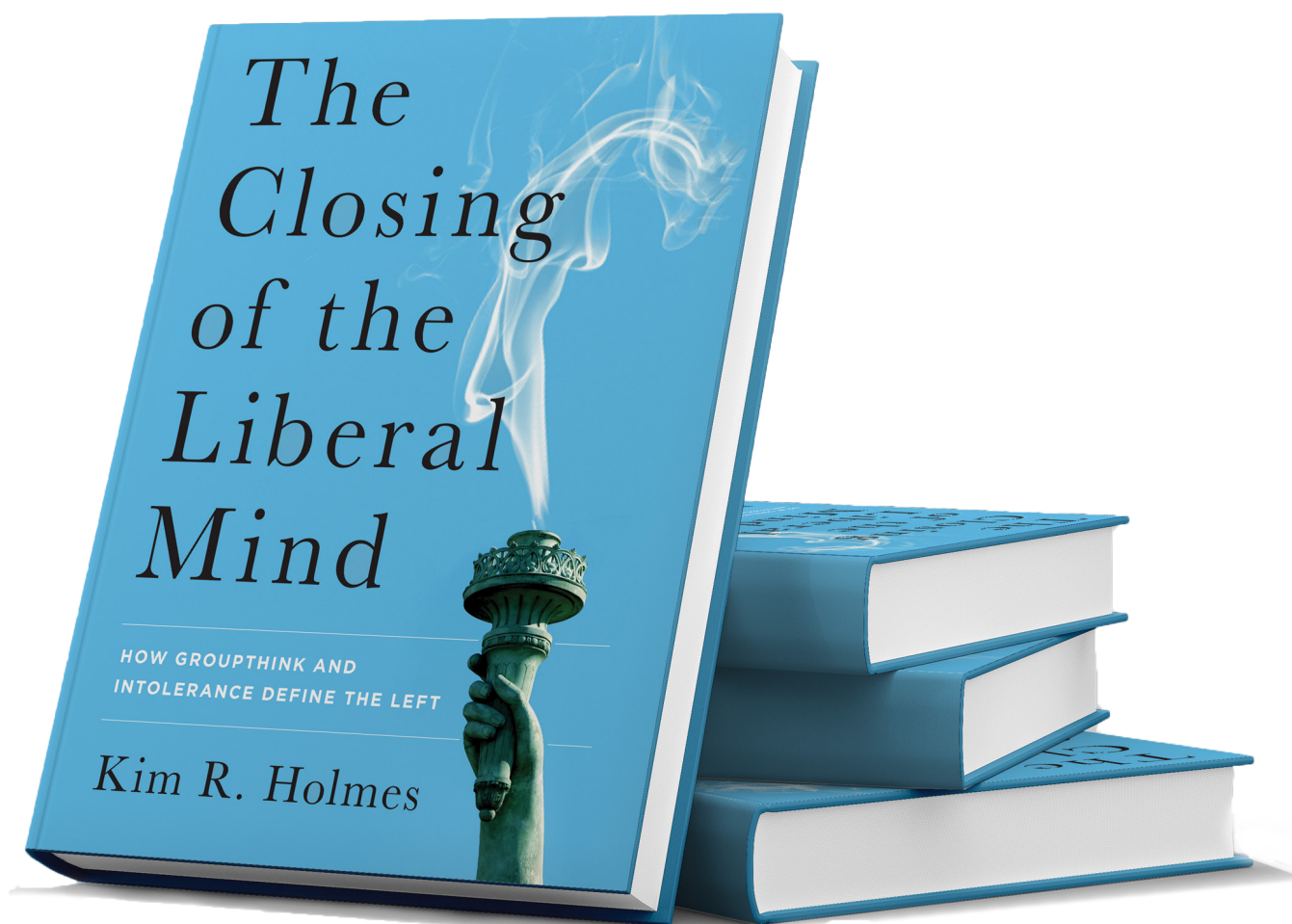


# Are Liberals Losing Their Minds?

Kim R. Holmes reveals how liberals have allowed close-mindedness and intolerance into our culture.



