

BOOK REVIEWS

John K. Wilson. *Patriotic Correctness: Academic Freedom and Its Enemies.* Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008. Pp. 263. Paper, \$22.95; ISBN 978-1-59451-194-3.

The Chicago writer and liberal activist John K. Wilson observes near the end of *Patriotic Correctness* that violations of academic freedom in higher education are exceptions to the rule. That conclusion might surprise his readers; *Patriotic Correctness* otherwise tells a depressing story of the relentless efforts of interest groups, legislators, and college administrators to silence dissent and debate. Conservatives can be targeted, especially by bureaucrats who fear controversy and criticism even more than radical politics. Yet, Wilson writes, it is "a dirty little secret of higher education ... that left-wing political activists encounter the most discrimination of anyone." The results are apolitical teachers, complacent campuses, and apathetic students.

Wilson acknowledges that with 4,000 colleges and universities, 1.1 million faculty, and 15 million students in the "vast industry" of American higher education, "anybody can find three anecdotes about universities to prove anything." To be sure, anecdotes abound in *Patriotic Correctness*. A few stand out as particularly shameful. Florida State University attempted to quash protests against Nike's sweatshops after the company paid the university \$3 million to endorse its athletic wear. Predictably, Wilson finds Catholic and evangelical Protestant schools to be the worst abusers of academic freedom, and school newspapers to be the most common targets of censorship. Abortion, gay rights, and the Arab-Israeli conflict perennially seem to be beyond the realm of intelligent debate. By contrast, some recent spasms of censorship are already passing into history. The days when opposition to President George W. Bush, the war in Iraq, or the war on terror provoked an indignant backlash seem like distant memories. Conservative agitator David Horowitz and his proposed Academic Bill of Rights receive special scorn. Wilson depicts Horowitz as an unsavory character whose seemingly innocuous Bill of Rights would stifle debate in the name of "balance." No discussion can represent every possible viewpoint equally.

Patriotic Correctness is a polemical work, with flaws of its own. Wilson apparently would put no meaningful limits on academia's most intemperate ideologues. He could say more about what he calls the "Wal-Mart University"—the attempt to adopt cost-cutting corporate practices in higher education. The rapid increase in the use of adjunct professors, who suffer from low status and less job security, might be the most insidious threat to academic freedom today, but Wilson gives the issue only a few pages. Ironically, Wilson does not make a strong case for academic freedom. Given the rarity, which he acknowledges, of intellectual freedom in the work place and its frequent absence from public places, the oversight is troubling. Many readers might not understand why teachers and students ought to be allowed wide latitude to express unpopular views. Whatever lip service they pay to critical thinking, colleges tend to

function primarily as job-training centers for employers who want technically proficient but docile workers, and in that case, who needs freedom?

Drawing extensively on traditional media and the Internet, *Patriotic Correctness* should interest both general readers and students of educational policy. Its fast-paced, straightforward style will make it accessible to undergraduates, but it might not be the best fit for any American history survey course; Wilson does not put his subject in much historical perspective. On the other hand, *Patriotic Correctness* is likely to provoke spirited discussions among more advanced students, and it will help introduce aspiring teachers to the realities of academic life.

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Robert L. Badger, ed. *Ideas That Work in College Teaching*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008. Pp. 165. Paper, \$17.95; ISBN 978-0-7914-7220.

This book of articles by professors from a wide range of disciplines at SUNY Potsdam is a pleasure and a great source of practical guidance and information. The scholars who came together to write the book are engaged—teaching twelve hours each semester, working on freshman seminars, and actively involved in a reflective practice. It was out of this practice that the book emerged: Professors from thirteen different disciplines—art, biology, computer science, education, geology, history, math, modern languages, philosophy, physics, politics, psychology, and sociology—had been reading books on education, and after reading one book that enraged the group, those gathered agreed that they could do better. The volume works especially well because it includes teachers from one institution with a set body of students, most of whom come from working class background in which “education has been neither a top personal nor a family priority,” and the faculty from one institution engage their students.

Several important themes and many useful tips emerge from this volume. Teachers should be prepared, flexible, creative, willing to take risks, and capable of setting and sticking to high standards. They should dare to experiment, and not kick themselves when they fail. As Oscar Sarmiento puts it in “Through the Comfort Zone or Just One More Go at College Teaching,” instructors should try to retain and pass on the intellectual excitement that led all of us to embrace the academy as our profession in the first place. College instructors should connect students to their communities and surroundings through service learning projects or group work that focuses on actual issues in students’ lives.

In terms of practical advice, many of the authors advised instructors to save the crafting of homework assignments for after class, since these often need to be altered to fit what might or might not have been understood during classtime. Others provided some great tips; for example, the volume’s editor, geologist Robert Badger (“You Can