

This letter is not about “political correctness.” We believe that a university should be a place in which ideas are freely exchanged and debated. T

The issue being addressed here is morality and legality.

As an alumna or family of an alumnus we feel we need to comment on a recent announcement by the University announcing the hiring of John Negroponete.

To begin with, a university should be a place that quite obviously upholds the law. In fact, Yale has an extraordinary law school, a school at which the Constitution of the United States is taught and revered.

It is also studied, rather extensively, in the Political Science Department.

In fact, for many years Yale was known for its exceptional courses on democracy taught by Robert Dahl, among others.

It is therefore quite shocking to read (one of us is a graduate of that political science department) that Yale has decided to employ a man who enjoyed a career which has rested to some great measure on violating the Constitution of this country.

John Negroponete was Ambassador to Honduras from 1981-1985. During that time the United States engaged in the contra wars and finally what was known as the Iran contra “scandal.” What this meant quite simply was that Ambassador Negroponete was a key player in funding a war which had been outlawed by the US Senate through the Boland Amendment.

He was a key player in an illegal war circumventing US law.

Others were tried for their role in this.

He was not; but his role was clear.

In the end, the illegal prosecution and funding of this war was carried out by the illegal sale of arms to Iran through a complex network of White House operatives, CIA personnel and rogue agents of the “Enterprise,” a group of ex-military and intelligence officials.

Much of this war was run through the US Embassy in Honduras.

In using Honduras as a base for operations against the left in Latin America extensive human rights abuses were committed. During his confirmation hearing in 2001 for the post of Ambassador to Iraq, Negroponte testified that he did not believe that death squads had operated in Honduras while he was there.

However, a 1993 Honduran government human rights report said that 184 suspected leftists had disappeared while in government custody, many of them at the hands of a US-trained Honduran army battalion.

Chris Dodd, the Senator from Connecticut, said, "Given what we know about the extent and nature of Honduran human rights abuses, to say that Mr. Negroponte was less than forthcoming in his responses to our questions is being generous."

The Inter-American Committee of Human Rights found that a "practice of disappearances carried out and tolerated by Honduran officials existed between 1981-1984."

And, finally, the CIA Working Group in 1996 admitted that "the Honduran Army committed hundreds of abuses in the period."

It went on to say of the abuses that "many were politically motivated and officially sanctioned" and linked to "death squad activities".

What was it exactly that Negroponte overlooked, tolerated, never reported or worse? According to the *Balti*  
*more Sun*

in a story in June of 1995, the US trained Battalion 316 used "shock and suffocation devices in interrogation.

Prisoners were kept naked, and when no longer useful, killed and buried in unmarked graves." The newspaper's team of investigators concluded that Negroponte had to have known.

It is ironic and deeply saddening to look at these statements and lies of the past as the US is once again trying to emerge from the horrors of our latest round of officially sanctioned torture. As a country we seem to be trying to turn that corner and say that we do not wish to be complicit anymore in torture or illegal activities violating international agreements.

And yet, at that very moment Yale turns to a man to teach who has become a symbol of both the undermining of the Constitution and the acceptance of human rights abuses.

As Ambassador to the UN under President George W. Bush, Mr. Negroponte sat behind Colin Powell as the US outlined its now totally discredited case against Iraq as having weapons of mass destruction. Again he was a team player – on a team without rules. As a team player, he was promoted first as Ambassador to Iraq and then to the newly- created position of head of National Intelligence. History has not yet finished writing the story of the Bush Administration and the war on terror and on our Constitution. There is vigorous debate on whether or not there should be hearings on everything from torture to illegal wiretaps to a military told to disregard our international treaties. Is that the legacy that Yale is trying to teach its students now? An op-ed in the *Washington Post* put it in terms much more suited to the world we wish to create – entitled “Torture is Not an Option.” The article said, “There are certain things democracies don’t do.” Is that not what Yale should be teaching?

The essence of this letter is to encourage the Administration of Yale University and in particular the president, Rick Levin, to look at the choices the University makes. What is the message that you are sending the students? Is it acceptable to take part in illegal activities when a government official is the one committing the acts? Is Yale condoning the violation of the Constitution when a group of officials within the government decide to do that? Is Yale condoning the use of torture and death squads when some feel they would be “useful?” We think that there will be many alumnae/i and students who will hope that the answer is no. Yet, by hiring Mr. Negroponte the University is condoning and rewarding those activities.

We ask you to look at this both morally and legally, and from the point of view of what our alma

mater stands for. We ask you to take your role seriously as an educator. We ask for you to do the right thing. Our country needs us to do the right thing. Now.

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