**NEW BOOK — COMING APRIL 2016**

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## **ARE LIBERALS LOSING THEIR MINDS?**

### **Kim R. Holmes reveals how liberals have allowed close-mindedness and intolerance into our culture**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**—American liberals are becoming increasingly “illiberal”—hardheaded in their opinions, judgmental about others’ behaviors, surrendering to the temptations of the closed-minded, says historian and former Assistant Secretary of State, Kim R. Holmes, Ph.D. During a time when moderate liberals and conservatives seem to have very little in common, Holmes points out one important alignment: neither has an interest in the triumph of illiberal values in our country.

In his new book, *The Closing of the Liberal Mind: How Groupthink and Intolerance Define the Left* (Encounter Books; Hardcover; April 12, 2016; \$25.99), Holmes reveals how American liberalism, which for centuries fought for individual liberties such as free speech, has become its opposite: closed-minded and intolerant of different points of views, a development that is transforming a once vibrant liberal tradition into an illiberal force for denying people’s rights and freedoms.

“There is in our culture today a general eagerness to demonize political opponents, but what makes it particularly dangerous is that so much intolerance is practiced by liberals who otherwise claim to be fair and open-minded,” explains Holmes. “This liberal version of intolerance, which I call ‘*illiberal liberalism*,’ occupies the commanding heights of American culture and its institutions—the media, our schools and colleges, the entertainment industry, the leadership of American corporations, the establishment political class and even many mainstream churches—threatening the foundations of American governance.”

In *The Closing of the Liberal Mind*, Holmes reveals:

- How progressive liberals are jettisoning their liberal traditions once held by traditional liberals such as FDR and JFK.
- How there has been a dramatic acceleration of the “illiberalization” of progressive liberalism under President Obama.
- How progressive liberalism’s “groupthink” is enforced by the revolving door-symbiotic relationships between government officials, journalists, academic posts, political activists and researchers who are funded either directly or indirectly by the federal government.
- How educators, celebrities, entertainers and business moguls work together to advance the new culture of intolerance.
- How the main battlefront of intolerance today in America that once was fought by battered liberals against an established, dominant conservative culture has shifted.
- The tactics for shutting down freedom of thought on campus, and the systematic cowardice of academia in the face of intimidation.

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**To schedule an interview with Kim R. Holmes, please contact Elizabeth Ray,**

**eray@crpublicrelations.com (ext. 130) or Victoria Kucharski vkucharski@crpublicrelations.com (ext. 136) at 703-683-5004.**

## **The Closing of the Liberal Mind: How Groupthink and Intolerance Define the Left**

By Kim R. Holmes

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Kim R. Holmes** is a Distinguished Fellow and former Vice President of The Heritage Foundation, who oversaw the think tank's defense and foreign policy team for more than two decades. As a historian of U.S. political movements and ideology, Holmes writes about America's place in the world and the changing political landscape.

Holmes also served as a U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for international organization affairs during most of the first term of President George W. Bush from 2001 to 2004.

Recognized around the globe as one of Washington's foremost foreign and defense policy experts, Holmes is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, where he formerly served on the Washington Advisory Committee.

Holmes holds doctoral and master's degrees in history from Georgetown University. He received a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Central Florida in Orlando. He was a research fellow at the Institute for European History in Germany and adjunct professor of European security and history at Georgetown University.



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## **The Closing of the Liberal Mind: How Groupthink and Intolerance Define the Left**

By Kim R. Holmes

### **QUESTIONS FOR THE AUTHOR**

1. What inspired you to write *The Closing of the Liberal Mind*?
2. You argue that progressive liberalism is becoming its opposite—namely “illiberalism”—what do you mean?
3. You describe progressive liberals today as the “postmodern left.” What do you mean by this and how does it differ from other kinds of liberalism in the past?
4. Define the “illiberal style” adopted by progressive liberals.
5. Please provide some examples of where the Obama administration is behaving in this “illiberal” way?
6. You say that America is ruled today by a ruling class heavily infected with the ideas of the postmodern left. Who are these people and why do you call them “rulers”?
7. You argue the liberal intellectual is “dead.” What do you mean?
8. What do you mean when you say that the postmodern left today is “abolishing humanity?”
9. Why do you single out liberals? Aren’t conservatives like Donald Trump the true “illiberals” in America?

