

The Danger of Free Speech Suppression on Campuses for America's Future



by Lee Smith

America is in danger of raising a generation of weak leaders,

or one with no leaders at all, says a First Amendment activist who works on free speech issues on university campuses. Cherise Trump, executive director of Speech First, says the future of America depends on young men and women standing up for their rights in the very place designed for intellectual exploration and spiritual growth—college.

In a recent episode of [Over the Target Live](#), Trump explained how at schools across the country radical university activists—administrators, teachers, and students—are determined to impose their extremist ideology on the student body and punish dissenters.

“For far too long, we’ve seen people say that what happens on campus stays on campus,” says Trump. “And that is not only proven to not be true, but I think there’s another side of that coin that we should really be concerned about.” She says that “it’s not just a matter of the ideas bleeding into society, it’s also the people who are going to be operating for the next 20 or 30 years in leadership positions in this country.”

Will the rising generation consist of “people who just kept their mouths shut and kept their heads down and weren’t courageous enough to stand up?” asks Trump. “Or are they going to be folks who like to use tyrannical and fascistic tactics to go after their enemies and to shut down people who disagree with them? So neither of those are going to be good for the country.”

According to Trump, the problem isn’t just at elite Ivy League institutions or small liberal arts colleges.

“What a lot of people really need to understand is if you’re in a very red state that does not change the environment on your campus,” says Trump. “A lot of these campuses are still very far-left leaning when it comes to administrators and faculty and students.”

She explains that many of the students targeted by the ideological activists had little interest in politics at first.

“Most of these students just want to get their four-year degree and get a good job at the end of the day. And maybe in the process develop intellectually and learn a few things that they didn’t know before and really challenge themselves, but especially those who aren’t that interested in politics, they’re being pulled into this.”

Now they’re starting to push back, with the help of Trump (no relation to President Donald Trump) and her organization. Speech First, she says, has enjoyed considerable success over the last five years suing universities that have violated students’ free speech rights.

“Litigation takes time,” says Trump. “But the results are ... very long lasting.” It used to be that free speech wasn’t “just a conservative issue. ... It’s something that didn’t used to be a partisan issue, but campuses have definitely turned it into one.”

Historically, [college campuses](#) have always been more liberal, but there were always debates. “Now the discussions and the debates don’t even get to occur anymore,” she says. “And you’re immediately lambasted and identified as a bigot or a racist if you try to speak up against some of the woke dogma.”

Students are worried that even clothing choices might make them targets.

“In red states like Texas,” says Trump, “students have told me they will not wear cowboy boots to class ... and they don’t want to have opinions or be identified as having any position on anything. They want to be neutral to avoid confrontation.”

Unsurprisingly, students are worried that their reading might give them away, too.

"Students can't read certain books in their dorms because they don't want their roommates to see what those books are," says Trump. "They won't listen to certain podcasts around their roommates. Again, this is like something in a security state, something that you would only see in Soviet Russia or communist China."

Controversial reading material, says Trump, includes the Bible and classical literature and philosophy, such as Plato. "Students have told me they won't read certain things because they're afraid that it might show that they are more intellectually inclined towards democratic republics."

Another controversial book is the late 18th-century collection of essays and articles urging Americans to ratify the Constitution of the United States. "There's concern about being seen reading 'The Federalist Papers,'" says Trump.

What makes "The Federalist Papers" a U.S. college version of samizdat literature? Because, Trump explains, it "outlines and justifies and explains why the Constitution was written the way that it was, and it really breaks down what the Founders were thinking during the writing of the Constitution. ... And if you are in a program, ... where [law professors] say that the Constitution is a racist document, and you're reading something that justifies it, you're immediately going to be identified as someone who actually believes in that."

Students are worried that their peers may snitch on them by filing a "bias report."

"It's something out of like East Germany with the Stasi," says Trump. "They want to encourage students to report on each other anonymously. They want this to be a regular activity. They're not just saying report these extreme incidents, they're saying report literally anything you see or hear."

That might include, says Trump, "microaggression, triggering," like "not using proper pronouns or gender affirmation

language.” She explains that “students are getting these emails saying, ‘You’ve been anonymously recorded for a joke that you said. Please come into the dean’s office.’ ... It’s just something out of like an Orwell story or something, but it’s really nerve-wracking because we’ve seen the stuff happen in history, we know these tactics, and now they’re being utilized on campuses.”

Because faculty and administrators are part of the problem, students are turning elsewhere for answers—or just for an opportunity to ask questions. Trump says they’re joining campus chapters of Turning Point USA or Young Americans for Liberty or attending College Republicans’ meetings.

“They’re very secretive about it,” she says. She notes that “they might not actually even be that conservative, they might be relatively moderate. They just want to be able to have these discussions and hear multiple sides of the issue and really challenge themselves.”

And they are. Campus radicalism is forcing students who weren’t politically active to get more engaged. By learning the issues driving [woke ideology](#), students are arming themselves with information and standing up for their rights. Their awakening is likely to determine America’s future.

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