



Georgetown Law students ask for 'reparations' and a place to 'cry' because of Ilya Shapiro's tweets

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Georgetown Law students held a sit-in demonstration on campus Tuesday to demand the immediate firing of Ilya Shapiro, a libertarian legal scholar who was recently hired as a lecturer and administrator at the school. They also called for a "reparations" package for black students to compensate them for missing class to attend the protest and asked for a safe space to "cry," requests that school administrators reportedly took seriously.

Shapiro, the vice president and director of the Robert A. Levy Center for Constitutional Studies at the Cato Institute, was put on administrative leave Monday because of a controversy regarding several tweets he posted on Jan. 26. Those tweets were critical of President Joe Biden's promise to exclusively nominate a black woman to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Shapiro's critics accuse him of harboring racist views towards black women and are calling for his cancellation by the university. The students conducting the sit-in declared in an announcement that the school did not go far enough, and that "Shapiro's rhetoric is not welcome at Georgetown Law, period."

"A coalition of Georgetown Law Students will gather for a sit-in calling for the immediate termination of Ilya Shapiro," the Georgetown Black Law Student Association said Monday.

The sit-in was live-streamed on the BLSA's Instagram page, National Review Online's Nate Hochman reported. Georgetown Law Dean William Treanor attended and answered questions from students, along with Mitch Bailin, the Georgetown University Law Center associate vice president and dean of students; Sheila Foster, the associate dean for equity and inclusion; and Amy Uelmen, the director of the school's "Mission & Ministry" program.

According to Hochman, Dean Treanor told the assembled students he was "appalled" by Shapiro's "painful" tweets and promised to "listen," "learn," and "do better" after hearing the complaints from students. While he emphatically apologized, he would not commit to taking further disciplinary action against Shapiro beyond investigating whether his tweets violated school policy.

“Since we’re a private institution, the First Amendment doesn’t apply to us,” Treanor said. “It’s not the First Amendment that’s the university’s guideline.” But he added, “on the other hand, the university does have a free speech and expression policy which binds us.”

Shapiro had tweeted that in his opinion, the best person Biden could nominate for the Supreme Court is Sri Srinivasan, an American of Indian descent who is currently the chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Observing that Biden instead pledged to nominate a black woman, Shapiro said Srinivasan “doesn't fit into latest intersectionality hierarchy so we'll get lesser black woman.”

After online backlash led by Slate writer Mark Joseph Stern, Shapiro deleted his tweet and apologized for his “poor choice of words, which undermined my message that nobody should be discriminated against for his or her skin color.” He expressed confidence that an investigation by the school would determine his tweet “didn't violate any university rule or policy, and indeed is protected by Georgetown policies on free expression.”

The students at the sit-in were not satisfied by Treanor's appeal to school policy on free expression.

Hochman reported that the crowd accused him of being “dishonest” and demanded action be taken against Shapiro, who was set to become the executive director of the law school's Center for the Constitution. One student reportedly suggested that the school defund the center “if, worst-case scenario,” Shapiro “were allowed to remain.” She insisted that the ideas expressed in his tweets can't “be divorced” from the center going forward.

“If Shapiro is there, then his ideas and his rhetoric will be the center,” she said.

Another student questioned why the center exists in the first place, noting that its current director, Randy Barnett, is a constitutional originalist.

“Why was it created?” she asked. “Because so far it seems like it has done more harm than good.”

“You can do as much diversity training as you want with staff,” she continued. “But I feel like that center has a certain ideology ... so I really want you to defend why we really need it, beyond, like, you know, free speech, and beyond diversity of opinion. I really want us to think critically about why we still need it.”

Treanor said the center is “important” and added that he wanted to “draw a line between conservatism and things that are racist,” according to Hochman.

Student demands did not stop at having Shapiro fired and the center where he is supposed to work defunded. One student asked the dean to cover for the classes they had missed to attend the sit-in as part of a larger “reparations” package for black students. In a follow-up question, she asked for a designated place on campus where traumatized would-be lawyers can go to cry.

“Is there an office they can go to?” she asked. “I don’t know what it would look like, but if they want to cry, if they need to break down, where can they go? Because we’re at a point where students are coming out of class to go to the bathroom to cry.”

“And this is not in the future,” she added. “This is today.”

That request was taken seriously by school administrators, Hochman reported.

"It is really, really hard to walk out of class or a meeting in tears, and you should always have a place on campus where you can go," Dean Bailin answered. "And if you're finding that you're not getting the person that you want to talk to or not getting the space that you need, reach out to me anytime — anytime — and we will find you space."