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**EXCERPTS FROM**

**The Closing of the Liberal Mind:  
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By Kim R. Holmes

**Introduction**

For centuries we have associated the word “liberal” with open-mindedness. Liberals were people who were supposed to be tolerant and fair and who wanted to give all sides a hearing. They cared about everyone, not just their own kind. They wanted to include people in the exercise of liberty, not exclude them. They believed in pluralism. By contrast, illiberal people were hardheaded in their opinions and judgmental about others’ behaviors, hoping to control what other people thought and said and to cut off debate. In extreme cases they would even use violence to maintain political power and exclude certain kinds of people from having a say in their government. (pp.vii-viii)

Moderate liberals and conservatives have one thing in common: neither has an interest in the triumph of illiberal values in America. Both should like to see a country in which freedom of expression, open intellectual inquiry, constitutional democracy, and the rule of law prevail. If not a unified front, at least a tacit alliance against illiberalism and extremism may be possible. (p. xi)

**Chapter 1: The Decline of American Liberalism**

The rise of the New Left in the 1960s represents a great divide in the history of progressive liberalism. After it, nothing was ever the same. The liberal optimism of a [Seymour Martin] Lipset and even the socialist dreams of the *Partisan Review* were cast aside in a wave of apocalyptic warnings about the flaws and sins of America itself. Liberalism had been in decline for decades, but its revival during the New Deal, and the new prestige it enjoyed intellectually in the 1950s, came to an abrupt halt in the mid-1960s. Student radicals and neo-Marxist intellectuals ridiculed liberalism’s most cherished values—individualism, pluralism, and tolerance—as capitalist instruments of oppression. Whereas turn-of-the-century progressives had been mere critics of America’s liberal tradition, the New Left declared war on the whole lot—not only the classical liberalism of the Founders but also the progressive liberalism of [Franklin D.] Roosevelt, [Harry] Truman, Lipset, [Daniel] Bell, and the New Frontier liberal intellectuals surrounding [John F.] Kennedy. To the extent that America was, as [Louis] Hartz had argued a few years earlier, a quintessentially liberal country, the New Left’s beef with America was just that: America was evil precisely because it was liberal. To reach the new promised land of social justice, that tradition had to be expunged, or as President Obama would put it decades later, America’s historical DNA had to be “cured.” (pp. 23-24)

## ***Chapter 2: The Rise of the Postmodern Left***

Practically every radical cause in America today shows the influence of this postmodernist assault. From radical feminism to racial and sexual politics, postmodern leftists blend their unique brand of cultural criticism with the political objectives of these movements. In their intellectual laboratories—the cultural studies and humanities programs at American universities—they apply theories of structuralism, poststructuralism, and deconstructionism to achieving the political objectives of the New Left. The results are a cornucopia of identity theories promising perfect diversity. They include radical multiculturalism, critical race theory, African-American criticism, feminist theory, gender and transgender theories, gay and “queer” theories, Latino studies, media “criticism,” postcolonial studies, and indigenous cultural studies, to mention only a few. The latest identity cause to add to the list is the “neurodiversity” movement in which, as its supporters put it, autism “ought to be treated not as a scourge to be eradicated but rather as a difference to be understood and accepted.” All adversity, even that which is biologically inherited, can be wiped away by simply adjusting one’s attitudes. (p.39)

There is no other way to put it: radical multiculturalism is a fraud. It claims to be something it is not—a compassionate worldview in which everyone gets a fair shake. It is actually a rigged system in which some people enjoy favor over others. It is the mirror image of the old hierarchy it wants to overturn: it now wants to put previous minorities on top, making them the new majority—if not in number then at least in enjoying government favor. As far as the law is concerned, no system of law can survive a radically relativist view of the world. (p.54)

## ***Chapter 3: Why the Postmodern Left Is Not Liberalism***

The postmodern left did not invent judicial activism, but it embraces it with a vengeance. It is the weapon of choice in the same-sex marriage fight. All too often laws are overturned on legal technicalities. In the American system, the Constitution is the protector of our most fundamental rights, and the law is supposed to reflect the will of the people, not the whims of unelected judges. Laws should be made by the people’s democratically elected representatives in the legislatures, not by the courts. When judges deign to speak for the people in the capacity of legislators, they not only usurp the constitutional rights of the legislature but subvert the democratic will of the people. (p. 66)

