

# Liberty Nation News

## Georgetown Embraces Cancel Culture As Americans Recognize Its Danger

**More than half of Americans are afraid of speaking their mind, and Georgetown demonstrates why.**

**By: Scott D. Cosenza, Esq.**

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Nearly six in ten Americans feel the nation's democracy is threatened because people are afraid to voice their opinions. That's from a new survey by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) that explored Americans' attitudes on free speech and cancel culture. The results are cause for both hope and fear. *Liberty Nation* spoke with FIRE lawyer Adam Goldstein in an exclusive interview about the survey and the latest victim of campus cancel culture, erstwhile law lecturer at Georgetown University, Ilya Shapiro.

### **Cancel Culture Is Real**

FIRE's survey measures support for free speech and how cancel culture impacts Americans' free expression. Seventy-three percent of respondents knew of the term cancel culture, and 59% of those surveyed responded "Yes" to the question "Do you think there is a growing cancel culture that is a threat to our freedom?" Goldstein, FIRE's senior research counsel, was encouraged by the response to that question. He likened the statistic to a quote often used in addiction recovery, "the first step is admitting you have a problem."

Georgetown certainly does. FIRE's mission is protecting free speech on campus, like Ilya Shapiro's. Georgetown Law just suspended Shapiro for criticizing President Joe Biden's promise to exclusively consider a black woman to replace Justice Stephen Breyer, who recently announced his retirement from the Supreme Court. Would-be Professor Shapiro had resigned from heading the Cato Institute's Center for Constitutional Studies to become executive director of Georgetown Law's Center for the Constitution. He was supposed to start Feb. 1 but was suspended before his first day because of two tweets he sent on Jan. 26.

The tweets suggested that owing to the nature of Mr. Biden's selection criteria, the role would be filled by a "lesser" candidate, rather than the most qualified person for the job – whom Shapiro suggested was Sri Srinivasan, the progressive chief judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals in D.C.

He further stated that the eventual nominee would always have an asterisk by her name, due to the method by which she will have been chosen. The description of a black female candidate as “lesser” prompted outrage both within the Georgetown campus and on social media.

Mr. Shapiro deleted the messages and apologized, saying, “I regret my poor choice of words, which undermined my message that nobody should be discriminated against for his or her skin color.” His response was not enough for the denizens of Twitter or Bill Treanor, the law school’s dean. Treanor suspended Shapiro, writing “pending an investigation into whether he violated our policies and expectations on professional conduct, non-discrimination, and anti-harassment, the results of which will inform our next steps.”

### **Freedom Of Speech, Just Watch What You Say...**

Dean Treanor’s actions reminded Mr. Goldstein of another FIRE case at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The Alaska Fairbanks case resulted in a staunch defense of free speech on campus. The institute’s president issued a memorandum, stating, “What I want to make clear and unambiguous is that responses to complaints or demands for action regarding constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of speech CANNOT BE QUALIFIED [emphasis his].” While Georgetown, as a private school, need not protect speech on constitutional grounds, it has a moral obligation to do so to defend academic freedoms.

Goldstein asked, “What are we investigating?” adding that surely Shapiro and all other professors would be less likely to speak openly due to the inquiry, even if Shapiro is reinstated. The vital facet for Goldstein is that “the process is the punishment.”

Seventy-six percent of those surveyed by FIRE said that, at least sometimes, “I am afraid to say what I believe because of the potential consequences.” The study revealed that Republicans are much more likely to be stifled by cancel culture than Democrats. The entire questionnaire has results broken down by party association and shows those who state a GOP affiliation are much more likely to be staunch defenders of the First Amendment. For instance, 31% of Democrats thought expression labeled “hate speech” should be protected, while 47% of Republicans did.

### **Good News – Bad News**

A third of all surveyed said free speech was the most important right they had. While that is good news, 30% of all respondents think “hateful” viewpoints shouldn’t be protected. Free speech advocates still have much work to do convincing these Americans of the necessity of free speech for a free existence. Mr. Goldstein said, “There is no way to codify hate speech that doesn’t wind up being used by the powerful to suppress speech they disfavor at the moment – the campus is a great place to see the failure of hate speech in action.”

If the survey and full-court press of support for Ilya Shapiro isn’t enough, FIRE announced its annual “10 Worst Colleges for Free Speech” list on Wednesday. Georgetown appears in the #4 slot this year. *LN* asked Goldstein if Dean Treanor’s actions bumped the institution onto the list, and he said no, it was bad enough to earn a spot without this latest episode.