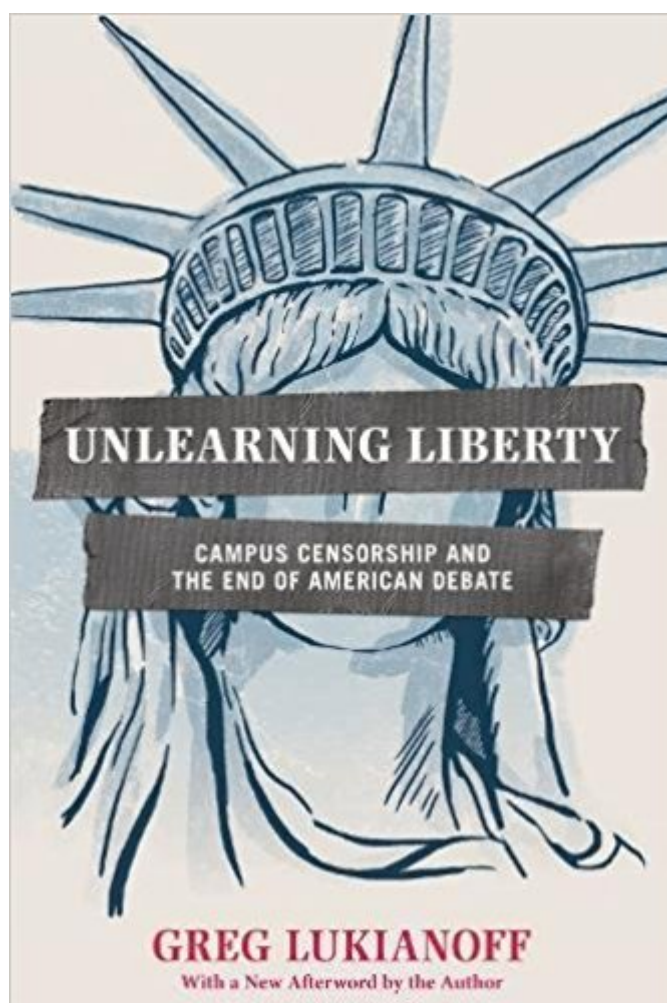


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# Unlearning Liberty: Campus Censorship And The End Of American Debate



## 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

"Lukianoff is an engaging exposé of the shocking repression of free speech on campus, combining good storytelling with clear principles and a serious purpose with a light touch." #151; Steven Pinker, Harvard College Professor of Psychology, Harvard University, author of *The Blank Slate* and *The Better Angels of Our Nature*"Unlearning Liberty is a must read book for anyone concerned about the constitutional future of our nation." #151; Nat Hentoff, journalist, author of *Free Speech for Me#151;But Not for Thee*"Here's a book full of sunlight#151;the best disinfectant for campus censorship." #151; Jonathan Rauch, guest scholar, Brookings Institution, author of *Kindly Inquisitors: The New Attacks on Free Thought#147;*Destined to be a classic work on freedom in America.~&#151; Donald Alexander Downs, Alexander Meiklejohn Professor of Political Science, Law, and Journalism, University of Wisconsin-Madison, author of *Restoring Free Speech and Liberty on Campus#147;*American universities have been described as islands of intolerance in a sea of freedom. *Unlearning Liberty* is a meticulous and inspiring guide on how to liberate the islands!~&#151; Christina Hoff Sommers, resident scholar, American Enterprise Institute, author of *The War Against Boys#147;*Lukianoff argues brilliantly and with wit for the importance of free expression in a society that hopes to produce free human beings rather than craven conformists.~&#151; Daphne Patai, professor, Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, University of Massachusetts Amherst, author of *What Price Utopia?#147;*Unlearning Liberty shows why free speech rights on campus are more important than ever, and how controversy is still a great teacher.~&#151; Mary Beth Tinker, plaintiff in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District#147;*Beautifully written and powerfully argued #133; an essential wake-up call!" #151; Nadine Strossen, Professor of Law, New York Law School, former President, American Civil Liberties Union (1991-2008), author of *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women's Rights* --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Greg Lukianoff is an attorney and president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. His writings on campus free speech have appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*, in addition to dozens of other publications. A regular columnist for the *Huffington Post*, he is a frequent guest on nationally syndicated radio programs and has made numerous television appearances, including on the *CBS Evening News* and *Stossel*. He received the 2008 *Playboy* Foundation Freedom of Expression Award and the 2010 Ford Hall Forum~&#151; Louis P. and Evelyn Smith First Amendment Award on behalf of FIRE. Lukianoff is a graduate of American University and Stanford Law School.

