



Georgetown lecturer Ilya Shapiro hopes Supreme Court tweet controversy helps 'broken' political discourse

Public debate is clearly broken in the United States, Shapiro says

By David Rutz

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In media news today, MSNBC hosts decry the move to loosen COVID restrictions, a CNN medical analyst says she supports Democrat-led states dropping school mask mandates, and 'The View's' Sunny Hostin drastically overstates the percentage of COVID deaths among younger people.

The Georgetown University Law Center lecturer at the center of a cancel culture controversy over a poorly worded tweet hopes his situation can help improve the fraught state of American political discourse.

Ilya Shapiro, who's under "investigation" after a critical tweet about President Biden's pledge to choose a Black woman for the Supreme Court, told Fox News Digital that public debate is clearly broken in the United States.

"Well, I'm still going through this storm," he said. "I just think that this is a moment where we can realize as a country, because I think this is bigger than me and Georgetown, that the way we go about discussing matters of great import is broken, and I'm hoping that my experience now can help in some way disrupt that and have people realize that there's a better way of discussing controversies."

Critics erupted

Shapiro, the newly slated executive director of the Georgetown Center for the Constitution, has been on administrative leave since last week after he fretted that a "lesser black woman" would get the Supreme Court slot instead of Shapiro's preferred progressive choice. Critics erupted that he was suggesting Biden's choice would be inferior due to her race, but he and his defenders insist he was making a standard critique of affirmative action.

"Objectively best pick for Biden is Sri Srinivasan, who is solid prog & v smart. Even has identity politics benefit of being first Asian (Indian) American. But alas doesn't fit into the latest intersectionality hierarchy so we'll get lesser black woman. Thank heaven for small favors?" he wrote on Twitter. "Because Biden said he's only consider[ing] black women for SCOTUS, his nominee will always have an asterisk attached. Fitting that the Court takes up affirmative action next term."

Following an uproar online, Shapiro, a scholar on the Supreme Court and former vice president of the Cato Institute, apologized for a poor choice of words, deleted the tweet, and also issued a message to the Georgetown community.

"A person's dignity and worth simply do not, and should not, depend on any immutable characteristic," he wrote. "Those who know me know that I am sincere about these sentiments, and I would be more than happy to meet with any of you who have doubts about the quality of my heart."

However, at least 900 students have signed a letter from the Georgetown Black Law Student Association calling for Shapiro's firing, and other Georgetown professors have called Shapiro's tweet racist and sexist. Georgetown Law Center Dean William Treanor said the school would investigate whether he violated "anti-discrimination" policies, and in a message to students said Shapiro had used "demeaning language."

"Ilya Shapiro's tweets are antithetical to the work that we do here every day to build inclusion, belonging, and respect for diversity," Treanor wrote.

Georgetown didn't respond to a request for comment.

Avoiding engagement

A chastened Treanor took questions from the BLSA last week, where students called for Shapiro's firing and made various demands, such as having a designated place on campus to cry, according to National Review. Conservative and moderate students described to Fox News Digital being ejected from group chats with fellow students about the situation if they defended Shapiro.

"Cancel culture is a way to not have to engage in debate with us ... Because you hurt my feelings, you can't come here and discuss your idea," a third-year student said.

The student described the campus approach to freedom of expression as "toxic." Another who grew up poor in New Jersey with an immigrant mother from Ecuador was derided for being "privileged" after backing a classmate defending Shapiro. There's concern from students that more moderate and conservative-leaning academics could avoid seeking employment at elite campuses.

"If you're a conservative, you might not want to deal with for example the response Mr. Shapiro has gotten," second-year student Timothy Harper said. "If you express your views online, you might just avoid this kind of job altogether."

While not a celebrity like Whoopi Goldberg or podcasting star like Joe Rogan, Shapiro joined them in making national news in the latest chapter of cancel culture, whose definition varies depending on the speaker. In that spirit, he said he'd love to reach out to Goldberg, who was suspended last week from "The View" for false comments that the Holocaust wasn't about race. Spotify has been pressured from the left to drop Rogan for past times he used the N-word which he said were out of context, as well as for his content on COVID-19.

Whoops! We couldn't access this Tweet.

"All I'll say is that if this can be a moment to turn down the heat and detoxify our national discourse, I'd be happy to appear with, whether it's Whoopi Goldberg and Joe Rogan," he said. "Bill Maher has done a lot on cancel culture. Whatever the vehicles might be for changing the way that we address controversies, I'm all for that ... I'm happy to be a vehicle for improving the tenor of political discourse."

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— Ilya Shapiro

Shapiro couldn't comment on Georgetown's investigation while it's underway.

"All I'll say is, I'm looking forward to a professional and efficient process, although there's not much to investigate, and I look forward to being vindicated based on the university's policies on free expression," he said.

Media support

While the heavily liberal student body might be against him, Shapiro has taken note of the wide spectrum of media support he's gotten. Multiple columnists and outlets have called for Georgetown to not dismiss him, from Michelle Goldberg in The New York Times – "political speech that should be protected by basic notions of academic freedom" – to Robby Soave in Reason – "it would be tacitly endorsing the unfair smear that he is a racist and a sexist."

"I never expected to make national news in this particular way, and I'm sure I don't see all of the things that are being written, but I do see a lot, and it has been gratifying to see outlets and writers that indeed are across [the] ideological spectrum defending the freedom of speech and academic expression," Shapiro said.

If nothing else, he said he would reconsider how to employ Twitter going forward, particularly after transitioning from a think tank like the Cato Institute to a law school campus. He can't reverse the clock on the situation, but he did clarify what he meant about Biden's upcoming Supreme Court decision.

"I think the pool of candidates for high government office should not be restricted by race and gender," he said shortly.

That would certainly fit under 280 characters.