

The Tragic Consequences of Placing Professors on Watchlists
by Dr. Michael Flanagan

I recently scrolled by an article discussing a “professor watchlist” created by a conservative group (Flarety, 2016). There have been other sites over the years designed to identify “problem” professors and their leftist viewpoints. The administrators of the watchlist sites often contact the students of these professors and encourage them to write anecdotal reports about alleged bias towards conservative ideologies. The creators of these watchlists feel that the professors are promoting a liberal agenda, while attacking conservative values.

In the past I would have kept scrolling by an article like this, writing it off as just another extremist website. But we are now living in a different America. Since the Presidential election hate crimes have spiked (Balingit, 2016). We have white nationalists taking key roles in the next presidential administration (NYT, 2016). Our President-elect, among many other authoritarian missives, has expressed plans to register Muslim citizens (Trip, 2015), and disregard First Amendment rights (Wright, 2016). The next logical target is college professors, because they educate and develop critical thinking and research skills in our next generation. A repressive government controlled by Wall Street, with a militarized police force, does not want free thinkers and political activists. Professors who are identified as liberals, progressives or leftists, might produce educated citizens instead of just churning out compliant workers. Those types of educators make the watchlist.

Senator Joseph McCarthy singled out some professors as un-American during his communist witch trials of the 1950's. His congressional committee persecutions destroyed lives and careers, and led to professors and teachers being forced to sign loyalty oaths or risk losing their careers (History, 2016). Trump surrogate Newt Gingrich has already come out in support of a new House of Un-American Activities Commission (Krieg, 2016).

What does it mean when a professor is placed on a right wing watchlist? For that professor, and his or her family, it means becoming online fodder for hate groups and possible termination for non tenured professors. It means having to constantly consider censoring lectures and discussions or risk losing their jobs. Professors are not just identified for their teaching, but marked for their personal writings and activism (Richardson, 2016). And once these watchlist groups get through stigmatizing liberal professors as un-American, public school teachers may be next. Teachers and their unions have been vilified by corporate privatizers for decades, so how long before we see kindergarten teachers called before some congressional committee and asked to give up the names of colleagues who attended anti-Wall Street rallies, or political protests?

Since the presidential election, teachers have been describing a dramatic upsurge in the amount of bias and bullying incidents towards students of color, Muslims, LGBT, and immigrant students (Wallace, Lamotte, 2016). Will those outspoken teachers soon be put on watchlists for reporting hate crimes against their students? We should all be wary of jack booted extremists, empowered by a Trump's election, publicizing lists of professors they disagree with in an attempt to destroy their careers. Silencing the ideas of professors, and the voices of public school teachers, is the next step in the

progression towards a totalitarian state. We have recently seen similar "red scare" tactics used to try and blacklist hundreds of alternative media sites such as the Intercept, RT and Truthdig (Taibbi, 2016). These strategies are designed to keep people uninformed and passive by taking out the intelligentsia. Fascism 101.

We must make the world aware that there are tragic consequences to placing professors on watchlists. We must to speak out now, loud enough to merit placement on these fascists' watchlists. The persecutions that occurred under McCarthyism can not be allowed to happen again, for "those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it". Professor Heather Cox Richardson, who was placed on this watchlist, refuses to be shut up because of these McCarthyist tactics (Richardson, 2016). Washington Post columnist Valerie Strauss wrote about the one hundred Notre Dame faculty members who have petitioned to be put on this watchlist in solidarity with the professors originally listed (Strauss, 2016). When they come for the college professors, we damn well ALL better say something. My name is Michael Flanagan, Ed.D. I am a NYC public school teacher and I stand with the professors on this watchlist. Anyone else?