

TURKISH
COALITION of
AMERICA

Fostering Understanding of Turkish . American Issues through Public Education



January 21, 2011

Ms. Suad Joseph, Ph.D.

MESA President

1219 N. Santa Rita Ave.

Tucson, Arizona 85721

RE: Turkish Coalition of America and Sinan Cingilli v. University of Minnesota, et al, 10-CV-4760 (DWF/FLN) (United States District Court for the District of Minnesota)

Dear Dr. Joseph:

I have read with scrupulous care your letter of January 18, 2011. I noted your reliance on anonymous press reports about the above-captioned case, rather than the Complaint by the Turkish Coalition of America, which we would have been happy to provide. I was disheartened that you chose not to contact me with your concerns and comments. We are always eager to share our views on academic freedom and freedom of speech and inquiry, which we cherish no less than I would assume you do. I was dismayed that an organization representing thousands of scholars internationally would be sufficiently aroused to write an official letter to another organization about an issue, but insufficiently conscientious to explore that issue with maturity and reflection.

In fact, your laudatory disparagement of actions that restrict freedom of inquiry and stunt development of critical thinking by exposure to diverse viewpoints fits like a glove what the University and its Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (CHGS) did: specifically, CHGS anonymously marked certain websites with a "scarlet letter" based upon idiosyncratic and ethnically biased conceptions of "denial" or "strange mixture of fact and opinion;" denied notice or an opportunity to respond to the defamed websites; and, de facto prohibited students from visiting or using the websites by threatening academic retribution for disobedience. I could not fathom that MESA would defend a government blacklist directly descended from the Index of Forbidden Books.

Turkish Coalition of America
1025 Connecticut Avenue, NW,
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-370-1399
Fax: 978-318-0037

Boston Office
48 Jonas Brown Circle
Concord, MA 01742
Phone: 978-318-0047
Fax: 202-370-1398

Istanbul Office
Cumhuriyet Cad. No: 17/1
34437 Taksim, Istanbul / Turkey
Phone: +90-212-297-95-80
Fax: +90-212-297-40-39

info@tc-america.org

www.tc-america.org

TURKISH

COALITION of AMERICA

Fostering Understanding of Turkish, American Issues through Public Education

You errantly assert that CHGS established its “unreliable” website list in furtherance of an “educational mission.” TCA inquired into purpose before filing the lawsuit, but CHGS was mute. If the blacklist served an educational function, why did CHGS dismantle it overnight when threatened with a lawsuit? Genuine education is made of sterner stuff. None of the other 2,500 colleges and universities in the United States features an “unreliable” website blacklist, either for pedagogy or otherwise. Even the interim Director of the CHGS, Ellen Kennedy, confessed she knew of no other comparable blacklist.

TCA’s Complaint alleges that it was conceived and maintained to de facto prohibit students from visiting or using the websites solely because of hostility towards a particular educationally credible viewpoint: namely, that the treatment of Ottoman Armenians during the mutual massacres and sufferings of World War I and its aftermath did not constitute the crime of genocide according to the standards of the 1948 Genocide Convention. The CHGS Director boasted to a University student that TCA’s website had been tagged with a ‘scarlet letter.’ The CHGS website and the Director further warned students against visiting or using it on pain of academic retribution, even to dispute TCA.

You speculate: “Presumably, those scholars felt that assertions made on these websites and in these resources were not in keeping with accepted scholarly standards or the consensus among scholars and should therefore be treated with skepticism.” But neither the CHGS nor the University has named a single scholar who participated in blacklisting the websites. Moreover, educational credibility was not the blacklisting standard. Instead, the CHGS employed two malleable terms devoid of objective meaning: “denial” or “strange mixture of fact and opinion.”

Have you ever visited our “banned” website? It includes a wealth of information and resources unrelated to the Armenian issue. The section on the Armenian-Ottoman history contains a rich collection of analysis and viewpoints by scholars and historians from the most prestigious American universities. One of those scholars, Professor Justin McCarthy, sells his “Map Project” through the “Resources Available from MESA” section of your own website. The CHGS would likely censor Professor McCarthy’s map scholarship for “denial.” Our website welcomes visitor suggestions on the Ottoman-Armenian controversy, and elaborates: “Our goal is to continue to openly discuss and debate the details of history and the genocide allegation.” Don’t you share that objective?

Turkish Coalition of America
1025 Connecticut Avenue, NW,
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-370-1399
Fax: 978-318-0037

Boston Office
48 Jonas Brown Circle
Concord, MA 01742
Phone: 978-318-0047
Fax: 202-370-1398

Istanbul Office
Cumhuriyet Cad. No: 17/1
34437 Taksim, Istanbul / Turkey
Phone: +90-212-297-95-80
Fax: +90-212-297-40-39

info@tc-america.org

www.tc-america.org

TURKISH
COALITION of
AMERICA

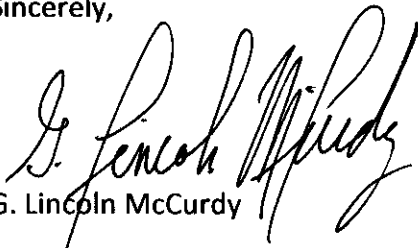
Fostering Understanding of Turkish, American Issues through Public Education

You also err in maintaining that students were only alerted to receive the blacklisted websites with "skepticism." To the contrary, students were warned against visiting or using them at the risk of unspecified academic retaliation, a de facto prohibition indistinguishable from the "informal" censorship of books constitutionally condemned by the United States Supreme Court in *Bantam Books v. Sullivan*. As TCA's Complaint underscored, the University's own statement of mission warred with its "unreliable" website blacklist which denied students the freedom of inquiry indispensable to critical thinking.

I am alarmed that you are celebrating indoctrination and censorship under the false banner of academic freedom. The future of American education would be grim if your ideas prevailed. Your position on this issue seems diametrically opposed to your views on other contentious matters. You customarily advocate open public access for groups whose voices are stifled or run contrary to established interests.

The TCA Complaint *expressly accepts the freedom of professors of whatever discipline or persuasion to voice their opinion about the reliability of websites or other information sources. None of TCA's claims challenge that freedom. We would have liked to see MESA join TCA in protecting freedom of speech and inquiry for all on university campuses, rather than bow to the vested interests of institutions and deep-pocketed donors.*

Sincerely,



G. Lincoln McCurdy

President

Turkish Coalition of America

Turkish Coalition of America
1025 Connecticut Avenue, NW,
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-370-1399
Fax: 978-318-0037

Boston Office
48 Jonas Brown Circle
Concord, MA 01742
Phone: 978-318-0047
Fax: 202-370-1398

Istanbul Office
Cumhuriyet Cad. No: 17/1
34437 Taksim, Istanbul / Turkey
Phone: +90-212-297-95-80
Fax: +90-212-297-40-39

info@tc-america.org

www.tc-america.org