individuals challenging the official narrative that the New York Times itself has adhered to closely (see my article on the media's treatment of Israel's approved ethnic cleansing: <http://www.zmag.org/meastwatch/israeeth3.htm>). The editors focus on Massad, allegedly "clearly guilty" of ill temper on two occasions, although under continuous provocation over several years. The editors misrepresent the facts even here – the grievance committee called the charges "credible," but didn't explicitly deny the credibility of Massad and his witnesses. Neither the committee nor editors had the integrity to note that the student charges were old and that they might have been constructed as part of an organized campaign of derogation; or

## EDWARD S. HERMAN

that the methods employed in this campaign have not been scrupulous, and that the incidents might have been edited or entirely fabricated.

In its last paragraph the Times editors contend that the grievance committee's mandate should have extended to the question of "anti-Israel bias" and that Columbia should hire and fire "with more determination and care." In short, the Newspaper of Record tells its readers that universities should police thought to keep out unwarranted bias, which seems to pose a threat in only one direction – the editors have never mentioned the possibility of unwarranted pro-Israeli bias, which for the editors may be inconceivable.

Joseph Massad is in good company. The editors of the New York Times found Bertrand Russell unworthy of an appointment to CCNY based on his politics and a bandwagon of hostile attacks. Sixty four years later they implicitly call for the removal of Joseph Massad based on his politics and an organized campaign of derogation. As Russell pointed out to the editors back in 1940, it is contrary to the fundamental principles of a free society to drive out of their position "individuals whose opinions, race or nationality they find repugnant." This point remains valid even where done under the cover of alleged "intimidation" by the victim being driven out.



## **USEFUL LINKS**

New York Times Supports McCarthyite Witch Hunt

[www.juancole.com/2005/04/new-york-times-supports-mccarthyite.html](http://www.juancole.com/2005/04/new-york-times-supports-mccarthyite.html)

Juan Cole, Informed Comment (April 8, 2005)

Ad Hoc Grievance Committee Report

[www.columbia.edu/cu/news/05/03/ad\\_hoc\\_grievance\\_committee\\_report.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/news/05/03/ad_hoc_grievance_committee_report.html)

Ira Katznelson, Chair; Lisa Anderson; Farah Griffin; Jean E. Howard; and Mark Mazower, Columbia University (28 March 2005)

EI EXCLUSIVE: Joseph Massad's statement to Columbia University's Ad Hoc Grievance Committee

[www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article3742.shtml](http://www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article3742.shtml) (5 April 2005)

Columbia Unbecoming in the clear light of day

[www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article3296.shtml](http://www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article3296.shtml)

Monique Dols (5 November 2004)

Joseph Massad responds to the intimidation of Columbia University

[www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article3282.shtml](http://www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article3282.shtml)

Joseph Massad (3 November 2004)

Columbia Considers Limits on Political Expression at University

[www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article2677.shtml](http://www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article2677.shtml)

Jacob Gershman, The New York Sun (19 April 2004)

Curriculum reform should start in the U.S. and Israel

[www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article1825.shtml](http://www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article1825.shtml)

Joseph Massad (18 August 2003)

Policing the academy

[www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article1362.shtml](http://www.electronicintifada.net/v2/article1362.shtml)

Joseph Massad (14 April 2003)

Can a 'Patriotic' Mob Take Over the Universities?

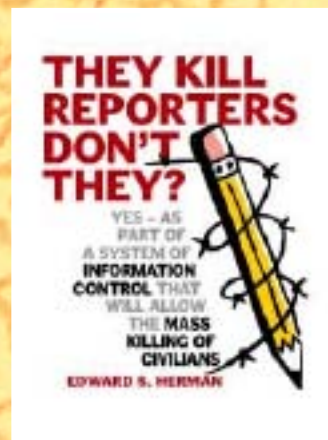
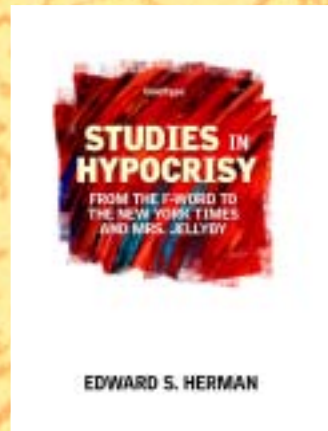
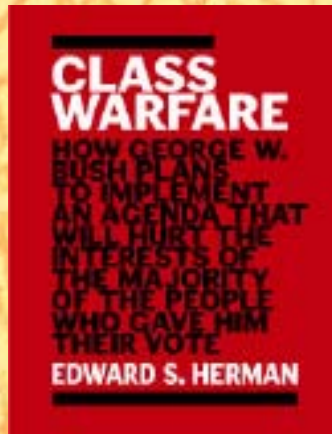
[www.dissidentvoice.org/Mar05/Kimmerling0329.htm](http://www.dissidentvoice.org/Mar05/Kimmerling0329.htm)

Baruch Kimmerling, Dissident Voice [or: [www.dissidentvoice.org](http://www.dissidentvoice.org)]

[www.blog.zmag.org/index.php?URL=http://www.dissidentvoice.org%5d](http://www.blog.zmag.org/index.php?URL=http://www.dissidentvoice.org%5d)

(March 29, 2005)

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