

The Silencing - How the Left is Killing Free Speech

Kirsten Powers

Kirsten Powers opens up by explaining that she is not a natural conservative. She comes from an Irish, working-class background and considered herself Democratic all of her life. She went to George Washington University and the University of Maryland, one which I attended, the other one just down the street. They are liberal bastions. Her life's experience has made her more conservative.

The subtitle of the book, *How the Left Is Killing Free Speech*, and her choice of a publisher, Regnery, suggest that this is a radically right-wing book. It is not at all that. It is simply a plea for common sense. Here, already before she has started, her point is made. Liberal orthodoxy has so defined the spectrum of thought in modern America that simply to question it, which is all she really wants to do, is to brand oneself as a right-winger.

Miss Powers is a USA Today contributor and a Fox News contributor. These are both centrist mass outlets, conservative mainly in the sense that they are often smeared as conservative. At 36 she is relatively young. She does not make many historical references. Let me start out with a few.

Saul Alinsky wrote the book on smearing conservatives. He called it "Rules for Radicals." The techniques that Miss Powers describes have been used by propagandists for all of my lifetime. I live in Ukraine, and note with chagrin that Russia is extremely effectively applying most of the techniques that she describes in order to vilify Ukraine and turn the Russian people (and American and European libertarians!) into unthinking supporters of Vladimir Putin.

The illiberal liberal camp, her word, champions pet issues which will be familiar to any reader of this review. On the social scene they advocate feminism, same-sex marriage, and racial equality. In public policy they believe in Obamacare and have a dogmatic belief in global warming. They do not argue. They assume the correctness of their positions, and use all of Alinsky's nefarious techniques to demonize, discredit, disorient and delegitimize their opposition.

Powers' examples are in large part from her own life. She refers repeatedly to Fox News. It is a favorite *bête noire* of the liberals. They delegitimize it, calling it not really a news organization. They accuse it of constant, unremitting bias. They invent cute names for it like Faux News. And yet it thrives – the beast thrives! The American people are not dumb, and they are becoming inured to the unrelenting propaganda attacks.

The book is very strong on examples concerning women and women's issues. She talks about the so-called "rape culture" on campus and the feminists' vicious attacks on people such as columnist George Will who question the statistics that they drag up to support their case. She points out the hypocrisy of women who attack other women simply because their politics are not in accord with progressives. They question the very femininity of women on Fox, calling them blonde bimbos and sarcastically questioning whether they are really women, or men masquerading as women, or female robots controlled by men. They use every device that they can muster to delegitimize the people, without addressing the arguments that the people make.

Second to the feminists is her attention to the gay rights lobby. They absolutely will not brook dissent, any deviation from the party line. Even fellow homosexuals can be brutally attacked when they advocate, for instance, tolerance of other points of view.

Although race is a subtext in many of the arguments, Powers generally steers clear of race issues. She tackles Al Sharpton in the sphere of sexism. She has a chapter covering the supposed rape that never happened at the University of Virginia (the Rolling Stone fiasco), Duke University (the lacrosse players) and New York – Tawana Brawley. Going back in history, she does recount the treatment of Democratic stalwart Daniel Patrick Moynihan when he questioned the pernicious effect of single-family upbringings within the black community.

Besides George Will, other personalities she cites frequently include Jeb Rubinfeld of Harvard, a lawyer who frequently challenges the legality of many of the illiberal liberals' positions. He is, incidentally and not mentioned, the husband of Tiger mom Amy Chua. Powers talks about what happened to the chief executives officers of Chick-fil-A and Mozilla when they made statements and political contributions to support a traditional definition of marriage. She spends a page on Stephen Pinker, the Harvard/MIT professor who has been very brave and eloquent in his defense of academic freedom. I recommend Pinker's book [[ASIN:0142003344 The Blank Slate]] for a description of how not just conservatives, but honest scientists are abused by people when their science might reveal things that the liberals don't want brought to light.

As an example, she cites the treatment of a famous scientist, Lazar Greenfield, who juried an article which came to the conclusion that women who have unprotected sex seem to get a mood elevating experience which is not shared by women who have sex with condoms. His conclusion was that there is something in semen that elevates women's moods. The feminists took offense and got this eminent scientist fired.

Quite a bit of the book focuses on campus life, especially the enforced political correctness on American university campuses. She says that conservatives have a difficult time being accepted. They are not accepted as commencement speakers, they are shouted down in classrooms, they are denied tenure and sent elsewhere. I will say amen to that. I attended the graduate school of education at the University of Maryland starting in 2004, on a free tuition program for senior citizens. The professors were almost universally hostile to this experienced, older straight white man; the students split between being aggressively hostile and simply curious that a person such as me might exist in the world. Rather than fight the educators, I switched to a PhD program in statistics, where facts matter. I can speak with authority about the magnitude of the problem on campus ten years ago. In this connection I recommend an excellent book by David Gelernter, Unabomber victim and Yale professor, [[ASIN:1594036063 America Lite]], offering his analysis of how the radicals took over American academia starting in the 1950s and the power they now have.

What purpose does this book serve? Miss Powers does a good job of documenting a situation that exists. She has an extraordinarily extensive biography, and I can offer one as well, all of which document the same thing as it has occurred not only for all of her lifetime, but even over all of my lifetime. Telling people about it, however, does not change much. It has been done many times before.

She offers a large number of examples of the illiberal liberals turning on their own. As mentioned, the homosexuals who advocate tolerance of other points of view; feminists who are willing to listen to the pro-life arguments; people who would actually invite students to listen to opposing points of view; reporters who honestly investigate the sins of not only the Bush administration but the Obama administration. One would hope that some of these liberals might be chastened. They might become frightened for the future of America, and speak up against the abuses that they suffered at the hands of other liberals. Sadly, this is not usually the case. They simply learn to shut up. That is the precisely message that the illiberal liberals want to spread – shut up if you know what's good for you.

Where does it go from here? I think one needs a broader perspective on society than simply these media oriented issues, social issues. This liberality has destroyed higher education. See Dinesh Dsouza 's [[ASIN:0029081009 Illiberal Education]] for the definitive work on higher education. Diane Ravitch, though somewhat disparaged by Powers in this book as a doctrinaire liberal, did a pretty good analysis of the school bureaucracies in [[ASIN:0684844176 Left Back: a Century of Failed School Reform.]] This liberality has moreover destroyed the economy. Conservative voices, dissenting voices have not been allowed in economic policy. This is true not only in America but the whole developed world. It is uncontroversial to claim that the levels of public debt worldwide in 2015 far exceed any historical record. It is becoming increasingly less controversial to claim with horror that it will end badly, in a prolonged recession and social turmoil. Although Powers does not make the point, the feminist and GLBT movements have severely undercut white and Asian America's ability to reproduce itself. There will never again be a generation nearly as large as the baby boomers, and the following generations are simply unable to support them with the generous benefits they have voted themselves in terms of Social Security and Medicare. Something has to give.

In summary, Powers book is not going to solve the problems, but it does a great job of documenting them. When the problems solve themselves, in whatever ugly fashion they choose, her book will have turned out to be prescient. A five-star effort.