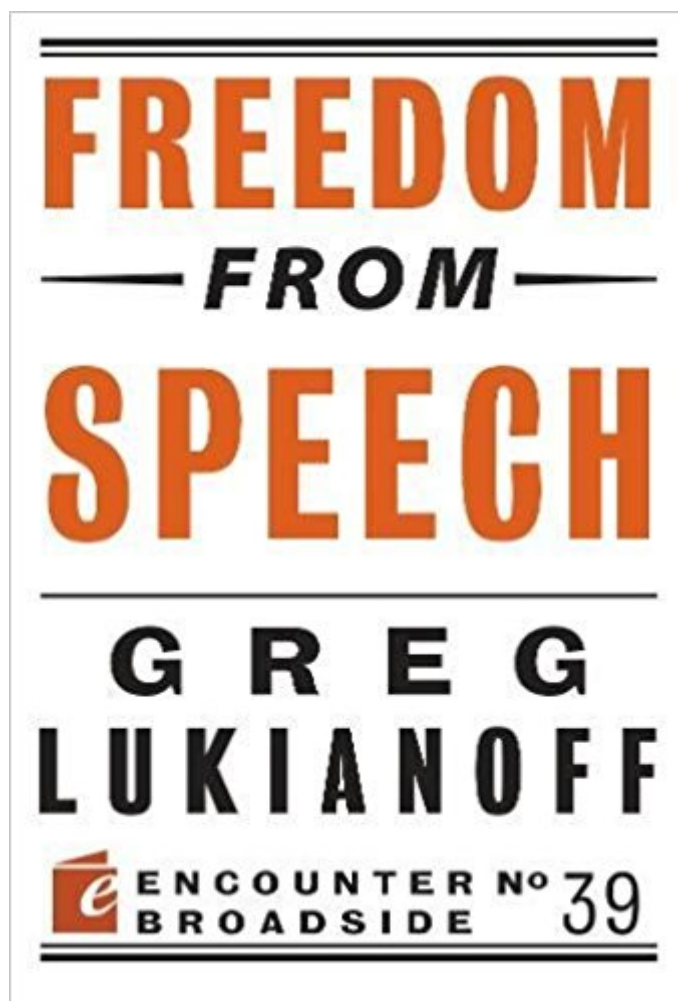


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# Freedom From Speech (Encounter Broadside)



## Synopsis

In *Freedom From Speech*, Æ Æ author and First Amendment lawyer Greg Lukianoff offers a troubling and provocative theory on why we can expect challenges to freedom of speech to grow in the coming decades, both in the United States and abroad. Lukianoff analyzes numerous examples of the growing desire for "intellectual comfort," such as the rise of speech restrictions around the globe and the increasing media obsession of punishing "offensive" utterances, jokes, or opinions inside the United States. To provide a preview of where we may be headed, Lukianoff points to American college campuses where speakers are routinely disinvited for their opinions, where students increasingly demand "trigger warnings" for even classics like *The Great Gatsby*, and where students are told they cannot hand out even copies of the Constitution outside of "free speech zones." Lukianoff explains how increasingly global populations are arguing not for freedom of speech, but, rather, freedom from speech.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Greg Lukianoff is an attorney and president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. His writings on campus free speech have appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*, in addition to dozens of other publications. A regular columnist for the *Huffington Post*, he is a frequent guest on nationally syndicated radio programs and has made numerous television appearances, including on the *CBS Evening News* and *Stossel*. He received the 2008 *Playboy* Foundation Freedom of Expression Award and the 2010 Ford Hall

Forum—Louis P. and Evelyn Smith First Amendment Award on behalf of FIRE. Lukianoff is a graduate of American University and Stanford Law School.

