

Is our free speech getting killed?

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As Americans, we prize free speech. We set the standard for the world. But is our free speech in the process of being destroyed?

Last month the following book by Kirsten Powers was published:

The Silencing: How the Left Is Killing Free Speech

As a liberal, Powers is criticizing the people with whom she identifies politically. Here is a short interview:

<http://video.foxnews.com/v/4255298637001/the-liberal-taking-on-the-left>

Here is a recent example of what Powers is referring to.

Recent example

Duke rebuke: Professor defiant after school condemns racially charged remarks, FoxNews.com, 2015-05-17

A Duke University professor was defiant after the school last week condemned his "noxious" and "offensive" words in a letter published in *The New York Times* in which he compared African-Americans unfavorably to Asian-Americans.

The school's rebuke came after a student backlash against Political Science Professor Jerry Hough, 80, whose May 9 letter sought to address racism and the Baltimore riots. Hough said African-Americans don't try to integrate into society, while Asians "worked doubly hard" to overcome racism instead of blaming it.

"Every Asian student has a very simple old American first name that symbolizes their desire for integration," he wrote on May 10. "Virtually every black has a strange new name that symbolizes their lack of desire for integration."

Duke students and faculty blast Hough last week, and the school told *The News & Observer of Raleigh* that he was placed on leave and that 2016 will be his last year at the school.

"The comments were noxious, offensive, and have no place in civil discourse," said Duke spokesman Michael Schoenfeld. "Duke University has a deeply held commitment to inclusiveness grounded in respect for all, and we encourage our community to speak out when they feel that those ideals are challenged or undermined, as they were in this case."

<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2015/05/17/duke-professor-responds-to-criticism-about-online-comments-made-regarding>

Dominated by political liberals, universities are no longer the haven for free speech that they were once touted to be. Instead, universities, overall, suppress the expression of viewpoints that are contrary to those of political liberalism. The foregoing article provides a graphic example of this.

As noted, the Duke spokesman said the following about Prof. Hough's statement:

The comments were noxious, offensive, and have no place in civil discourse.

Do you agree with this assessment? Do you think that the expression of viewpoints, such as those of Prof. Hough, should be suppressed?

It seems to me that if the professor spoke about blacks using degrading terms, the claim of noxious and offensive would be appropriate. But the professor simply made a rational argument.

If a person makes a respectful, rational argument against a liberal position, isn't the appropriate response to counter it with a rational argument? What the Duke spokesman seems to be saying is that a rational argument against a liberal position is noxious and offensive to liberals, who dominate the universities. What the Duke spokesman seems to be saying is that, at universities, liberals won't debate rational arguments against their positions. Instead, they will suppress them in the name of civility, claiming that viewpoints to the contrary are uncivil.

What does this disposition teach students? Shouldn't a university teach students to put forth the effort to develop rational arguments for their positions? But, instead, the leaders at universities are teaching students to seek to suppress viewpoints contrary to theirs.

Kirsten Powers offers the following commentary:

Campuses across the United States have become ground zero for silencing free speech. Universities founded to encourage diversity of thought and debate have become incubators of intolerance where non-sanctioned views are silenced through bullying, speech codes, "free speech zones", and other illiberal means. [p. 70]

The root of nearly every free speech infringement on campuses across the country is that someone — almost always a liberal — has been offended or has sniffed out a potential offense in the making. Then, the silencing begins. The offender must be punished, not just for justice's sake, but also to send the message to anyone else on campus that should he or she stray off the leftist script, they too might find themselves investigated, harassed, ostracized, or even expelled. [p. 76]

If colleges and universities encourage that attitude, they are not educating students; they are perpetuating their immaturity and fostering intolerance. [p. 88]

The illiberal left isn't just ruining reputations and lives with their campaigns of delegitimization and disparagement. They are harming all of society by silencing important debates, denying people the right to draw their own conclusions, and derailing reporting and research that is important to our understanding of the world. They are robbing culture of the diversity of thought that is so central to learning and discovery. [p. 17]

As Powers documents, at a typical university, a professor who is a political conservative or a religious conservative keeps quiet about their conservatism as they seek tenure, and even afterward, for fear of the kind of treatment exemplified in the foregoing article. [p. 18-19, 199-202]

Narrow vs. broad meaning of free speech

Narrowly, the idea of free speech refers to a legal right that is identified in amendment 1 of the United States constitution, which prevents the federal government from abridging the right. Amendment 14 — ratified in 1868 — was later used to broaden this right to prevent state and local governments from abridging it.

Broadly, the idea of free speech refers to the cultural acceptability of free speech, and this is what Powers is talking about. She is saying that liberal interest groups have taken the strategy of persuading businesses, especially universities, to suppress employee speech and activities that counter the liberal agenda, even to the point of trying to get such employees fired for speech or activities that have nothing at all to do with their job.

As an example, Powers cites activists who opposed the appointment of Mozilla co-founder Brendan Eich to the position of Mozilla CEO in March 2014.

That same day, a Twitter mob exploded with criticism of Eich. Gay rights supporters were angry about a six-year-old donation of \$1,000 to the "Yes on 8" campaign, which sought to ban same-sex marriage in California in 2008.... Remember, this proposition passed the same year Senator Barack Obama sat in Rick Warren's church to explain his religious based opposition to same-sex marriage. Eich took the time to address the criticisms.... Such assurances proved inadequate, however. Almost seventy thousand people signed a petition organized at CredoAction, a progressive social change

organization, telling Eich to renounce his beliefs or resign as Mozilla's CEO. They accused him of "advocating for inequality and hate" and ordered Mozilla to fire him if he refused to resign. Finally, just over a week after his appointment, Mozilla announced that Eich would be stepping down as CEO. [p. 11]

American Civil War

I believe that the issue that Powers raises may be even more important than she realizes. Here's why.

During the years that I developed my comprehensive theory of human life, I became intrigued as to the cause of the Civil War, which started in 1861 and continued until 1865. I ended up spending many months immersed in the historical details. Such a study necessarily entails, not just a study of the years immediately prior to the war, but also a study of the history of the nation since its founding, along with a history of yet earlier years.

What was the result of my study? Besides learning an amazing amount of historical information, I felt that I had identified a single causal factor that, by itself, allows us to organize all of the other causal factors and, as a result, obtain a striking simplification in our understanding of the cause of the war.

What was the single, organizing causal factor that I identified?

Going back to the 1790s, southern governments had started suppressing discussion of alternatives to slavery. Why did they do this? Because the horrific Haitian slave revolt of 1791 scared the living daylights out of southern slaveowners. As a result, southern state governments established laws to transform their societies into police states per speech pertaining to slavery, per humanitarian activities on behalf of slaves, and per the sale and movement of slaves by slaveowners. The goal was to minimize the likelihood of a slave revolt.

With the southern populace unable to publicly discuss alternatives to slavery, the southern leaders were unable to adequately consider alternatives to slavery. This locked them into the mindset of a slaveholding society and thereby put them on a collision course with the northern states, where the discussion about slavery progressed without restraint.

I convey the foregoing insights in *Human Life*, Edition 3 (2015), p. 284-294, and in *Why?* (2008), p. 372-383, 581-582.

Meeting format

We'll discuss the foregoing ideas as we proceed, and we'll consider all ramifications of the topic that are of interest to the participants.