

Academic Assassination and a Three-University Plagiarism Coverup: The Case of Robert M. Frumkin

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In late 1974, Dr. Robert M. Frumkin, distinguished behavioral science scholar and tenured professor at Kent State University in Ohio, USA, discovered that two of his departmental colleagues were unequivocally guilty of plagiarizing a graduate student's masters thesis. He then made the 'error' of blowing the whistle on them.¹ When these men, Dr. Lawrence Litwack and Robert Sakata, both also tenured professors at Kent State at that time, heard about what Frumkin had done, they organized, during the 1974 Christmas vacation, an academic assassination plot. Since almost every member of the department had at one time felt the sting of gadfly Frumkin it was relatively easy for Litwack and Sakata to get all the full-time professors in the department to compile a 95-page book of charges against him which would serve as the rationale for his dismissal. In compiling this indictment, Frumkin's colleagues set in motion the academic machinery which insured that the charges made against him would in fact lead to his dismissal.

The Essential Facts on the Plagiarism

Drs. Litwack and Sakata, although they were not particularly research oriented, desired full membership on the Graduate Faculty of the University. In order to achieve that status and maintain it, one had to publish a minimal number of research papers within every five-year period of employment. Both men, in 1971, did have the requisite research papers published to maintain (Litwack) or establish (Sakata) their full membership status on the Graduate Faculty. They wanted that full membership because it meant that they could then direct student doctoral dissertations, get pay raises without a hassle, and, in the case of Sakata, get a promotion from assistant to associate professor. In apparent desperation they decided to take the unethical shortcut which is not as rare as we would like to believe.² In 1971 Litwack and Sakata heavily plagiarized the 1967 M.A thesis of Kent State

student John R. Cullen³ by publishing a paper in *Psychological Reports*⁴. Not only were Litwack and Sakata guilty of plagiarism—a cardinal academic sin—but also misuse of public funds. They used \$ 150 of public (Ohio) funds earmarked for the Guidance Bureau in order to subsidize the publication of their paper. This published paper was then used to help Litwack maintain his full membership and Sakata obtain full membership in the Graduate Faculty. The use of the *Psychological Reports* paper, under these circumstances, thus makes both men not only guilty of plagiarism and misuse of state funds but also academic fraud.

Proof of the Plagiarism

A. On page 353 of the article, the sample is *exactly* like the one in the Cullen thesis. See pages 24 and 25 of the thesis. B. On pages 352-354 of the article the tables contain figures *exactly* like those found on pages 34-38 of the thesis. C. Of the 15 references listed at the end of the article, 12 were taken from the thesis, one was Cullen's thesis (listed as if it only had a passing relation to the paper), and two were publications by Litwack. It was never suggested that "their" research article was any work other than their own. There is not the slightest hint that the article had anything to do with the Cullen thesis.⁵ Sakata had nothing whatever to do with Cullen or his thesis and he was listed as the senior author of the paper. On the other hand, Litwack was Cullen's major thesis adviser and, therefore, knew much about the Cullen thesis. Here is another case of student exploitation at its worst.⁶ It is the clearest case of plagiarism I have ever seen in two decades.

Frumkin Dismissal

In March, 1975, at what was announced as a routine department meeting. Frumkin's departmental chair, Dr. Glenn Saltzman, a close friend of Litwack and Sakata, formally presented the 95-page book of charges to Frumkin and all members of the department and asked them, "within 48 hours" to vote, "after reading the document" on whether or not Frumkin should be dismissed. Frumkin's colleagues voted unanimously that he be dismissed.

Frumkin requested a hearing before his faculty peers. In May and June, 1975, after two weeks of hearings before an all-University hearing committee, his colleagues votes 3-2 that he not be dismissed and sent their recommendation to President Glenn Olds. President Olds, a staunch conservative who found controversial social activist Frumkin a perpetual irritant, recommended that the Board of Trustees (which had the power to dismiss) dismiss him. In July, 1975, the Board of Trustees, ignoring Frumkin's peers and all principles of due process, voted 5-2 that he be dismissed.

Since that dismissal, even though Frumkin is a distinguished scholar (listed in *American Men & Women of Science*, *Contemporary Authors*, *International Scholars Directory*, etc), he has had a pariah status in the academic world and has not even been able to get employment in the non-academic world commensurate with his abilities.⁷ Frumkin has lost efforts

at reinstatement at Kent State both in the state and federal courts. In spite of the fact that independent scholars⁸ and Frumkin himself⁹ have shown that Litwack and Sakata, his enemies who spearheaded his dismissal, were clearly guilty of plagiarism, misuse of state funds, and academic fraud, Frumkin remains relatively unemployed and unemployable. While Frumkin struggles in relative poverty, Litwack and Sakata have lived in professional luxury.

Litwack took an early retirement from Kent State and is now a full professor and department chair at Northeastern University. Sakata is a full professor and department chair at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Litwack is a Professor Emeritus at Kent State.

