



Ilya Shapiro controversy: Georgetown Law students speak out against liberal intolerance, cancel culture

Moderate, conservative law students describe 'toxic' environment for free expression

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February 5, 2022

Fox News contributor Jonathan Turley on attempts by the left to 'cancel' Joe Rogan by pressuring corporations.

An uproar over a Georgetown University Law Center lecturer's tweet about President Biden's Supreme Court pick has some students speaking out about cancel culture and the intolerance for free expression they've witnessed on campus.

Ilya Shapiro, a constitutional scholar formerly of the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, was among the voices to criticize Biden's vow to nominate a Black woman for the Supreme Court, but he voiced his dismay in an admittedly poorly worded tweet on Jan. 26. Shapiro called for Biden to nominate progressive, Obama-appointed Judge Sri Srinivasan, an Indian-American, but said because of the president's pledge he would instead pick a "lesser black woman."

Recently named as executive director and senior lecturer at the Georgetown Center for the Constitution, Shapiro was pilloried after his tweet was flagged as racist by left-wing Slate writer Mark Joseph Stern, a Hoya alumnus, and others.

Georgetown Law Center Dean William Treanor announced Shapiro would be placed on leave pending an investigation this week, among them for whether he violated "anti-discrimination" policies, and accusations against Shapiro of "demeaning language" in a message to students. Shapiro deleted the tweets about Biden's pick and later said, "I regret my poor choice of words, which undermine my message that no one should be discriminated against for his or her gender or skin color."

However, it hasn't ended there, with more than 900 students signing a letter from the Georgetown Black Law Student Association calling for Shapiro's firing, and other Georgetown

professors calling Shapiro's tweet racist and sexist. This week, there was a sit-in led by the BLSA. The group made demands, among them Shapiro's termination, having a designated place to "cry" on campus, and allowing a Black student to sit-in on every campus hiring process. At one point, according to National Review, a chastened Treanor told students he wanted to "draw a line between conservatism and things that are racist."

"It is exactly the typical mold that we've been seeing," a third-year conservative Georgetown Law student who wished to remain anonymous told Fox News Digital. "They throw a tantrum and the administration responds."

"I think the dean has done a poor job in communicating his response about this whole situation and that's what's fueled this radical activism that we're seeing on campus right now," second-year student Travis Nix said.

The nonpartisan Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) wrote in the Washington Post that firing Shapiro would harm Georgetown's credibility and desired reputation as a place of open, robust discussion.

That reputation is being put to the test with the Shapiro controversy. In messages to students obtained by Fox News Digital, Treanor called "racial stereotypes" a "pernicious force in our society" and said Shapiro's tweets were antithetical to the school's commitment to "diversity."

Some conservative students said that goal isn't applied evenly at Georgetown, one of the nation's largest and most prestigious law schools, whose Washington location has made it a hotbed of political activism and discussion.

"It's very toxic," the third-year student said. "I've never raised my hand and said anything [about] my conservative view points. I don't feel comfortable in it. My professors have been tweeting anti-conservative rhetoric. There's no space for a conservative to speak."

"Seems to me as a conservative student that I was already hesitant to share my views in class, especially larger classes," second-year student Timothy Harper said. "I think the administration's response has sort of shown that caution to be justified."

Harper and other defenders said Shapiro's remark was plainly a critique of affirmative action and nothing more pernicious than that.

"The administration's response suggests that either certain conservative perspectives aren't really welcome on campus or that if you're going to express those opinions, you have to be extremely careful to word them perfectly," he said. "Otherwise, there will be some blowback, either from the administration or other students."

Some of that blowback from other students has come in the form of being ejected from group chats. Nix showed Fox News Digital a message he said got him ejected from a GroupMe for second-year students when defending a fellow student, Rafael Nuñez, who was being accused of being "privileged." Nuñez, the son of an Ecuadorian immigrant mother, described himself to Fox News Digital as center-left in his politics and troubled by the liberal intolerance for defenses of Shapiro on display in the group.

He, too, was ejected from the group chat when he stood up for a student speaking out against the calls for Shapiro's head. He said it was "ridiculous" to be accused by other students of color of having privilege, given his background growing up poor in New Jersey.

"I wasn't defending the tweet, I think the tweet was in bad taste," Nuñez said of what Shapiro wrote. "It was very troubling, the response, It's an echo chamber. We were told to not give opinions because our opinions don't matter ... If that sub-set of students wants that to happen, then they should make that clear. They get on this moral high ground that what they believe is the only true and best belief."

"For a fellow person of color to tell me that I'm privileged, that I defend these tweets because I have low self-esteem, and I'm trying to make myself feel better ... They're being hypocrites," he added. "They're doing exactly what they accuse others of doing, of judging others, generalizing other populations about knowing their experience."

He said he didn't bother to tell the administration about how he was treated, telling Fox News Digital that if Shapiro was possibly on the chopping block, Georgetown might not hesitate to yank his scholarship.

In the GroupMe, a progressive student suggested that some others sounded like they "belong in the confederacy."

"Fed Soc is a helluva drug," another student said in a group chat, referring to the campus' right-leaning Federalist Society membership that espouses a textualist interpretation of the Constitution.

"Overall, I would say it's pretty poor," Nix said of the ability to speak freely on campus. "There's a vocal minority that doesn't respect conservative or libertarian ideas at all ... When you get people one on one and talk to them in person, it's a lot better I think. But when they're in this group setting, there's definitely not a lot of respect for the ideas that I and some other students in Federalist Society hold at all."

Asked whether the campaign against Shapiro seemed like "cancel culture" in action, Nix said, "100 percent."

"People read and listen to everything in the worst light and try to get them fired over it and get them silenced and try to basically make everybody just go out in the media and Twitter ... and just attack them so they have to apologize, and then their employer might fire them," he said.

"They're trying to get him fired over comments that don't warrant firing. So, whether it's cancel culture or whatever it is, I think it's wrong," Harper said.

While the campus is divided, voices across the political spectrum have risen up to defend Shapiro, or at the very least, say dismissing him would be a drastic mistake. Articles in National Review, Reason, and The Week have written critically about campus efforts to oust Shapiro. Liberal New York Times columnist Michelle Goldberg scolded Georgetown for putting Shapiro on leave in the first place and wrote that threatening his job undermined the concept of academic

freedom. Other liberal voices who detest Shapiro have also argued against firing him, including Mark Joseph Stern.

Georgetown's consistency on when it calls out what it views as discriminatory actions is also in question.

The Washington Free Beacon noted that Georgetown Law professor Heidi Li Feldman appeared to violate the anti-discrimination policies Treanor claims to hold dear when she tweeted in 2020 that "law professors and law school deans" should "not support applications from our students to clerk for" judges appointed by then-President Trump. "To work for such a judge indelibly marks a lawyer as lacking in the character and judgment necessary for the practice of law," Feldman said, without facing any known consequences.

Núñez said the situation has made him concerned for the future of the legal profession.

"I think it's a bad precedent," he said. "We are becoming lawyers. We have to defend both sides. We have to learn how to listen to other points of view. How are we ever going to progress and learn and grow as a nation if we just block out one side? One way or another, conservative or liberal."

The third-year student said she once wouldn't tell a classmate that she had worked in a Republican U.S. senator's office, because Feldman was in earshot.

In the letter she sent to Treanor, she said firing Shapiro would send a message that all mistakes are unforgivable, and that she had unfortunately been right to silence herself in class.

"If they're going to accept conservative students, they can't treat us like the red-headed stepchildren once they get in," she said.

Georgetown Law didn't respond to a request for comment.