

San Diego State University professor attacked over Facebook post criticizing Senator John McCain

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In an attack on free speech and democratic rights, Jonathan Graubart, a Professor in Political Science at San Diego State University (SDSU), has been targeted by a media campaign following a Facebook post he made on July 21.

Responding to the torrent of hagiographical news stories surrounding Republican Senator John McCain in recent days Graubart posted a short comment on his personal Facebook page, which was followed by a media campaign that not only misrepresented his views but also used empty moralistic cancer sympathy to glorify the war monger McCain while inspiring violent threats against the professor.

The expression of goodwill for McCain, Graubart stated, seemed to him to be a reflection of a society that valued elite lives over ordinary ones. To build on this theme, he quoted Hannah Arendt's line on the German cultural elite that bemoaned the fact that the Nazis sent Albert Einstein into exile, "without realizing that it was a much greater crime to kill little Hans Cohn from around the corner, even though he was no genius."

McCain, Graubart pointed out, was no Albert Einstein, and not just in terms of brain power. Unlike Einstein, who had "very appealing humanist instincts, as a socialist, antiwar, anti-imperialist, and anti-statist Zionist," McCain was "a risible public figure," a "war criminal," who in his political career had "championed horrific actions," and undermined "state commitment to public health." Graubart concluded the post by stating that he would rather see an outpouring of good wishes for "random contemporary Hans Cohns than politicians."

The more or less innocuous post on a personal Facebook page, was picked up initially by Channel 10 in San Diego, and then drew the attention of national right-wing media outlets including Fox News and the

Washington Times, leading to Graubart becoming the target of a torrent of hate mail, with some threatening outright violence.

Graubart's post, which remains on his profile page, contradicting the *Washington Times*' claim that it was deleted, was followed by over 200 comments. Many of the comments were supportive in defense of free speech, calling on the university to fight back "by denouncing the threats to free-speech and the vicious attacks against Dr. G(raubart)," as well as highlighting the one-sided media campaign slandering the professor. However, this post and the University's official statement addressing this issue have also been barraged with hateful comments.

Facebook comments were accompanied by angry email and voicemail messages with numerous threats of violence, calling him a "hook-nosed f-ing Jew," and attacks on his late mother. Graubart told WSWs reporters that the voicemails have been especially chilling, since almost half have warned of violence and one even pointed out his home address.

Some of the student organizations on the SDSU campus, particularly those directly linked to the Democrats and Republicans, were quick to jump on board the smear campaign.

Brandon Jones, the president of the SDSU College Republicans, declared piously, "[it] is one thing to disagree with a politician, or anyone, for that matter, based on differences in ideology.. [but] to wish bad health upon them because of those differences is outrageous...I hope next time you try and find some more compassion within yourself." More ominously, Jones went on to say, "If you don't want to stand behind our troops, feel free to stand in front of them, professor."

The official statement of the SDSU College Republicans claimed that Graubart's post "set a

discriminatory environment towards conservatives on our campus,” and would not be tolerated by their organization. The statement did not quite explain how this lack of tolerance would be expressed.

The SDSU College Democrats were not far behind. While claiming to support Graubart’s right to free speech, Michael Cline, the president of the organization condemned the “nasty and inappropriate” personal attacks. Neither organization seemed to have actually paid attention to the content of Graubart’s post.

While the campus public safety officers have advised Graubart to stay away from his university office (putatively for his own safety), the reaction of the SDSU administration has been characteristically spineless. The administration quite consciously distanced itself from Graubart, taking pains to reiterate its “respect and appreciation” for “Senator John McCain’s service to our country during both his military and public service careers.” With no real expression of support from the institution he has served for over a decade and half, Graubart continues to be the target of right-wing groups on and off-campus, with many sending ominous anti-Semitic death threats.

This incident should be taken very seriously for it is reflective of some of the dangerous trends visible in contemporary politics, the most obvious being the erosion of basic democratic rights. The right to free speech, once the cornerstone of bourgeois democracy, is being systematically attacked on all fronts, particularly in educational institutions where the ruling class has always tended to react swiftly to any signs of opposition, real or imagined.

While a right-wing professor, Jörg Baberowski, has been able to freely use his position at the Humboldt University in Berlin and can rely on a network of contacts among politicians and the media to spread his extremist positions, and a conformist academic community to protect him, left-leaning academics have faced witch hunts or firing for defending basic democratic rights.

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Baberowski, it should be noted, has not only declared his support for Ernst Nolte, the most well-known Nazi apologist among German historians of the post-war era, but also stated in a *Der Spiegel* article from early 2014 “Hitler was no psychopath, he was not vicious. He did not want the extermination of the Jews to be discussed at his table.”

In recent months, Evergreen State College in Olympia,

Washington has become the site of a reactionary, racist campaign against biology Professor Bret Weinstein, after he spoke out against a college-sponsored event that called for all white students and faculty to leave the school grounds for a day. In another attack on academic freedom, Trinity College suspended Professor Johnny Eric Williams earlier this year following Facebook posts he made regarding race relations in the United States.

In 2015, protests focused on allegations of racial insensitivity and racism on the part of college administrations, occurred at the University of Missouri, later spreading to Yale University, Ithaca College, and Amherst College.

The protests at Yale called for the resignation of professor Erika Christakis, a lecturer in early childhood development, after she questioned a memo sent by the university on “culturally unaware and insensitive” Halloween costumes. Ultimately, Christakis decided not to continue teaching courses at the university.

Professor Graubart’s post was a short comment on a personal Facebook page, and as he himself noted, it was an account that had less than a hundred “friends.” Yet, this short post became a news story that highlighted not just its supposedly treasonous sentiments, but also the putatively bigger problem of “left wing” professors running rampant in universities, poisoning young minds. The way in which this was done is also revealing of a particular tactic used by the ruling class and its acolytes to attack anyone who might smack of not toeing the line or of tapping into genuine oppositional sentiments amongst the broader population.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at SDSU extends its unequivocal support to Professor Graubart and condemns the campaign against him. We call on the students and faculty of SDSU and other universities across the United States and internationally to join us in the fight to preserve free speech and democratic rights. With the acceleration of the attack on core democratic principles under the Trump administration, this fight has become even more pressing.



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