

The Eagle

Give me liberty, or give me safe spaces?

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In the era of safe spaces, trigger warnings and cultural appropriation, it is as if college students don't understand the concept of free speech in society, let alone its necessity in getting the most out of college. Rather than engaging in a marketplace of ideas, my peers opt for coddling and whining at the slightest discomfort and call the issue offensive.

Don't get me wrong, this is no front upon the issue of crimes or other problems that are, well, problems. However, here is the real issue: if you're not exposed to discussions that challenge you and subsequently cause a degree of discomfort, how will you ever learn how to handle a situation in the "real world" that does the same?

In this "real world," the stakes are high, your job and very livelihood are on the line. This "real world" doesn't allow you to skip class because you're too mentally scared because your candidate wasn't elected. This "real world" doesn't provide you a "safe space" for you to be protected from those who differ and disagree with you. This "real world" will charge you for vandalism for displays that you destroy because they don't support your rhetoric.

After all, doesn't that defy what you're shelling out tens of thousands for? In college, we're supposed to be learning how to communicate with others, exchange ideas and broaden our experience, but it seems that in today's world, the fear of offending someone is all that's on anyone's mind.

You see, that's where things change. Everyone is all for free speech until something "offends" them. But the truth is, just because something offends you, doesn't mean someone else doesn't have the right to say it. Because without free speech, especially for those critical of the current administration, you would have no right to say how much you despise the Trump administration.

On Tuesday April 18, AU Young Americans for Liberty hosted David Boaz, the Executive Vice-President of the Cato Institute. As you can imagine, free speech on college campuses is always a hot topic. But interestingly enough, Boaz discussed something different, something that extended beyond your typical free speech discussion. He talked about one's freedom to discriminate against anyone you want. You don't want to hire someone for a job because you don't like them? Fine, don't. Don't want to bake a cake for someone's wedding? Okay, don't. Don't want to sell your product to someone because of who they are? Well, don't.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying this is right. And while members of the executive board and those in attendance may have disagreed with all or some of these points, perhaps to the point

of discomfort, the ability of the group to engage in discussion like this helps to reaffirm what college is all about. But didn't Boaz talk about the intimidating issue of discrimination? Yes. But did people hide from this different viewpoint? No. Members exercised their right to ask questions in the Q&A, giving them an opportunity to explore the topic and challenge the assertions.

But just because a speaker discussed a differing topic doesn't mean that we shouldn't be exposed to it. Ideas were brought up and ideas were challenged. Without the freedom of speech what can you say or do to confront something like this if you don't agree with it? Nothing.

The beauty of this nation comes from the idea that we are free to do and say as we please, as long as we are not putting anyone else in imminent danger. The fact is, someone stating their differing opinion only puts you in the danger of being exposed to someone else's point of view. Sure, "hate speech" is a problem. But "hate speech," unless it is a call to action commanding someone to commit some act, is still freedom of speech.

The affronts made upon free speech in U.S. colleges are just the start, and I'm not just talking about politics either. If we continue to limit young adults' free speech and provide "safe spaces" on college campuses, how would our nation function? How would we function as a nation with a generation rising who is not in support of free speech? A generation that only supports free speech when it's convenient? The fact, is we wouldn't. We would raise generations to come that don't understand the importance of universal free speech. We would live in a nation that censors its citizens and prevents anyone from saying anything it doesn't like. Sounds like hell to me.

How can we maintain this free society, when we don't even promote free speech in the areas that foster our growth? The answer is that we can't. If we don't have these difficult discussions in college, we won't ever. And how awful would it be to be surrounded by people in this nation that you can't engage with. Now be assured, I'm not advocating for anyone to go out and purposefully disrespect or offend another, but keep in mind that your free speech is just as important as anyone else's, and it must be exercised if we wish to keep it. So, go and talk about your ideas and engage with others. Please don't let your fear of hearing from someone else prevent you from advocating for your first amendment rights.