

# OPINIONS

## Professor endorses controversy and multiple perspectives

by Alec Stone Sweet  
As a professor of Political Science, I am writing in response to the opinion written by Michael Summersgill (Campus, May 2), entitled "McCarthyism Revived." The author warns readers that within "the hallowed halls of Middlebury" there are professors who teach that "the United States was largely at fault for the Cold War," and "preach the merits of communism." All of this apparently adds up to a form of "political correctness" which is imposed upon students, "cheats students out of a complete education," and teaches students "what to think," not "how to think."

Although it appears that my personal views on Stalinism are roughly those of Mr. Summersgill, I too teach these things, and wish to contribute to the ongoing debate about "political correctness."

Last Fall, I taught a course on the history of US foreign policy since 1945, which Mr.

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Summersgill attended. We read a number of short articles on the origins of the Cold War, an extraordinarily divisive subject among American students of history and political science. The authors of these readings reflected this controversy: some argued that Stalin and the Soviet Union were entirely at fault for bringing on the Cold War; some argued that the blame must be shared more or less by both sides. Our job as a group was to weigh these arguments and assess the evidence as best we could, and then discuss this debate together.

There is, of course, no single "correct" view on this issue at all; that is the point—it is controversial. Mr. Summersgill's

letter states clearly that he believes there is only one true perspective on this same issue—his own. This is "political correctness," by the way, but it comes from the right not the left. My interest is not to change his mind—that would be Stalinist. My interest is to ask, cajole, beg him and other students to try to understand what all the fuss is about—before they

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choose sides without reflection. Developing intellectual flexibility in this way is very important. I even think (is this heresy?) that students ought to be capable of arguing strongly a point of view which does not conform to their own. I do all of the time.

What is often very difficult—from a teacher's perspective—is to get students to look at two (or more) sides of a debate fairly. This may be especially true when it comes to debates about American history, politics, and culture. Some students do not like to be challenged in this way, because it means confronting their own biases about their world. In this particular course, a very aggressive and vocal few became quite belligerent with other students whose arguments or beliefs they judged to be insufficiently "patriotic," or American. "If you don't like it, go live in Russia / Nicaragua / Iraq," was heard more than once then (and all over campus during the Persian Gulf operation this winter). This again is "political correctness," and again it does not come from the left.

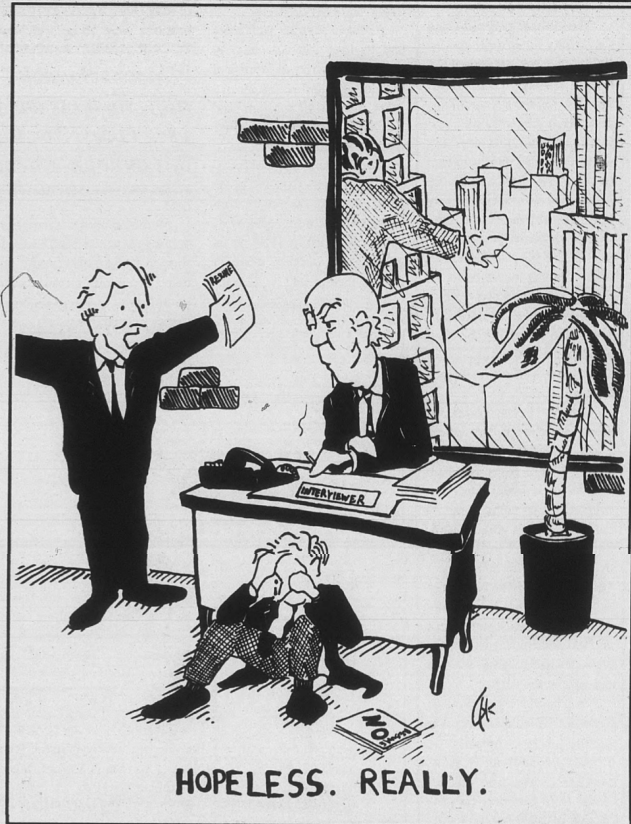
Discussions about such subjects as the sources of the Cold War, our own hot war in Vietnam, the Reagan administration's secret funding of the *contras* in Nicaragua, the Persian Gulf operation, are matters which arouse strong passions.

On these issues, significant controversy exists, multiple perspectives exist, and some of these perspectives may be threatening to students. But it would be all but impossible—and silly—to study the Cold War and Vietnam, for example, without confronting scholarly controversy. In this sense, the study of multiple perspectives is part of what a "complete" education is

all about.

Mr. Summersgill and I do agree that it is patently illegitimate for any professor to grade a student down for her or his own ideological biases. Where it gets tricky is when students are so intent on proving their ideological point that they fail or refuse or are unable to show that they have worked through the materials. In essay exams, papers and discussion, the process of arriving at conclusions—that is appreciation of the sources and dynamics of the debate—is often much more important than the conclusions arrived at. After all, we can only agree to disagree, and be respectful of each other's positions, if we are able to: 1) retrace our steps through some minimally communicable process of thinking and judgment; and, 2) identify the crucial steps where we diverged along the way.

Finally, am I, and others who teach this way, reviving McCarthyism? Perhaps it did not need reviving: professors are being accused (if not yet by name) in your paper of being communist, as if that were on its face a crime. Censorship is the silencing of voices, of reducing multiple perspectives to one. We must seek to keep the debate going, even if it means playing devil's advocate—whether for the right or for the left.