All in all, Obama is the anti-President Bill Clinton of Democratic politics. He has changed not only the Democratic Party but progressivism profoundly. Gone is the “New Democrat” moderation of the Clinton era. The Democratic Leadership Council, the intellectual force behind Clinton’s rise, closed shop in 2011. Even Bill Clinton’s wife, Hillary, ever watching the socialist Bernie Sanders over her left shoulder, has disavowed her husband’s legacy. It may be, as liberal columnist Dana Milbank crowed in an article titled “‘Liberal’: So Hot Right Now,” that liberal is no longer a dirty word; yet the movement that he describes is liberal in name only. The postmodern left, the driving force of progressivism and the dominant voice of the Democratic Party today, has triumphed over liberalism. (p. 73)

#### **Chapter 4: The Illiberal Style of Liberal Politics Today**

It may seem futile to complain about the crudeness of American mass culture. It has been around for decades, and it is not about to change anytime soon. The thin line that exists these days between politics and entertainment (witness the rise of Donald Trump) is undoubtedly coarsening our politics. It is becoming more culturally acceptable to split the world into us-versus-them schemata and to indulge in all sorts of antisocial and illiberal fantasies about crushing one's enemies. (pp. 91-92)

The intolerance toward Christianity is driven not merely by policy disagreements, but by a general bias against Christianity *as a religion*. When *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni associated Christianity with bigotry in an opinion piece, he did so because he truly believes Christians hold outdated and erroneous prejudices in general. He thinks Christians are stuck in the past. They need to discard their outdated views, “much as they’ve jettisoned other aspects of their faith’s history (like slavery), rightly bowing to the enlightenments of modernity.” It is not enough to leave Christians alone to believe as they please. They must be made to see the error of their ways and to convert. Their influence on society must be neutralized and at best eradicated. Not only liberal commentators but high-ranking Democrats hold this view of religion. Hillary Clinton told attendees at the Women in the World Summit in April 2015 that “deep-seated cultural codes, religious beliefs and structural biases have to be changed” in order to give women access to “reproductive health care and safe childbirth.” How this change should occur, she did not say. But suffice it to say that if America’s most prominent Democrat in 2015 next to the president believes people of faith must be made to give up their most sacred convictions, we are in new political territory indeed. (pp. 102-103)

#### **Chapter 5: Promethean Government Unbound**

Despite debating the meaning of the U.S. Constitution for more than 225 years, Americans always have taken that constitution seriously. They parry and thrust over whether it is “living” or not, and legal scholars endlessly parse the meaning of certain phrases and words.<sup>36</sup> But for most of U.S. history there has been a fairly consistent consensus that the Constitution is a document that establishes limits on what the federal government could and could not do. Unlike many others around the world, the American Constitution makes quite clear that the actual powers of the federal government are limited—they are “enumerated” or reckoned in ways that indicate government power is bound by certain rules and principles. Today’s illiberal liberals do not agree. They view close adherence to the Constitution, as *Washington Post* columnist Harold Meyerson describes it, to be a “fetish” of the Republican right. They adhere to what is, in their minds, a higher calling. They believe in social justice, about which the Constitution is completely silent. They have faith not in the words on an old parchment but in their own vision of a new democratic order of their own making. They have supreme confidence in themselves. As candidate Obama once declared, they are the “ones” they have been waiting for. (pp. 138-139)

One of the unique attributes of being American has been a passionate devotion to free speech. It is one characteristic that sets us apart from other Western countries, where the tradition is far less cherished. As lines get blurred and free speech is cheapened as a mere social fiction by clever intellectuals, we could find ourselves losing one of the most precious birthrights of our historical fight for freedom—the liberty to believe and say what we please about the nature of our government, our politics, and our society. (pp. 157-158)

## **Chapter 6: Bullies, Shaming Rituals, and the Culture of Intolerance**

The intolerance of the American left comes in degrees. Its most nuanced form is simply to ignore a contrary point of view as if it does not exist. From there are various gradations ranging from the subtle snub of a conservative at a cocktail party to attempts to use the courts and administrative rules to shut down debate. Among all the varieties of leftist intolerance, however, none stands out quite like the bigotry on America's campuses. It can be breathtakingly nasty—nearly totalitarian in its disregard for human decency—and it occurs at the very places our society entrusts with educating our future leaders. It is often the worst of the worst, and it can involve shaming rituals reminiscent of Hester Prynne's ordeals in *The Scarlet Letter*, or worse, the public denunciations on Chinese campuses during the Cultural Revolution. (p. 163)

