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## Acute lesson in political science

Michelle Malkin

A week after the September 11 terrorist attacks, four Muslim students claimed that their public college professor called them "Nazis," "murderers" and "terrorists." The media ate up the story. Muslim activists rallied. School officials panicked.

The college administration kicked the political science professor — Kenneth Hearlson of Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, Calif. — off campus without a hearing, placed him on paid leave and then launched an investigation that remains unfinished.

Now, 11 weeks later, the Muslim students' story is unraveling. But the professor is still sitting at home, barred from teaching because he upset some hypersensitive young people with overactive imaginations. Here's what the fuming Muslim students said happened two months ago:

C.C. Abdelmuti, a 20-year-old student in the group, told the Los Angeles Times on Sept. 22 that Mr. Hearlson "accused us of killing 5,000 people."

"He was saying lots of horrible things," added Zayneb Saidi in the same article. "'You're terrorists, murderers and rapists.'"

Also quoted in the Sept. 22 piece: Mooath Saidi, an 18-year-old sophomore and Zayneb's brother, who claimed Mr. Hearlson said: "'It was you who flew the planes into the World Trade Center. You are a terrorist.'" He needs to get fired, if not prosecuted, for what he did."

Mr. Abdelmuti was quoted in the Chronicle of Higher Education on Sept. 25: "He was telling class that Muslims shouldn't be trusted and shouldn't have any rights."

Mooath Saidi repeated his assertions in the Los Angeles Times on Sept. 30: "He pointed at me and called me a terrorist. I stand by what I have believed from day one. He should be fired."

Mooath Saidi again reiterated his allegations to the Orange County Register on Nov. 14: "He pointed in my direction and said, 'You drove two planes into the World Trade Center. You killed 5,000 people. You are a terrorist.'"

Mr. Hearlson acknowledges that the weekly lecture he gave

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during his Sept. 18 introductory government course was impassioned. He is, after all, a passionate man — a 57-year-old conservative former Marine who grew up poor in rural Kansas, became a born-again Christian and began teaching nearly two decades ago. Mr. Hearlson "pushes hot buttons to make students think," he told me, but he says he has never made personal attacks against anyone during class. "I just tell the truth."

The evidence supports Mr. Hearlson, not the hysterical Muslim students.

A transcript of the taped discussion reveals that Mr. Hearlson never accused any of his students of being terrorists. He did criticize the Clinton administration's half-hearted attempt to retaliate against Osama bin Laden in 1998 ("he didn't make much of an attempt to get him"). And he unabashedly praised the resurgence of patriotism and religion after the attacks ("I've never seen so many flags in my lifetime. God all of a sudden came alive in America, didn't he?").

Mr. Hearlson also repeatedly asked why Arab states refused to condemn terrorism against the United States and Israel unequivocally. And challenging the politically correct mantra that all Muslims are peaceful, he mentioned an incident in which Muslim students plastered hate flyers across his campus last year. "I am not going to lie to you," he told the class, "I am not going to tell you they were nice people."

The only other time during the lecture that Mr. Hearlson used the word "you" came when he discussed Arab attacks on Israel dating back to 1948. When a student questioned what he meant, Mr. Hearlson clarified that he was referring to Arab nations, not any student personally. Even a New York Times reporter concluded after hearing the taped discussion that "while Mr. Hearlson's criticism of Muslim nations was unrelenting, the claims of personal attacks were exaggerated or fabricated."

Alan Charles Kors, president of the Philadelphia-based Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which supports Mr. Hearlson, says: "This is a case that should concern not only the citizens of California, but all individuals who care about liberty and academic freedom." He's right.

If higher education is an enlightened search for truth, these misguided Muslim students have chosen a dead end paved with lies. They want Mr. Hearlson "prosecuted" and "taught a lesson" for offending them. It is the students who need to be schooled. In the United States, we don't punish professors for speaking their minds.

*Michelle Malkin is a nationally syndicated columnist.*

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