## T-shirt is no laughing matter

by Katherine La Sota  
Perhaps you are familiar with the t-shirt I'm about to describe. It belongs to the "co-ed naked lacrosse" genre of violent and sexist sportswear that has been seen on our campus in the past several years. On the front are the words: "Middlebury Co-ed Naked Lacrosse." On the back, underneath the emblem of the two crossed lacrosse sticks, are the words: "IT TAKES A QUICK STICK TO BEAT A TIGHT CREASE." Now, you don't need to be fluent in lacrosse to get the gist of the intended meaning, but just in case you're a little rusty, allow me to spell it out, in its English translation: "If I'm going to rape her,

I'd better do it fast, before she says no." The first time I saw this shirt, I was confused. The second time I saw it, I was offended. The third time I saw it, I was disgusted. Now, after three years of seeing this shirt, my confusion and disgust have turned into outrage. What is going on here?

### How is it that educated and free-thinking adults...come to wear a shirt that is essentially an advertisement advocating rape?

How is it that educated and free-thinking adults, living in a community of supposed liberalism and progressive ideology, come to wear a shirt that is essentially an advertisement advocating rape? Is it that they don't understand what the phrase means? Is it that they don't understand what it means to be raped? Think about it... "IT TAKES A QUICK STICK TO BEAT A TIGHT CREASE." It's short and snappy and to the point. The lacrosse jargon coincides perfectly with the appropriate sexual imagery. It's even got internal rhyme. Really funny, right?

Sure. It's hilarious. One out of every four women will be sexually assaulted during her lifetime. A woman is raped every eighteen seconds in this country. Every three minutes a woman is battered. In Vermont alone, the statistics tell us that one out of every three families experience sexual assault in their homes.

Many on this campus are still laughing. I asked one male student, the first person I saw wearing this shirt, how he felt

about advocating rape in the name of the Middlebury Lacrosse team. He replied, "Lighten up. It's just a joke." A woman I saw wearing it last year told me, "It's my boyfriend's. I didn't really take it seriously, I actually thought it was pretty funny." Perhaps the most interesting of the interac-

tions I have had concerning the Lacrosse/Rape T-shirt occurred last Thursday, the night of the "Take Back The Night" march and rally (a community event protesting violence against women). Standing in line at dinner, I noticed the man in front of me—saw those chilling words once again in bold black letters: "IT TAKES A QUICK STICK TO BEAT A TIGHT CREASE." I tapped him on the shoulder, and told him that I found his shirt incredibly offensive and violent, and asked him why he was wearing a shirt that advocated rape. He replied that he didn't see it that way. When I inquired as to how he did see it, he said, "I think it's witty. I think it's humorous."

I told him I knew plenty of women who have been raped, who would offer him a very different opinion. I asked him again, how could he think that wearing the shirt was funny? How could he not see the implications of the political statement he was making, in buying and wearing such a shirt? "Look," he said, finally meeting my eyes (continued on page 24)

## Social house's "art" exhibit is offensive

by Victoria E. Fischer  
This letter comes as both an invitation and as a warning to the community: there is a new "art" exhibit on display on the north wall of the former Zeta Psi house (now called the Mill). What was at first a display of two thoroughly tanned female bodies in suggestive poses, scantily covered by colored strips of lycra and fringe, has recently taken an even more stimulating (and, if I may add, revolting), turn.

The residents have now bolted a two-story long, purple fish hook onto the wall in place of the former fraternity symbol. Its shaft plunges between the two women and fiercely cradles one of them in its hook. The fish hook, which is a piece made by a Middlebury student, is not in itself the subject of my concern, rather it is the vulgarity of its placement between the two pin-

ups that disgusts me. I feel compelled to write an open letter on this matter after having confronted one of the decorators in person and having been treated with disrespect and complacency. I had been wondering for several weeks why the pin-ups should face passers-by and not the resident of the room (for his shades are consistently drawn down, concealing the pictures from his view), so I approached him as he stood on a ladder installing the hook and posed my question. He replied, chuckling, that they came with the house. When I asked if he had any intention of removing them from public view, he said that several people had asked the same question, and, well, he might just have to think about it. It doesn't seem that he has thought too hard. The hook continues to wrap itself around the woman, its sharpened barb

piercing the air next to her head, and I continue to walk by, wondering why I and all other members of the community should have to look at it. I need not spell out the connotations

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—any exposure to male America's sexist slang will allow one to interpret the "art." I ask that we all consider: is this a symbol that we will allow to remain on college property, representing our school and the taste of its students? By allowing it to remain, passers-by and visitors will form an opinion of this school that will somehow, at some point, affect their opinion of us. Viewing an exhibit by choice is one thing, having it

forced upon us is another. I refuse to let such an image remain an emblem of my institution, for although it has been created in ignorance and tastelessness by only a few, it must be seen by many. And as members of this institution and this community, it also, in some way, belongs to us. I recommend that, if the residents and members of the Mill agree that the fish hook is a work of art they want on their wall, let it be. But the pin-ups must come down. They may have come with the house, but the house has changed. In honor of its new image as a co-educational residence, let's change the window display.