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Elizabeth Brenner, Publisher

David A. Zeeck,
Executive Editor

David Seago,
Editorial Page Editor

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EDITORIALS

TESC blundered in honoring killer

The Evergreen State College can be a curious place.

Today's commencement ceremonies will feature a taped, 13-minute address by Mumia Abu-Jamal. Abu-Jamal is a death row inmate in Pennsylvania and a former Black Panther. He has become something of a celebrity with Americans who are easily infatuated with thugs who strike revolutionary poses. At least some of Evergreen's students and faculty members presumably will be applauding his remarks.

This is particularly intriguing in light of past student-faculty protests – in the name of nonviolence – against equipping Evergreen's campus police with handguns. Abu-Jamal's fame ultimately derives from the fact that he murdered a police officer with a gun.

His supporters don't like to dwell on the inconvenient facts that led a Philadelphia jury to sentence him to death in 1982. These include the witnesses who testified they saw him shoot police officer Daniel Faulkner, and the .38-caliber bullets that somehow found their way from Abu-Jamal's revolver – which was found at the scene – into Faulkner's head and chest.

A common claim is that Abu-Jamal was framed. To believe that, you have to assume an elaborate conspiracy on the part of Philadelphia police to let the *real* cop-killer walk.

Why is Evergreen showcasing a murderer at its graduation exercises? Evergreen President Jane Jervis recently issued a statement that said Abu-Jamal had been included in the ceremony because he had galvanized "an international conversation about the death penalty, the disproportionate number of blacks on death row, the relationship between poverty and the criminal justice system." But others – including Sister Helen Prejean, the author of "Dead Man Walking" – have managed to provoke discussion about capital punishment without murdering a police officer.

The college is paying a price for its foolish decision to publicly honor Abu-Jamal. Police groups are understandably outraged. Gov. Gary Locke, in response, cancelled his own plans to speak at the commencement. U.S. Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Texas) has said he would call on the House today to observe a moment of silence in protest of Abu-Jamal's address. Faulkner's widow plans to protest at the graduation ceremony.

Their criticism is on target. Any institution of higher education is in the business of transmitting the enduring values of civilization from generation to generation. One of those values holds that you don't murder people – or honor those who do.