

FRAMING THE AAAS TOWN HALL MEETING

*Shut Up and Teach? Faculty and Public Issues*

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Bruce Franklin wrote, from the anti-Vietnam War years, "imagine legislation forbidding professors of literature to get their noses out of their texts." Or, I add in this moment, legislation forbidding singers to comment on heads of state. We hit on the Dixie Chicks' film title to frame our interest in faculty and public issues. The Chicks were told by Clear Channel to shut up about George W. Bush and about U.S. policies and, instead, to attend simply to their job description. Well, we want to interrupt attempts to police such dissent by means of vocational restraint or job re-training.

We're addressing connections between faculty interests and local, national, and international politics and responses to those connections. We're talking about many decades of *rhetorical* tarring and feathering of faculty who step outside of the confines of their research and their classrooms. We're talking about 30 years of hostility directed at ethnic studies and women's studies programs. We're talking about the often successful attempts over the past five years to marginalize particular scholars of Middle East studies. We're talking about a couple of years of David Horowitz, the man who would be Czar of faculty regulation nationwide, and his red-baiting campaigns against "radical" scholars and his promulgation of academic loyalty oaths. All of these things are proximate causes, to varying degrees, for tonight's town hall.

This event is not about the lacrosse case, but this moment's context is saturated with surmise, with conversation, with responses to last spring, and with our various accumulations of vicious racist and sexist emails, telephone messages, and paper mail messages (all collectively numbering in the thousands now), and mail fraud. Still, whether we enter this discussion from thinking about decades of criticism of counter-conventional thinking, or attempts at marginalizing faculty opposed to the U.S.'s military adventurism, or Horowitz's visit to Duke and elsewhere, or the past eight months of organized outcry against out-of-control liberal professors at Duke, we enter this discussion not to complain about hurt feelings (ours or others') but to talk back against demands that we shut up and teach, or that we shut up and stop teaching, or that we should shut up because we're too stupid to teach, or that AAAS has nothing to teach so it simply should be shut down, or that we should all just shut up completely.

In talking back, we demonstrate the pleasures of working through and across difficulties of critical encounters.