

Mack Deserves No Flak

Harvard Must Stand by Academic Freedom

By Todd F. Braunstein

In 1993, Kenan Professor of Government Harvey C. Mansfield Jr. '53 touched off a campus-wide controversy with remarks tying Harvard's modern grade inflation to the increased recruitment of blacks in the 1970s.

At the time, Dean of the Faculty Jeremy R. Knowles expressed his disagreement with Mansfield's remarks and added that he knew of "no evidence" to support them.

But Knowles correctly defended the right of Mansfield—and all members of the Harvard community—to "express themselves openly and candidly."

Recently, the Medical School faced a similar problem of academic freedom when Dr. John E. Mack, a tenured professor, authored a book about people who who claimed to have been abducted by alien creatures from outer space.

It is unfortunate that those at the Medical School have chosen not to emulate Knowles' wise restraint. The Medical School administration last year formed an ad hoc committee to evaluate Mack's scholarship.

Simply by convening a committee to investigate Mack's work, the Medical School has set a terrible precedent. And the recent leaking of a letter on the matter, authored by Dean of the Medical School Daniel C. Tosteson '44, sheds further light on the controversy.

For one, it proves that the Medical School faculty will stop at nothing to smear Mack publicly. Furthermore, it illustrates the school's willingness to pay lip service to academic freedom while trying to crush any ideas that don't fit neatly into its orthodox conceptions.

There are no doubt significant differences between Mansfield's case and Mack's.

Dr. Arnold S. Relman, a professor emeritus at the Medical School who chaired the ad hoc committee investigating Mack, has argued that the fact that Mack is a scientist means that he must be held to a higher standard.

"[I]n science, ideas by themselves aren't enough," Relman wrote in a guest commentary appearing in *The Crimson* ("The Motivation for the

Mack Inquiry," Sep. 13, 1995). "They must ultimately be supported by peer-reviewed evidence, and Dr. Mack failed to meet that expectation."

In fact, Relman argues that the very purpose of the committee was to investigate the fact that Mack "wasn't doing any scientific research on the problem and wasn't being sufficiently objective and detached in his clinical approach to the 'abductees.'"

But Relman leaves the door open for the kind of work Mack has done by using the word "ultimately." Mack, in fact, is working in an academic community where, at a certain point in time, ideas are enough. If an academic community isn't a safe haven for

be brought up to the standards expected of the Harvard Faculty of Medicine," Relman told *The Crimson* in a news story that ran on September 11.

Relman ignores one significant detail: Dr. Mack is a tenured professor at Harvard Medical School, entitled to all the privileges that the post confers.

One of the many perks of tenure—and one of the reasons why it is such an important aspect of an academic community—is that it enables a professor to conduct his research in whatever way he or she sees fit, within certain ethical and legal guidelines.

By obtaining tenure, winning the approval of both his faculty and the University president, Mack retains the right to conduct his research in whatever

manner he sees fit.

No matter what its opinion of Mack's work or methods, the Medical School bound itself to tolerate his scholarship when it recommended him for tenure.

By second-guessing one of its own tenured faculty, the University is violating the sacred pact that has allowed ideas of all kinds to flourish for so many years. Even worse, the Medical School has set an unfortunate precedent for future episodes involving unorthodox professors. The incident raises some troubling questions that we should consider.

Will future Medical School faculty and administrators appeal to this incident as a precedent for investigating others with opinions that are unconventional or politically incorrect? Will the Tosteson-Rehman rationale be employed by deans in other faculties less restrained than Knowles to investigate the likes of Harvey Mansfield?

"We don't have room in our culture for this," Mack told *The Crimson* in an interview last spring. "It's the elite people, my colleagues, who decide what we're supposed to believe, and to them this isn't supposed to be."

Mack was correct.

The Medical School was wrong to have convened this fact-finding committee in the first place. It was wrong, in light of what has been made public so far, to have reprimanded Mack at all. It was wrong to have leaked information to the media in an obvious attempt at smearing Mack.

It is simply reprehensible that the elitist powers-that-be at Harvard University have once again refused to do the right thing in order to maintain their sacred orthodoxy.



nascent, if odd and unconventional, ideas, what is?

Relman also points out that Mack "hadn't published evidence in the scientific literature or in any scholarly books." But as Mack's lawyer Roderick MacLeish correctly argues, "John has the right as a faculty member to choose the medium through which he wishes to communicate his work."

The letter issued by the committee "is neither punitive nor coercive but it does suggest how Dr. Mack's future studies might