In 1976, the Kent State faculty was up in arms about a *student*, one Andres Bermudez, who plagiarized a portion of his doctoral dissertation at Kent State. Faculty leaders, administrators, and trustees called for revoking his doctoral degree, even though Bermudez was now a dean of a college in Puerto Rico and such a step would ruin his life.¹⁰ In a March 7, 1978 letter to the *Record-Courier*, "a daily newspaper in the Kent area, 13 leading Kent State professors stated that if there was "certain evidence that Bermudez engaged in academic deceit, then the choice is ethically clear—he should categorically have his degree revoked." One of the signers of that letter, Prof. Kenneth Calkins, stated in that same issue of the newspaper that "It needs to be made clear that if this is plagiarism, this faculty won't accept any deals. If anyone has considered making a deal, the faculty would not accept it.. It's a matter in which the reputation of this university is being challenged." However, these same 13 professors, including Calkins, when approached by Frumkin on the *faculty plagiarism* of Litwack and Sakata, refused to help him by exposing Litwack and Sakata because, in doing so, they knew they would surely discredit the University's case against Frumkin, thus bringing more shame on the University. In spite of the fact that the Bermudez student plagiarism gained state and national attention, no newspaper in Ohio or elsewhere in the USA has dared print anything on the Litwack and Sakata faculty plagiarism. The *New York Times* sat on the Litwack-Sakata story for almost six months and then decided not to publish anything on it.

Frumkin, in a continued effort to get reinstated at Kent State and get his name cleared, has contacted the presidents of all three universities involved in the plagiarism coverup. Those Presidents have refused to do anything about it. The current president of Kent State, Dr. Michael Schwartz who in 1975 was the Dean of the Graduate School at Kent State, asked that Frumkin be kept out of his sight; he has strongly resisted all efforts to expose Litwack and Sakata and has supported the blacklisting of Frumkin. Since Litwack and Sakata are no longer at Kent State, although Litwack is officially a Professor Emeritus there, Schwartz says that Kent State has no interest in or obligations relative to the past behavior of Litwack and Sakata.

Academic Assassination

Since his dismissal in 1975, scholar Frumkin has been in a pariah status in his own country. He has been blacklisted not only from teaching full-time

at any accredited American university but also prevented from even obtaining full-time employment in non-academic jobs. All prospective employers ask him about why he left Kent State where for more than 8 years (1967-1975) he was an honored member of the faculty. And in all honesty he has not been able to avoid telling prospective employers the truth. The only way that Frumkin survives financially is to work at several poorly paying part-time jobs. In 1980 Frumkin helped found the Social Activist Professors Defense Foundation, an organization dedicated to helping suppressed professors by publicizing their cases and raising funds for their struggles. SAPDF publishes a quarterly journal, *Zedek*, and he is currently editor of it.¹¹

Strategy for Redress

Only an expose of the Litwack-Sakata affair, at this time, can provide the means by which Frumkin can reopen his case against Kent State and finally gain the redress he deserves. I urge readers of *Philosophy and Social Action* to see that the Litwack-Sakata plagiarism story gets into the mass media in countries where the American university power elite cannot pressure the continued coverup. The universities in question must be forced to face up to their responsibilities so that Frumkin will have a chance to spend his remaining professional years in dignity.¹²

I think a letter writing campaign to the trustees and presidents of the universities in question will also help Frumkin. The name of the president of those universities are as follows :

- Dr. Michael Schwartz, President
Kent State University Kent, Ohio 44242 USA (telephone number) (216) 672-2121
- Dr. Christopher C. Fordham III. Chancellor
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514 USA, (919) 962-2211
- Dr. Kenneth G. Ryder, President
Northeastern University, 360 Huntington Avenue Boston, Mass. 02115 USA (617) 437-2200
- Dr. Litwack is now a Professor at Northeastern.
- Dr. Sakata is now a Professor at the University of North Carolina.
- Drs. Litwack and Sakata were professors at Kent State in 1975.
Supportive letters to Frumkin would also be helpful. He may be reached at this address :
- Dr. Robert M. Frumkin
Adjunct (Part-time) Professor Hutchinson Hall, Room J105H Kean College of New Jersey Union, New Jersey 07083. □

REFERENCES

1. Ralph Nader et al. (eds.), *Whistle Blowing* (New York : Grossman, 1972); Charles Peters and Taylor Branch, *Blowing the Whistle* (New York : Praeger, 1972).
2. Brian Martin, 'Plagiarism and responsibility', *Journal of Tertiary Educational Administration*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 183-190 (October 1984); William Broad and Nicholas Broad, *Betrayers of the Truth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).
3. *A Study of Recidivism and Non-Recidivism among Parolees from the Cleveland Boys School* (Kent, Ohio : Unpublished M.A. thesis, Kent State University, 1967). Kent State Library call number HV 6049/C 654 ; available on interlibrary loan.
4. Robert Sakata and Lawrence Litwack, 'Recidivism among juvenile parolees', *Psychological Reports*, vol. 29, pp. 351-355 (October 1977). *Psychological Reports* is a reputable professional psychology journal published in Missoula, Montana, USA.
5. See R.M. Frumkin, *The Kent State Coverup, Volume II* (Irvington, New Jersey : Frontiers Press, second edition, 1983).
6. Brian Martin, 'Academic exploitation', in B. Martin et al. (eds.), *Intellectual Suppression* (Sydney : Angus and Robertson, 1986).
7. Since 1981 Frumkin has applied unsuccessfully for more than 3,000 full-time jobs.
8. For example, Dr. Giles E. Gobetz, Sociology Department, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242.
9. Frumkin, op. cit. note 5.
10. *New York Times*, 25 April 1977, p. 18.
11. *Zedek* is published in Detroit, Michigan. Address: 19329 Monte Vista Drive, Detroit MI 48221, USA.
12. On Frumkin's social activism at Kent State, see Helen R. Samberg, 'Academic repression at Kent State University', *Zedek*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 82-91 (February 1982). Since 1981 Frumkin has been living below the USA-established poverty line.

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