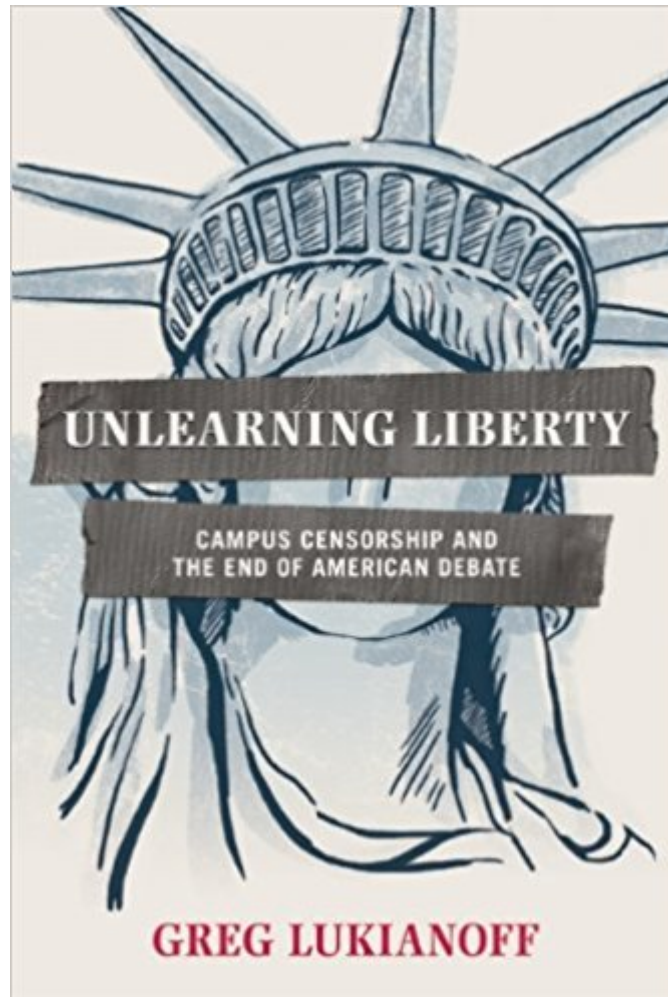


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# Unlearning Liberty: Campus Censorship And The End Of American Debate



## Synopsis

For over a generation, shocking cases of censorship at America's colleges and universities have taught students the wrong lessons about living in a free society. Drawing on a decade of experience battling for freedom of speech on campus, First Amendment lawyer Greg Lukianoff reveals how higher education fails to teach students to become critical thinkers: by stifling open debate, our campuses are supercharging ideological divisions, promoting groupthink, and encouraging an unscholarly certainty about complex issues. Lukianoff walks readers through the life of a modern-day college student, from orientation to the end of freshman year. Through this lens, he describes startling violations of free speech rights: a student in Indiana punished for publicly reading a book, a student in Georgia expelled for a pro-environment collage he posted on Facebook, students at Yale banned from putting an F. Scott Fitzgerald quote on a T shirt, and students across the country corralled into tiny "free speech zones" when they wanted to express their views. But Lukianoff goes further, demonstrating how this culture of censorship is bleeding into the larger society. As he explores public controversies involving Juan Williams, Rush Limbaugh, Bill Maher, Richard Dawkins, Larry Summers; even Dave Barry and Jon Stewart; Lukianoff paints a stark picture of our ability as a nation to discuss important issues rationally. *Unlearning Liberty: Campus Censorship and the End of American Debate* illuminates how intolerance for dissent and debate on today's campus threatens the freedom of every citizen and makes us all just a little bit dumber.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Can't say it any better than Ken at Popehat.com (awesome free speech legal blog). In *Unlearning Liberty*, Greg reviews the different occasions and excuses for censorship in modern American universities, marshaling a bewildering array of case studies. Some were familiar to me: the ludicrous reaction to posters at University of Wisconsin-Stout, the legal threats to critics of the administration of Peace College, and the entirely repellent tale of Indiana University punishing a student worker for reading a book about struggles against the Klan in front of coworkers. Many others were new to me -- and I follow FIRE fairly closely. Greg has a talent for describing instances of censorship in a way to outrage me anew even if I have heard of them before. (For instance, I defy anyone to read about the University of Delaware's frankly Stalinist reeducation program for frosh without feeling disgust and contempt; Greg offers new details that led me to put the book down and go take a walk for a while.) But this is not merely a compilation of cases. Greg traces the history of campus censorship after the "political correctness" disputes of the 1990s, and weaves the incidents of censorship together to explain how different vaguely defined ideas (like "harassment" and "disruption" and "civility") are used in an unprincipled manner as trump cards to shut people up. Moreover, Greg rather convincingly illustrates how university censorship impacts the attitudes and tolerances of students, and explains why we should fear that students taught to submit to censorship and due process violations will not be reliable supporters of free expression or due process as voting adults.

