

# STL JEWISH LIGHT

## The growing illiberalism of liberalism

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In my earlier life I was a liberal, drawn by liberalism's traditional focus on individual liberty, open-mindedness and other such values. However, as I explained in my 2002 "Class Warfare" book: "All the while ... as I was aging, I was becoming more and more alienated from the left. ... It is not that I have abandoned liberalism. Rather, liberalism has abandoned me."

That was 2002. The illiberalism of liberalism has only exacerbated since, today's liberalism being unrecognizable from its roots.

A common narrative the liberal media promote these days is that President Donald Trump is an authoritarian, if not outright fascist. We hear speculation that he may refuse to leave the White House if defeated in November, that he has sent jackbooted armed troops into cities such as Portland, Oregon to impose law and order, that he is using executive orders to bypass Congress and that he exhibits other manifestations of dictatorship.

I am not a fan of Trump. However, I would argue that such characterizations of Trump are wildly exaggerated and, in any case, are surely no worse than the kind of illiberalism that the Democratic Party and its brand of liberalism now represent.

I am not just talking about Democratic proposals by Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other high-profile party figures to triple the size of the federal budget, even though the growth of Big Government itself is a recipe for more, not less, regulation and coercion over how we live our lives.

No, I am more concerned about the threat to our most precious liberties, particularly free speech, posed by the Left not only through government restrictions (should the Democrats take control of both the executive and legislative branches) but also through the larger cultural institutions it already controls (academia, Hollywood, media and big tech).

There is no question that liberals now dominate the latter sectors of American society, from Ivy League professoriates to entertainment industry celebrities to most newsrooms to the corporate boards of Apple, Google, Twitter and Microsoft. And there is no question as well that these elites who shape our national conversations about race and all other matters have had a negative effect on free expression and tolerance for viewpoint diversity, manifested by their language policing related to “political correctness,” “speech codes,” “safe spaces,” “microaggressions,” “trigger warnings” and, most recently, the “cancel culture.”

Although right-wingers at times can be a source of curbs on free speech, the restrictions today are coming mostly from the left.

A new CATO Institute survey finds that “self-censorship is on the rise in the United States” as “nearly two-thirds – 63% – of Americans say the political climate these days prevents them from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive.”

Interestingly, only the far left feels comfortable expressing their views in the current environment. The CATO study says that “strong liberals stand out ... as the only political group who feel they can express themselves.” A majority of centrist liberals (52%), moderates (64%) and especially conservatives (77%) feel they have to self-censor. In other words, it is not some alt-right fringe group that is being silenced, but a majority of the country.

Even thoughtful liberals such as Steven Pinker of Harvard have conceded there is a problem. He said at a talk he gave in St. Louis that academia’s obsession with diversity goes only so far, as universities typically “want students and faculty who look different but think alike,” that is, subscribe to liberal orthodoxy.