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.

"*Unlearning Liberty*" is a worthy successor to "*The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses*," written by Alan Kors and Harvey Silverglate, the co-founders of FIRE (the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education) and published in 1999. Greg Lukianoff has been President of FIRE since 2001, and most of the cases of free speech and due process violations on our college campuses that form the backbone of this lively and informative book, were referred to FIRE over the past dozen years. Since the problems of "political correctness" and the over-reaching of speech codes have been well known since "*The Shadow University*" and other exposés were published in the 1990s, it is very dispiriting to see that the pace at which freedoms are violated has not slackened. Lukianoff does not permit himself to be discouraged, however, and concludes the book with the hope that reforms targeted at making higher education more affordable may also fuel other reforms, including unchaining thought and speech on campus. Despite the fact that he earlier links the infringement of individual rights to the growth of the professional university administration, he does not, however, provide much hope or evidence that this is likely to happen. FIRE itself is one of the chief blocks to what seem to be an ever-increasing willingness of both

campus administration and government to limit freedom in order to protect students from hurt feelings and foster civility. The stories related here are chilling. They include, for example, an older student working his way through college found guilty of racial harassment merely for reading a book, an orientation program that literally trains its practitioners to stifle debate, several schools that have explicitly prohibited Christian groups from forming organizations thus depriving them of the rights of association while other kinds of student groups have free rein, guidelines circulated with syllabi that demand student agreement with debatable assumptions and graduate programs that expel students who dispute approved definitions of "social justice." Examples of such trends and practices are truly disturbing. One of the most frightening trends, as Lukianoff's many narratives of rights-violations makes clear, is the creation of regulations and laws by the Department of Education and state legislatures that literally require universities to violate the individual rights of their students (e.g., the "Dear Colleagues" letter issued by the DOE in 2011 requires a reduced standard of evidence to convict a student of harassment, including sexual assault). Lukianoff even explains how a recent Supreme Court decision misconstrues the first amendment. The law of the land is itself moving away from protecting our liberty, an evolution this book interestingly links to the flagging attention to vigorous debate and critical thinking fostered on campuses where students and faculty alike are increasingly afraid of expressing themselves bluntly and clearly. We are in danger of failing to educate the next generation of citizens to value central freedoms. My only criticism of this important and fluidly written book is its organization. Each chapter opens from the perspective of a fictional student first learning about, then applying to, finally being admitted to and attending a fictional college campus. The anecdotes and interests of the chapters follow those of this hypothetical young student, from censorship in high schools to hypocrisy in college publicity and admission to the excesses of orientation programs and infringement of freedom of association on campus. I found this structure confusing and would have preferred that the powerful evidence supplied by this book had been organized by a more rigorous topical method--e.g., a chapter on speech codes, followed by a chapter on the rise of the therapeutic approach to student life, followed by a chapter on due process, freedom of association and so forth. I also thought that the fictionalizing thought experiment that governs the book's structure blunts the brute reality of the true stories that it tells. But if Lukianoff's student-centered approach attracts more young readers, the loss of clarity will be worth the expansion of readership.

I'll freely admit to being a dyed-in-the-wool social Conservative, so obviously I can resonate with this book. However, Mr. Lukianoff (a lifelong Democrat) really makes a great case that all of us are

prone to censoring views we don't like and surrounding ourselves with only people and media that say what we want to hear. All of us need to resist these urges and instead engage in debate and dialogue with others. He focuses on colleges and the stories he relays just get your blood boiling. It is amazing that people don't see their own hypocrisy. Mr. Lukianoff really shows that stifling debate and dialogue is a huge cause of the current polarization in this country. When you think your side is right and the other side is evil, why treat them with respect? Ultimately, although he focuses on college, the attitudes he described can be witnessed on the nightly news every day in just about every facet of life. We do not have a "right to not be offended" and the sooner Americans internalize this message, and the many others in this book, the sooner we will all learn to come together even if we don't agree on everything.

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