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Responses to Lynne V. Cheney

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Comments

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In November of 2001 Lynne V. Cheney announced the release of a report entitled *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done about It* on behalf of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, a nonprofit educational organization based in Washington, D.C. Announced as a project of the Defense of Civilization Fund, and written primarily by Jerry L. Martin and Anne D. Neal, the report was prefaced by the following comments from Cheney:

At a time of national crisis, I think it is particularly apparent that we need to encourage the study of our past. Our children and grandchildren—indeed, all of us—need to know the idea and ideals on which our nation has been built. We need to understand how fortunate we are to live in freedom. We need to understand that living in liberty is such a precious thing that generations of men and women have been willing to sacrifice everything for it. We need to know, in a war, exactly what is at stake.

The editor of *Taboo* invited several educational scholars to reflect on the report and Cheney's introductory comments. Those responses follow.

From Peter McLaren

For years I have taken a strong stand against many of your positions. But I have never tried to silence your voice—or others who share your general political perspective on a number of educational and cultural issues—as part of the necessary debate over what constitutes the meaning and purpose of democracy and democratic values. And now that you and your political patrons are targeting the academy under the guise of patriotism and the defense of civilization, I feel duty-bound to respond.

While you were busy directing attacks on critics of President Bush's war on terrorism, did you once consider that section 218 of the USA Patriot Act was permitting law enforcement to do an end run around the Fourth Amendment? Did you

consider that sections 411 and 412 was coming perilously close to trampling on the Bill of Rights?

What is your record on speaking out against terrorism? Did you say anything in 1990, when Orlando Bosch, accused by members of the US government of masterminding the bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 people, and 30 other acts of sabotage, was released from custody in the US by President Bush, Sr., at the request of his son, Jeb, who was trying to win the approval of the Miami Cubans? Did you signal your outrage then? Where were you when Ronald Reagan was praising the Mujahedin leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar? Did it matter that Hekmatyar, along with some associates at Kabul University, threw acid in the faces of unveiled women? Did you protest then? Did you protest when the CIA gave the Khomeni government a list of members of the Communist Tudeh Party, leading to the torture and slaughter of thousands of people? Did you protest then? Or was the slaughter justifiable because they were communists? Where was your outrage when the US government supplied Indonesia's General Suharto with a list of members of the Indonesian Communist Party, whom it knew would then be slaughtered along with trade unionists, peasants, and ethnic Chinese? Did you protest then? Or was it justified because the victims were communist? Did you become sick with anger when you learned about the massacres in East Timor by the Indonesian military? Did you protest? Did the silence of the US government bother you? Did you urge the US to condemn the slaughter? Where was your anger when the US supported the Khmer Rouge when it was part of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, fighting the socialist government of Hun Sen? Did you protest US support of those responsible for the killing fields of Cambodia? Where were you when our military helped support with training and weapons the military dictators in El Salvador and Guatemala? When 200,000 indigenous peoples were slaughtered by the death squads whose leaders were trained in the School of the Americas, Georgia, did you protest? Did you protest when Henry Kissinger supported General Pinochet's reign of terror after he helped overthrow Salvador Allende? Were you saddened that the innocent had to die?

Maybe, at the time that these events occurred, you were not aware them. Or maybe you think that they are just unsubstantiated rumors, or distortions of history by leftist pundits. Because I raise these issues, Ms. Cheney, you may think that I am part of the "hate America" crowd. I don't hate the United States. I love much of what it has accomplished. But I do hate terrorism. I hate terrorism when it is carried out by monsters like bin Laden. I hate it just as much when it is carried out as part of US foreign policy. Patriotism that is not at the same time conjugated with introspection and sustained critical self-reflexivity is a patriotism that does an injustice to the word. One of the best features of this country is its provisions for our ability to be self-critical, to challenge, or affirm, as the case may be, what has been presented by the dominant media as commonsense. In your report on the enemies of civilization, you attempted to prevent that self-criticism from taking place by producing a climate of fear. The way

for us to mature as a country is to face the consequences of our overt and our covert actions in the arena of geopolitics. We need to acknowledge our history—to celebrate the good but also be vigilant in facing up to those events in which we have participated that have shamed the principles of democracy and human decency. If Enron can mess up, what makes you think the joint chiefs of staff or the CIA are immune? A country that refuses to face its past, or who exerts pressure on those who attempt to do so, insults the spirit of self and social inquiry that are the foundations of real democracy.

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