Freedom of speech is a bedrock American principle. It is enshrined in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but it cannot be reduced to that amendment. Instead, as Greg Lukianoff points out in this Encounter Broadside, it reflects “cultural values” and “intellectual habits,” such as “giving the other side a fair hearing, reserving judgment, tolerating opinions that offend or anger us, believing that everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion, and recognizing that even people whose points of view we find repugnant might be (at least partially) right. At the heart of these values is epistemic humility—a fancy way of saying that we must always keep in mind that we could be wrong or, at least, that we can always learn something from listening to the other side.” Lukianoff contends that these values and habits are under assault in America today, and he points to numerous examples to establish the point. The assault on freedom of speech cannot be dismissed simply as “academia’s fault,” the result of “liberal groupthink” and “political correctness.” (Academia does play a crucial role, however, as Lukianoff’s *Unlearning Liberty* details at length. So does the political Left.) Instead, the assault reflects a social trend that can be seen worldwide: “people all over the globe are coming to expect emotional and intellectual comfort as though it were a right. This is precisely what you would expect when you train a generation to believe that they have a right not to be offended. Eventually, they stop demanding freedom of speech and start demanding freedom from speech.” The problem with expecting comfort as a right is that, well, the real world doesn’t work that way. Even assuming that everyone is acting on their best behavior, diversity ensures that there will be disagreement in society about what is true, good, and beautiful. Far from helping resolve those disagreements, social rules and cultural norms that promote “freedom from speech” hinder reasonable resolutions of those conflicts—and even the agreement to disagree. Instead, freedom from speech requires power—university administrators, government regulators, etc.—to impose a version of truth, goodness, and beauty on a diverse society that literally does not have a say about it. Far from promoting a tolerant, comfortable society, then, the right to comfort ironically creates victims and transmogrifies conflicts about fundamental principles into zero-sum conflicts about who wields power. In such a situation, reason loses and force wins.

That's not a good situation for democratic societies to find themselves in. Far better to allow Socratic gadflies to ask uncomfortable, even embarrassing, questions and to dialogue the way to reasonable answers. Unfortunately, that's not the path contemporary American society is taking.

Freedom of speech has been in the news quite a bit in recent years and is on the decline not just in the United States but elsewhere in the West as well. As Greg Lukianoff notes in "Freedom from Speech," in our country today increasing numbers of Americans show not just indifference, but in some cases outright disdain toward one of the bulwarks of civilization. Lukianoff provides the cultural definition of free speech as opposed to free speech as defined by the Constitution and describes the intellectual underpinnings of free speech, as well as why robust free speech is necessary for science, culture, and societies to continue to advance and to avoid stagnation and decline. The author looks at a key trend today that leads many to undervalue freedom of speech. As many value security over liberty in other spheres such as economics, they also tend to do so in other areas as well, and Lukianoff explains why he thinks the threat to free speech will only grow in the coming decades. College campuses are the places where one would expect to find the most fervent defenders of free speech, but this is sadly not the case, and Lukianoff details some of the problems facing free speech in the academy. "Freedom from Speech" is a relatively short booklet and can be read in a single sitting, but it timely and convincingly argues why robust free speech and open exchange of ideas are not luxuries, but absolute necessities for civilized societies.

I came to this volume after reading 'Unlearning Liberty' and found it to be an excellent synopsis of some of the ideas more thoroughly handled in that text. Thinking I had found a resource of literature from like minded thinkers, imagine my surprise when I did an search to find that most of the other Encounter Broadside texts are largely anti-Obama screeds. I'll probably read a few of the less polemical sounding ones to confirm that observation, but be cautioned that if are a fan of Encounter Broadside already and you're looking for an argument about how Obama is responsible for the death of free speech, this book will surely disappoint you...

This essentially is an expanded op ed piece. It generally is well-written and very well-argued, dealing with a major emerging issue on most college campuses (and elsewhere). Being an academic, who moved from brick and mortar teaching to primarily online, I certainly saw this problem become worse. Although Lukianoff is better at describing the problems than in providing

solutions, this is a brief work that is worth reading, particularly for anyone who is involved with higher education.

A great read about the freedom of speech. I'm not used to books this short, but it covers a lot of content in a (relatively) short number of pages, keeping the reader engaged the entire time. You can easily consume this book in one sitting and learn a lot. Freedom from Speech takes a refreshingly new approach to defending free speech, looking at the issue through the prism of valuing intellectual comfort rather than face challenging yet uncomfortable ideas, and also the right not to be offended, as opposed to the traditional conservative/liberal dichotomy. The content is also very relevant to real life and not just baked in theory, covering modern day controversies such as the Donald Sterling scandal, Google and the "right to be forgotten," and the recent wave of disinvitations for controversial convocation speakers at universities, among others. Greg also does not shy away from tough or controversial topics in this book, which makes it a very compelling read.

This is a good, direct wake-up call about the erosion of free speech in the U.S., due to Political Correctness. It is a sobering reality that should concern everyone.

An insightful, concise discussion of a pressing contemporary issue. Easily worth the read.

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