Liberals are always fond of the First Amendment – except when it protects those who disagree with the left. FSM Contributing Editor Jason Antebi looks back on recent incidents across the country and warns that freedom of speech is closely linked with our national security.

Columbia University and the Liberal Prude Police
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There is a movement on college campuses to create a new right--one so powerful that it even trumps our right to free speech. Born out of college mission statements that wish to promote “understanding” and “tolerance” and “acceptance,” it is the right of every student and administrator to feel perpetually incensed. The latest bastion of sensitivity to uphold this entitlement was Columbia University.

According to the Columbia Spectator, the University initially suspended its club ice hockey team for offending the campus community by posting bawdy recruitment flyers. In addition to their suspension, not only was the team to be placed on probation for two years, but they were to submit a written apology to the community based on “the offensive nature of the recruitment poster.”

After a week of intense criticism, Columbia revoked its punishment.

To the reasonable observer, this seemed like a harsh punishment. Virtually end a club’s season over a poster? The team must have praised Hitler or called for the assassination of our President on their flyers to elicit such a reaction from administrators, right? Not quite.

The flyer’s recruitment message, meant to attract strong athletes to their hockey team called “The Lions”, simply read “Don’t be a pussy.” As in pussycat.

Unfortunately for the team, the hypersensitive campus administrators didn’t get the joke nor did they appreciate the provocative flyers, which were meant to gain attention. And attention was exactly what they got.

Student government presidents of the four undergraduate colleges at Columbia signed a letter to the administration demanding the insensitive hockey team be reprimanded for their flyers; one of the presidents was quoted as saying the flyers
“espouse offensive ideologies.” The jury is still out on how the flyer has anything to do with an ideology when the “offensive” phrase in question is a common slang term for young adults of all political persuasions.

This foolish initial reaction, however, seems to be the norm at Columbia University.

According to Columbia Spectator sports columnist Jake Olson, "It seems like any time something remotely un-PC surfaces in the campus dialogue, petitions are signed, letters are written, and protests staged, no matter how innocuous the matter might be."

Indeed, just last week Columbia made national headlines when a liberal protest turned to "pandemonium."

While the administration claims the punishment had all to do with the fact that posting the flyers was in violation of their posting policies and nothing to do with free speech rights, advocacy groups were not buying it and their criticism led to the retraction of the punishments.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) quickly wrote to Columbia president Lee Bollinger protesting the suspension, arguing it "makes a mockery of Columbia's commitment to free expression on campus." Michael Meyers of the New York Civil Rights Coalition echoed FIRE's concerns and explains he was "shocked and chagrined to learn about the suspension."

Groups like FIRE, a non-profit educational foundation based in Philadelphia, PA, are far from surprised when colleges react this way. And can you blame them?

This month, The Bruin Standard reported that politically incorrect flyers are routinely ordered to be pulled down at the University of California at Los Angeles by taking the dorm stairs, not the elevators, to their rooms. There is even a policy at the University of Mississippi that outlaws "offensive language" used over school telephones.

But who is it okay to offend on college campuses? Don't worry: the right not to be offended only extends to liberals and minorities.

At the liberal arts Occidental College in Los Angeles, CA, the administration was silent when a white, male student had his door tagged with a swastika after protesting the anti-Republican climate on campus, but when a gay administrator found a ridiculing caricature of him in the library, the College condemned the insensitive incident. At Oregon State University, when the conservative student newspaper The Liberty was vandalized presumably by students who were offended by the very existence of a conservative perspective, the College President was silent, but when the campus Pride Center was vandalized presumably by a student offended by the diversity-focus of the center, an administrator quickly spoke out to the entire campus community.

When conservative students are offended, the liberal agitators are protected by the First Amendment. When liberal students are offended, the First Amendment is pushed aside and the Prude Policy reign supreme. Why is it that the hypersensitive liberal students get this treatment, when the conservative ones do not?

"Too often, those who demand censorship rather than freedom are the loudest voices on campus," says Robert Shibley, FIRE's Vice President of Operations, "and administrators tend to place a higher value on order than on liberty."

The implications of this type of censorship, when it comes to national security, are catastrophic, even if this particular brouhaha is over harmless posters. Administrators, professors and bleeding-heart students wish to censor opinions that may demean or offend others. Imagine the reaction to posters asking for something as simple and commonsensical as closing our borders. "No human being is illegal," say our friendly student-protestors at Columbia! Come on over our borders, Mr. Terrorist, we wouldn't want to demean you as a human by calling you "illegal."

How could we prepare our students – our future leaders – to protect our country from our enemies, when our campuses are telling us it's politically incorrect to target people who may wish to cause us harm?

Were Columbia University's ice hockey team's posters crude? Yes. Do they use less than desirable language for recruitment? Sure. Does it warrant a suspension, probation, and public apology? Absolutely not. Like many colleges before them, Columbia took the precious feelings of some students, and thrashed the free speech rights of the rest of the campus. They were right to retract their punishment, but the true test will be whether they can refrain from acting like this in the future.
Contributing Editor Jason Antebi is a producer at KFI AM, Los Angeles. A nationally-known critic of political indoctrination on college campuses today, The Chronicle of Higher Education noted Antebi’s leadership that led to the passing of his own college’s Student Bill of Rights.

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