

# *Connecticut Law Tribune*

## **A War Of Words**

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**Freedom of speech is a fundamental liberty in this nation, but it is something now being tested by the flag of patriotism that has rapidly found itself draped over our nation. Let us hope that it does not gradually become an iron curtain, crushing all underneath it.**

**Not only is public dissent of the government suddenly radically frowned upon, but there seems to be little tolerance even of people observing their viewpoints in their own personal realms. News reports from around the country tell tales of people who have been assaulted or threatened for expressing viewpoints critical of the government. It is natural that in times of great need we feel a desire to pull together and unite toward a common goal. It is also important that we know what that common goal is, and that we make such decisions intelligently. We need a cornucopia of voices, an array of opinions, to know whether we're making the right choices. Stifling dissenters and skeptics means only that we are united around the idea of being led by a dictator or an oligarchy: Tell us what to think, by God, and we'll think it.**

**At newspapers, columnists are employed to write their opinions -and the best columnists have strong ideas about what they want to say. Most newspapers revel in the give and take of reader reaction over such views. But when it comes to criticizing the government, it's a whole new ball game. After lambasting President George W. Bush's performance on Sept. 11, a long-time columnist for an Oregon newspaper quickly found himself sacked. Others across the nation have voluntarily toned down - or been asked to tone down -their pieces. And some newspapers are even removing a comic strip-"The Boondocks"-from the comics' pages or from the newspaper entirely because of its irreverent attitude.**

**Now, in what can only be an ironic twist of fate, this fascist disease has taken a sudden turn at many of the nation's college campuses. The disease itself is not new there: for years, conservative or libertarian opinions have been hunted down and routed from the ivy-covered enclaves. But suddenly, the tables have been turned on those espousing the standard liberal line.**

**During a campus vigil at a state university in California, students heckled a teacher who criticized U.S. foreign policy. The Boston Globe reported last week that at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., a secretary was told to take down a flag she had hung in her office-"inciting a deluge of hate mail and angry calls denouncing the professor who asked her to do it."**

**This is a dark time for our nation, indeed, if we sacrifice one of our most cherished liberties in the name of defending freedom. But we are heartened that there are many who are working tirelessly**

**to rip open this blanket of oppression.**

**"There are people on the right and the left who are being told to shut up, and administrators keep saying, 'This isn't the time for such debate,'" said Harvey Silverglate, a Boston civil liberties attorney and co-founder of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a group representing about 10 college professors who charge that they've been silenced by school administrators since the terrorist attacks.**

**"We're watching these developments with a lot of concern," said Ruth Flower, the director of public policy for the American Association of University Professors. "There's a very strong unity of opinion for the first time in a long time in the country, but a unity that doesn't allow for dissent."**

**Perhaps one benefit of this fight is that, when cooler heads prevail, those who suddenly found themselves oppressed will remember what it was like. And in the end, maybe we will all seek to encourage debate that truly embraces all viewpoints.**