American universities and colleges have an enormous impact on the culture. It is not simply that they are shaping the minds of our young people, our future leaders. It is also that they are the avant-garde of the culture, providing in their intellectual laboratories the next new idea that will be taken up by political activists, lawyers, priests, preachers, entertainers, schoolteachers, and the public elementary and secondary education administrators of the future. The entire multicultural movement, which began in the halls of academe, is today practically the official doctrine of America's educational establishment. Far from being marginal or isolated, the political activism of the universities, including shaming rituals, is an influential part of America's mainstream culture. (p. 172)

## **Chapter 7: The Death of the Liberal Intellectual**

The problem is that intellectuals have forgotten their calling. They are supposed to "speak truth to power." And yet today they *are* part of the power. Much of the problem stems from universities turning their backs on open inquiry and a well-rounded education. We should remember that the ideal of the liberal arts college was originally a progressive idea. In the 1890s, largely under the influence of Progressive leader and Governor of Wisconsin Robert La Follette, the University of Wisconsin developed what was called the "Wisconsin Idea," namely, the idea of the university as a place to explore knowledge impartially. As [Richard] Hofstadter described it: *The role of the university, it must be emphasized, was to be wholly nonpartisan; it would be impartial between the political parties and, in a larger sense, it was expected to serve "the people" as a whole, not a particular class interest. It would not offer propaganda or ideologies, but information, statistics, advice, skill, and training. By the same token, it was hoped that the prestige of the university would grow with its usefulness.* (pp. 204-205)

Liberal intellectuals come by their illiberalism honestly. They have a choice. They can maintain their independence, at which point we have some obligation to listen to them. Or they can cash it all in and become shells for the administrative state. Too many have chosen the latter option, which means they have forfeited their right to be taken seriously as intellectuals. We should not be surprised that the ideology they adopt is one that openly makes the case against human freedom. Who needs freedom when you have power, prestige, and money? What is freedom if it can be bought and sold by a government contract or exchanged for a comfortable post at a university? Now that so many intellectuals are in positions of power, they want to close the gates behind them. (p. 206)



### **Chapter 8: The Troubled Legacy of the Radical Enlightenment**

The French Revolution gave history its first instance of modern leftist illiberalism—an embrace of tyranny in the name of the people. All the symptoms were there: the use of coercion against the individual in the name of the public good; a fierce closed-mindedness and the suppression of dissent; the appeal to romanticized, utopian myths to justify ruthless acts in the “name of the people”; and a complete rejection of the moderate Enlightenment’s respect for narrowly defined (largely negatively defined) individual rights and the rule of law. Over 40,000 people were executed in less than a year during the Terror, some 17,000 by the guillotine. Tyrants had existed for millennia before the French Revolution, but what made the new dictators in Paris different, and historically dangerous, was that they committed their illiberal acts in the name of liberalism itself. (p. 220)

### **Chapter 9: The Closing of the Liberal Mind**

Unfortunately, the open mind is dying. It is under fire from the very same people who claim to embody the spirit of the Enlightenment—namely, progressive liberals. It is not only the most egregious of abuses such as hate speech ideology or campus controls on free speech that shock. There is the much larger problem of groupthink. Liberal intellectuals these days simply cannot be bothered by critical analysis outside their own frames of reference. They are profoundly uncurious about anything that does not fit their predetermined narratives of reality and politics. It is as if they are latter-day scholar-monks who receive their wisdom from a transcendent source and feel no need whatsoever to question its premises or assumptions. Knowledge, like human progress, must be created and managed by state policy, bureaucratized and forced on all people equally despite the infinite differences that exist between individual human beings. It is a sad state of affairs, especially for intellectuals who are expected to know better. (pp. 258-259)

### **Conclusion: The Way Forward**

Above all, liberalism needs to regain its respect for the open mind. There is no other way to put it: the closing of the liberal mind is an American tragedy. America needs a viable liberal philosophy. Not only is liberalism part of the country’s historical DNA, it is vitally important to have a political movement that pushes the culture and the system to adapt to changing circumstances. We need an open competition of ideas. We need people to remind us that everyone should be included in the American dream. But we also need a liberalism that does not pretend that history ends the moment progressivism gains power. To make true progress, liberals need to be open as well to real change. They need to entertain all possibilities, including the possibility that sometimes they can be wrong. (p. 270)

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