



New Club Hosts Panel Discussion Featuring Danish Editor Responsible For Controversial Cartoons

Flemming Rose, Who Inadvertently Sparked 2006 Riots, Among Panelists at Rutgers Event

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January 27, 2015

PISCATAWAY, NJ—After a thorough screening by Rutgers security officers, and then passing through a metal detector, attendees were treated to a panel discussion of free speech experts at the Livingston Student Center on Thursday, January 22.

Hosted by the new "Objectivist Club" at Rutgers and funded by the California-based Ayn Rand Institute, the event's tagline was "Freedom of Speech vs. the Tyranny of Silence."

The panel of speakers included Flemming Rose, the editor of the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten, the daily paper that, in September 2005, published cartoons that sparked protests and rioting in Europe and the Middle East.

The publication of the cartoons led to widespread protests and rioting, attacks on newspaper offices, and even the jailing of editors who republished the cartoons in some countries.

Much of the discussion touched on the recent "Charlie Hebdo" massacre, where two men allegedly killed twelve people at the satirical newspaper's Paris office, sparking the largest protest in the country's history.

Rose said the journalists at Charlie Hebdo there paid the highest price just for publishing cartoons.

It was something he could relate to after having commissioned a series of depictions of the prophet Muhammad that eventually led to protests and riots.

Although Rose's paper did not republish the Charlie Hebdo cartoons, that is a decision he regrets.

Rose said that he and other journalists have been living under a climate of intimidation and fear for the last nine years – since the Danish cartoons controversy in 2006.

One cartoonist, Kurt Westergaard—whose cartoon showing Muhammad wearing a turban with a bomb in it—became the face of the controversy, and like Rose, is currently on the al-Qaeda "most wanted list."

He added that his paper was very honest in why they didn't republish the cartoons, and while regretting that decision, he was pleased with that honesty, something that could not be said of many US newspapers.

Rose said American papers largely fabricated excuses for not republishing the cartoons.

Interviewed after the event by New Brunswick Today, Rose admonished editors like those at the New York Times for what he called "a very incoherent argument."

"Let's be honest... the reason is fear," he told New Brunswick Today.

Rose argued on the panel that "publication does not mean endorsement," explaining that—like them or not—the Charlie Hebdo cartoons are news.

"How many people are going to die before they show their readers why they are dying?"

Rose ended his comments remarking on the erosion of the distinction between words and deeds—how contemporary society is confusing saying something offensive with actual violence.

, spoke more directly on what he perceives as attacks on free speech and expression today, especially on campus.

Headquartered in Philadelphia, FIRE, which celebrated its 15th anniversary in October is dedicated to defending free speech and expression on college campuses, and ensuring the due process rights of students accused by their school's administration.

Over the summer, they launched their "Stand Up For Speech" project, a series of lawsuits against colleges across the country for violating students' rights to free speech, expression or demonstration.

With the help of cooperating law firms, FIRE has never lost a case they have brought to court.

Shibley said that he views the stifling of speech as shifting over time from being driven by college administrators—as it was in the 60's and 70's—being now driven by students themselves.

Ghate told the audience to imagine a society in which religion not only constantly controls every aspect of life, including food, work and sexual expression, but also demands political power.

Ghate said that freedom of speech and expression are a relatively new "Western invention," and that the separation of church and state was necessary to safeguard it.

He warned that, if we do not consider and discuss these issues, and preserve the right to free speech while confronting those that would seek to impose censorship, we will live in a world where people kill each other over the contents of what some consider to be sacred documents.

After the first hour of remarks concluded, the moderator invited the audience to ask questions of the panelists.

Responding to a question about people being offended, Rose said that “we need to grow thicker skins.”

On the trend of people being sent to “sensitivity training,” Rose said, “maybe we all need to go to insensitivity training.”

Salmieri asked Shibley about the political environment on campuses in the United States.

Shibley responded by noting the trend of students who nowadays ask permission for everything, not realizing that in a free society, anything people do is legal unless specifically made illegal by statute.

Salmieri told New Brunswick Today that he was happy to see a lot of students ask questions, and that it was a successful event with a good discussion.

The evening wrapped up with a community member asking the panel if they believed that German laws criminalizing Holocaust denial should be repealed.

The panelists were unanimous in their support for the repeal of such laws, with Rose illustrating the importance of allowing such views to be freely and openly expressed.

Rose argued that with such speech being criminalized, ideas like those are forced underground, where they endure and fester—rather than being confronted and defeated in a “marketplace of ideas.”

In response to the question, Shibley said that, like any provable fact, it is a simple matter of the Holocaust either happened or it didn’t, and whether people want to deny facts or not should be up to them.

Shibley argued that, when government wants to ban or restrict speech, they always start with the most ridiculous speech or the most uninfluential people that no one supports.

He elaborated how government censors always start their “policy creep” by “depending on your complete lack of sympathy for ridiculous or hateful speech to get their foot in the door.”

The Objectivist Club is a new student club at Rutgers this year, with regular meetings every Wednesday at the College Avenue Student Center. Its purpose is to study the philosophy and works of author Ayn Rand.

Club president Aldo Mayro, a junior majoring in philosophy and economics, told NBToday that the Ayn Rand Institute had contacted him regarding hosting Rose at Rutgers several weeks before the Charlie Hebdo massacre.

“In our culture today, there is a growing trend of censorship and self-censorship and it’s evident in much of media and society, and especially on campus,” Mayo said.

