

My New, Courageous Friend

Kirsten Powers is a brave person. With her new book, *The Silencing: How the Left is Killing Free Speech*, Powers takes on what she (quite properly) calls “the illiberal left.” But even though she has the facts—and 69 pages of end notes to support them—she is going to be excoriated, lampooned, ridiculed, lambasted, and insulted by every leftist columnist and television commentator who believes himself or herself to be the nation’s all-knowing arbiter of truth and justice. Powers had better have a thick skin, because many of the people she is calling out for their obvious intolerance have thin skins.

To people like me—political junkies and close followers of current events—almost all of the examples of intolerance succinctly yet expertly described by Powers will be familiar. To those who are less involved in following the political left and its tactics, some of the incidents related by Powers may appear, at first encounter, to be aberrations. But those examples take on added significance when gathered into one book, presented one after the other. *The Silencing* is a rapid-fire exposition of the contempt many on the left have for anyone who dares to disagree with them. The gutsy Powers is shooting on full automatic, with live ammunition, and she takes no prisoners.

In reading *The Silencing*, I almost immediately thought of a statement I made in the opening pages of my multi-volume work, *The Complete Obama Timeline*. I wrote, “Conservatives seek freedom *to*, while leftists seek freedom *from*. Conservatives seek to fix *government*, while leftists seek to fix *people*.” Obama himself offered unintended support for my statement when he said, a few days ago, “[I]f we’re going to change how [House Speaker] John Boehner and [Senator Majority Leader] Mitch McConnell think, we’re going to have to change how our body politic thinks, which means we’re going to have to change how the media reports on these issues...” Obama is not concerned with *facts* and using them to persuade people to change their minds; he is eager to *change and manipulate how people think*.

That is precisely the mindset of the illiberal left that Powers brings to our attention. But she also exposes leftists who go beyond Obama’s Orwellian suggestion, providing example after example of individuals and organizations that would prohibit people from even *expressing* their thoughts. Powers writes, “Instead of using persuasion and rhetoric to make a positive case for their causes and views, they work to delegitimize the person making the argument through character assassination, demonization, and dehumanizing tactics.” “This intolerance is not a passive matter of opinion. It’s an aggressive, illiberal impulse to silence people.” This is not changing how people think. It is imprisoning their minds and beating them into submission.

The illiberal left tactics are evident, Powers points out, in many areas, such as same-sex marriage (where even expressing the same view that Obama had previously held cost Brendan Eich his CEO position at Mozilla), rape (where merely questioning the validity of clearly outrageous college rape statistics was enough to get Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist George Will disinvited from speaking events and generated demands that *The Washington Post* stop running his columns), and abortion (where ideological purity on

the left demands that everyone support abortion up to and including a baby's due date). To the illiberal left, agreeing to disagree is not permitted. One must submit or be destroyed.

Those on the illiberal left "are authoritarians at heart," writes Powers. "[T]hey know what Americans should think and what information they should consume." That explains how, as I note in *The Complete Obama Timeline*, someone like former Obama advisor Cass Sunstein can advocate a "fairness doctrine" for the Internet and suggest that angry e-mails be *prohibited* from being sent for a 24-hour cooling off period. Sunstein even proposes "...a Civility Check that can accurately tell whether the e-mail you're about to send is angry and caution you, 'warning: this appears to be an uncivil e-mail. Do you really and truly want to send it?'" Even more alarmingly, Sunstein wants the Internet to *automatically* post links to opposing opinions. An article that disputes man-caused global warming could, for example, be *required* to display links to sites that promote the "Gore doctrine." People like Sunstein would have been laughed out of the Democrat Party just a few decades ago. Today they are teaching your children at colleges and universities—and running the Democrat National Committee.

How has the word "but" been somehow attached to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution? We have gone from, "That offends you? Too bad. This is America!" to "Well, Pamela Geller has the right to express an opposition to oppose violent jihad, *but...*" But *what*? Although the Garland, Texas jihadist attack took place after Powers' book went to press, she nevertheless addresses where some of those "buts" come from: "Given the choice of being shunned by their peers or losing their job for a personal view, [most people] will always choose silence over confrontation." As a result, white office workers pretended to pay no attention when black co-workers cheered the O. J. Simpson verdict in October 1995. So-called "objective" journalists excoriated Pamela Geller because not doing so might mean losing a promotion—or an invitation to a cocktail party at the tony Manhattan apartment of someone higher up on the media ladder. Rational and emotional revulsion to late-term abortion is kept bottled up inside because daring to express an opinion might mean being reviled as a "Fundamentalist Evangelical wacko."

The illiberal left also moves the goalposts and makes it impossible to satisfy its demands. "The illiberal left," notes Powers, "loves to call Republicans racist for not having enough black and brown people representing them, but as soon as one is elected, the delegitimizing commences. They aren't 'real black or brown people' or they are self-hating sellouts and traitors." Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is therefore an "uncle Tom," Condoleezza Rice is an "Oreo," Congresswoman Mia Love (R-UT) is a "house n--ger," and Senator Tim Scott (R-SC) is where he is only because a Republican "ventriloquist can always find a good dummy." An illiberal leftist, of course, can make such statements and remain in Congress or on MSNBC, while everyone else must watch every word he or she says to avoid persecution by the PC police.

We have gone from liberty-demanding colonists who told King George III to stick his tea tax up his royal arse to a nation of cowards who will either keep quiet or say things we don't believe because we want to be thought of as being on the same side as Oprah, Jon

Stewart, and the Kardashians. Why are we afraid to state our opinions? This is not to suggest we should be rude when expressing disagreement. But simply disagreeing with someone is not a “microaggression” that demands the establishment of “safe rooms” so that our “precious snowflakes” can avoid hearing anything other than what their politically-correct professors download into their malleable minds. It is the illiberal left that has created this environment. Powers observes that if college students are “going to be traumatized by *The Great Gatsby*, then they are going to find day-to-day life unbearable once they step outside the child-care programs that are passing for universities today.” “Do students think that once they graduate they will be able to ‘opt out’ of anything they don’t like?”

Allowing the illiberal left to act as society’s “thought police” not only threatens open and civil discourse, it is also life-threatening. Powers notes the local government cover-up of hundreds of rapes by Muslims in Rotherham, England, where “illiberal feminists mostly yawned.” Salon.com did not express outrage over the rapes of young girls, it posted “a brief Associated Press report about how Muslims were outraged by the Rotherham report.” (Readers will not find detailed reporting about the Rotherham rapes in the mainstream media. Look instead to PamelaGeller.com and be prepared to be incensed.)

Politically, my leanings are libertarian. Kirsten Powers is a liberal, but she is a liberal in the traditional, open-minded, Jeffersonian sense. She is not a leftist who believes a socialist end justifies any means. Powers believes government can be a force for good. I recognize it as a source of liberty-denying evil. But we are civilized people who can certainly discuss our disagreements without disparaging the motives of each other. Her book is a warning to both the political left and the right. The right must not be cowed by the tactics of the illiberal left, but should also not adopt them. The left must recognize that someday the shoe may be on the other foot, and should stop kicking while it has that shoe. Powers concludes, “Contrary to popular thought, familiarity doesn’t breed contempt. It breeds understanding and tolerance. Now, go make some unlikely friends.”

Kirsten Powers is my new friend.

Don Fredrick
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