The book "UNLEARNING LIBERTY" is an insightful look into academia today and although Lukianoff points to the many administrators that have run an 'underground railroad' of sorts to funnel abused students and faculty to legal remedy... there are far too many administrators and faculty who feel that it is their right to restrict the rights of others, punish the guilty without due process and destroy the careers and lives of the innocent. The book chronicles many of the cases of FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights in Education) over a ten year period. Some will make you mad, some will make you cry. This book should be given to every freshman entering a college or university today... so they know what their rights are... where they can appeal if they find themselves unfairly under the administrative boot... and, most importantly, that they are not alone. So, whether you are on the left or the right of the political spectrum, you will find this book quietly disturbing.... and a must read. Roger Freberg

Greg Lukianoff is one of the key figures in a 'watchdog' group called FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights in Education). Similar to a group like the ACLU, FIRE is devoted to protecting students' speech

and due process rights on college campuses. The fact is that most people don't seem to know - or are not concerned about - the extent to which many schools do censor student speech: from relegating student speech to small "free speech zones," to painfully ambiguous speech codes that ban everything from insensitive jokes to "inappropriately directed laughter," to out-and-out residence life programs designed around imbuing students with the "correct" political messages. This book not only profiles dozens of such cases, but makes a strong argument as to why all of us - whether in college or not - suffer as a result. These chapters are organized in a sort of 'chronological order' based on a student's academic career. So, the first chapter focuses on student rights in high schools (which FIRE doesn't per se deal with, but are important for setting up the rest of the book). The next several chapters focus on things like the 'residence life programs' mentioned earlier - like the one at my current university, the U of Delaware. (I won't explain it here; you can easily find out more online.) Later chapters focus on how free speech and expression is often stifled in the classroom and how, in some cases, students have been made to engage in political acts with which they may not disagree as a condition for passing a class or graduating a program! Lastly, we focus on issues where professors have been removed from departments for speech that someone somewhere judged to be offensive (like the history professor who was asked to resign for using the word 'wetback' in class....with the point of explaining the historical origins of the term). Throughout, Lukianoff argues as to why all of us - whether student, parent, or neither - should care about this. If we want students who become critical thinkers, innovators, and have a strong sense of individuality, then allowing free speech in those institutions that are supposed to aid students in all of these - colleges and universities - is a must. If we want to raise students who are capable of reasoned debate - as opposed either to students who learn to censor themselves automatically, or only 'discuss' amongst those with whom they already agree in an attempt to 'play it safe,' we need to model those things in the college and university environment. (Lukianoff also talks about a possible link between the 'quiet classroom syndrome' many professors know all too well and the punishing of student speech on campuses.) As it stands, Lukianoff cites several surveys which indicate that a very low number of students, and a lower number of faculty (!) believe it is 'safe' to hold unconventional opinions on campus. And if colleges and universities are preparing the leaders of the future, this uncomfortability with holding 'different' opinions will affect the overall social climate....for the worse, in my opinion. [It is also worth noting that Lukianoff discusses cases of censorship on the "left" and "right." Why is this worth bringing up? Because just as the ACLU often gets berated as a "leftist" institution, FIRE often gets branded a "right wing" institution. This is because a good many of the cases involve "conservative" folk getting in trouble in "liberal"

institutions. But, as Lukianoff explains, this is not because FIRE seeks out cases by political motive, but because as it stands, the majority of campuses seem to be those where "conservative" opinions are more likely to offend than "liberal" ones. But, yes, Lukianoff profiles a good number of cases where "liberal" groups or individuals were defended, also. Lukianoff himself identifies as a moderate democrat.]Anyhow, this is a really engaging and somewhat maddening book to read. While some of the stories Lukianoff recounts are quite maddening, what is worse is that Lukianoff is obviously frustrated that few seem to be alarmed. Students, in his experience, have often internalized and accepted a world of "free speech zones," applying for permits in order to pass out flyers and keeping one's mouth shut when one has an idea that may clash with the professor's or university's. I hope Lukianoff can convince more people about the seriousness of this issue.

Greg's book is important because it establishes convincingly that American institutions of higher education are teaching intolerance of dissent and acceptance of various forms of censorship. The cases Greg describes show that this is not a partisan issue -- the words and ideas being suppressed are being attacked from all sides of the political spectrum, and sometimes out of non-partisan hostility towards criticism. Young adults educated in modern American universities can't be expected to support freedom of expression as adult citizens if they are taught to disdain it as students.

Shhh. This is a great book, but it criticizes college administrators. If they find out I liked it or considered it to include important ideas, I might get into trouble. And my children might not even get into college. Oh, heck, I don't care. I'll shout it from the rooftops: WE ARE THROTTLING STUDENT VOICES AND THEREBY THROTTLING NEW IDEAS AND TEACHING OUR BRIGHTEST NEW THINKERS TO STOP THINKING. I feel much better now. See you in detention. - Dave P.S. This is a great book.

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