

Mr. Philip T. Masciantonio, Director of Broadcasting and Operations
WKCR Board of Directors
WKCR
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By electronic mail:
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Dear Mr. Masciantonio and WKCR Board,

As organizations and individuals dedicated to promoting freedom of expression, we write to address a recent incident in which a student producer asked author Laurie Stone to censor excerpts from a work she had been invited to read on Studio A, a program of WKCR, because the excerpts did “not reflect [the] station’s values and more importantly [the] university’s values.” Unwilling to expurgate passages from her work, Ms. Stone cancelled her appearance. WKCR subsequently apologized for the student producer’s actions and declared that she had “misrepresented” WKCR policies concerning freedom of speech. WKCR’s apology asserts the station’s commitment to guaranteeing freedom of expression to its guests and programmers; WKCR “strongly believe[s] in robust freedom of expression.”

A statement upholding free speech principles, however, rings hollow when actions by representatives of WKCR violate those principles. Indeed, the student producer, in asking Ms. Stone to censor her work, reiterated WKCR’s belief that “freedom of speech and expression are important for all writers,” before telling the guest author that “there is no wiggle room on the censorship.” We urge WKCR to use the incident as a chance to demonstrate in practice its commitment to free expression by re-inviting Ms. Stone to read from her work uncensored and by hosting a discussion on freedom of expression in student media at a moment of heightened sensitivities.

As an independent, student-run organization, WKCR may select its guests as freely as any other media outlet. However, as a station that has explicitly announced that it guarantees “freedom of expression to its guests”, once WKCR invites guests onto its shows, it is obligated to allow them to express their own views— not just the views endorsed by the station’s representatives.

Demanding that a guest censor a story she has been invited to read because it contains views that the producer finds disagreeable demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the meaning of freedom of expression. Such a demand not only restricts discussion and debate about controversial subjects, but also creates the risk

Joan E. Bertin
Executive Director

NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors’ Equity Association
American Association of
School Administrators
American Association of
University Professors
American Association of
University Women
American Booksellers for Free
Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Jewish Committee
American Library Association
American Literary Translators
Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Society of Journalists &
Authors
Americans United for Separation of
Church & State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children’s Literature Association
College Art Association
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
The Creative Coalition
Directors Guild of America
The Dramatists Guild of America
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund
Educational Book & Media Association
First Amendment Lawyers Association
Free Speech Coalition
International Literacy Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of the Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Youth Rights Association
The Newspaper Guild/CWA
PEN America
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation
of America
Project Censored
SAG-AFTRA
Sexuality Information & Education
Council of the U.S.
Society of Children’s Book Writers
& Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Democratic Intellectuals
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ
Office of Communication
United Methodist Church,
United Methodist Communications
Women’s American ORT
Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

that listeners will gain inaccurate understandings of guests' beliefs. Dictating what opinions guests may or may not express is an affront to free expression and entirely defeats the apparent purpose of having guests on the show; guests are presumably invited to share their insights rather than parroting the producer's views. This is especially disturbing since WKCR is based at Columbia, a university known nationwide for adopting strong policies in support of academic freedom and for promoting high standards of journalism.

The incident has seriously undermined WKCR's claimed commitment to "robust freedom of expression." Inviting Ms. Stone to read from her work uncensored would be one way to restore trust in the station's integrity. We also urge WKCR to turn this unfortunate incident into an opportunity to take the lead in addressing the role of student journalists at a time of lively campus debate over free speech, offense, and social justice by hosting an on-air conversation on these topics. We would be delighted to help organize such a conversation.

Sincerely,




Svetlana Mintcheva, Director of Programs
National Coalition Against Censorship



Karin D. Karlekar, Director
Free Expression At Risk Programs
PEN America



Mary Rasenberger, Executive Director
Authors Guild



Henry Reichman, First Vice-President and Chair
Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure
American Association of University Professors



Dennis Johnson and Valerie Merians
Co-Publishers, Melville House Publishing

Jeffery Renard Allen, author
University of Virginia

Eric Alterman, author and Distinguished Professor of English and Journalism
Brooklyn College

Christen Clifford, performer, writer, faculty
The New School

Joe Conason, author

Chris J. Cuomo, Professor of Philosophy
University of Georgia

Susan Daitch, author

John Domini, author and journalist

Joan Hawkins, Associate Professor of Cinema and Media
Indiana University

Holly Hughes, performer, writer, professor
University of Michigan

Esther Hyneman, former board member of Women for Afghan Women, Professor Emerita
Long Island University

Margo Jefferson, author, professor
Columbia University

Elizabeth Kendall, author, professor
The New School

Laura Kipnis, author, professor
Northwestern University

James Lasdun, author

Diane Lefer, author

MG Lord, author, faculty
UCLA

Deborah Maine, Professor Emerita, Population and Early Health
Columbia University

Mitch McEwen, Assistant Professor of Architecture
University of Michigan

Jeff McMahon, performer, Associate Professor, School of Film, Dance and Theatre
Arizona State University

Daniel Menaker, author and former Editor-in-Chief of Random House Books

Albert Mobilio, author, faculty
The New School

Ted Mooney, author

Eileen Myles, author

Katha Pollitt, author

David Rivard, author, professor
University of New Hampshire

Sarah Schulman, author, activist

Mark Stamaty, author, cartoonist

Terese Svoboda, author

Marvin J. Taylor, Director, Fales Library
New York University

Catherine Texier, author

Sharon Thompson, author

Lynne Tillman, author

Steve Wasserman, Publisher and Executive Director
Heyday Books

Art Winslow, former Literary and Executive editor of *The Nation*

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