

The Ciceronian Example

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When I was about thirteen I bought a secondhand book—the first book I purchased—that contained speeches by great men as far back as classical times. The speeches which made the greatest and most lasting impression on me were Cicero's orations against Catiline. The horrors of Catiline's conspiracy became fixed in my mind as the paradigm of threats against republican government in all the centuries to come. Cicero's rhetoric resonated as nothing else I read as I grew older and better acquainted with history. Sixty years ago countless students in the United States read those powerful orations and had their thinking affected as mine was at the time.

One wonders how many students today have even heard of Cicero (106-42 B.C.), the great statesman who lived in the waning days of the Roman republic before Caesarism came to dominate the Roman world. The Roman republic was lurching to its close, even as the American republic is moving into a zone of extreme peril.

In the fall of 63 B.C., Cicero, then a consul of Rome, delivered a series of orations in the Temple of Jupiter Stator before the Roman Senate against what has come down in history to be known as the Catilinerian Conspiracy—orations specifically aimed at Lucius Sergius Catiline who planned to sweep away the Roman republic through massive and widespread revolutionary action. The words "How long, oh Catiline" jumped at me from the page when I turned to the opening sentence of the first oration delivered Nov. 7. Laying out the case against Catiline, a patrician who had been governor of Africa and who supported the blood-stained Sulla dictatorship, Cicero constructed what most probably is the most extensively and best-documented legal case in history.

Cicero warned of the disease eating away inside the country—the disease of corruption and disloyalty to the republic's ideals and traditions. In his second oration, delivered Nov. 19, he told the Senate,

Here, set deep inside the country, are conspiracy, danger and a deadly foe.
Degeneracy, madness and evil are the enemies we have to fight.

This is a text that was applicable to the entire Western world during much of the century, especially during the long decades of Communist subversion. It also is a text for our times in the United States. Degeneracy certainly is as widespread in America as it was in the worst periods of late Roman history. Cicero warned the senators that

... it is grim, not only to govern the country, but even merely to ensure its survival.

Statesmen of today could say the very same thing.

In his orations against Catiline, Cicero was not only citing the menace of Catiline's armed cohorts within and without the walls of Rome but the moral rot that gave rise to the threat of armed insurrection. He referred to Catiline's

. . . special treasure, his picked elite. You can see them about, lovely young men with elegantly combed hair either beardless or bearded to excess. . . . In these gangs are to be found every gambler, adulterer, debauchee and sensualist who exists.

He calls them "these soft and pretty boys," obviously referring to the same types of deviates that are so numerous in America today.

Cicero was able to identify the social groups which constituted the rotten core of Roman society and pinpoint the conspirators, persuading the Senate to order their execution, but he could not counter the forces which aimed at destroying Roman values and traditions as he was not the leader of a political movement. He admitted in the first oration that

. . . the disease which is eating into our country may be checked for a short time but cannot be completely cured

Even so, the threat to the Roman republic in those far-away days was simpler than the threat we face in modern America because the conspirators and their sympathizers could be expelled from Rome and kept without its walls. Today, it is vastly more difficult to deal with the very real enemy within.

Cicero, like Ronald Reagan, had the most elevated view of his country, saying in the fourth oration against Catiline that Rome was "the light of the world and the stronghold of every nation . . ." Nevertheless, there were Romans who had nothing but hostility for the nation that sustained them—a modern phenomenon as well. These individuals, he said "were born in our country and yet have treated it as no homeland at all but an enemy city." He asked the Senate to consider "those among our own citizens" who are smitten by "some mania" and "have turned into enemies of their own country."

What the Roman republic didn't have to deal with is the peculiarly modern institution of the media or the domination of literature by ideologues hostile to the state and its values and traditions. A half century or more ago this wasn't a major problem, a threat to the unity and character of a free country. Today, it may be our biggest problem in trying to sustain republican institutions, the problem of small, ideological elites in positions of great power who seek to exercise thought control. Citing the problem on the college and university level, Llewellyn H. Rockwell, Jr. has observed that students between eighteen and twenty-two

. . . have been trapped in the clutches of an increasingly leftwing professorate devoted to falsifying history and rubbing out our common sense, excelling in mind control, and bent on destruction of bourgeois institutions.

Dr. Arnold Beichman, research fellow of the Hoover Institution, reminds us that George Orwell said that “He who controls the past controls the future.” Attempting to control the past is a full-time activity for many liberal and leftwing historians and journalistic commentators on the American past. Dr. Beichman cites the work of revisionist historians who are doing all they can to convince people, especially young people, who don’t remember the events of fifteen or ten years ago that the United States didn’t win the cold war. The gulag slave camp system may be gone and the Red Army no longer holds sway over Eastern Europe. But the leftwing commentators are determined that a new generation not understand that the free world triumphed over Soviet Communism and that President Ronald Reagan forced the Soviets to end their thralldom of captive peoples within and without the Soviet Union.

The rewriting of the history of the twentieth century goes beyond that, however. One school of Sovietologists denies the USSR was what a writer for the *New York Review of Books* rightly described as “a uniquely demonic utopia” that pursued a “demented ideology.” These writers deny that the terror of the Communist system was a terror for everyone. And the drive to rewrite American history is equally strong. There is a positive demand to reconfigure American history. Typical of this was a letter published in *The Washington Post* in March 2000, the author of which complained of “books written by ethnocentric white men,” saying that the American history that’s taught to us is “fabricated.” In other words, the work of generations of students of American history is to be dubbed a huge pack of lies and replaced by accounts hostile to everything that’s happened on this continent since the first settlement.

When Caesarism overwhelmed the Roman republic, the Romans had to live with the new order but they weren’t compelled to accept the rewriting of Roman history prior to the principate. This is a uniquely modern process characteristic of the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century. And as new forms of totalitarianism evolve in the twenty-first century, the rewriting of history—this means that freedom of speech and freedom of thought are being subverted.

The dimensions of the new American-style thought control system are revealed in a list of proscribed attitudes set forth by a professor at George Mason University under the general heading of “Cultural Awareness.” Among the new “sins” are

Institutional Racism, Cultural Racism, Ethnocentricity, Classism, Lingualism, and Heterosexism.

The flavor of this list of *verboden* views is revealed in the definition given of “Lingualism”:

According to Shumabb-Kangas, this term refers to ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language.

Not even George Orwell, with all his insight into totalitarian concepts, could have come up with that concept—a concept totally alien to a free, rational society. Yet this sort of thing is being foisted on schools and colleges around the country. It is being passed out as guidance to teachers. And some people wonder how Nazi doctrines ever gained a hold over intelligent Germans in the 1920s and 1930s! Obviously, it can happen here; it is happening.

And here it is instructive and worthwhile to go back to the great minds and characters of the classical world, specifically to Cicero, who took the most principled stands against the spread of Caesarism—the totalitarianism of the ancient world. I am reminded of his first Philippic against Marcus Antonius. In this Philippic he asks: “Do you have to be voluntary slaves?” This is a question that should be asked those Americans who are required to accept the multicultural thought control embodied in the list of social and cultural sins set forth by the professor at George Mason.

The efforts to establish thought and behavior control in the United States are pervasive. They are being made in almost every institution of American life. Colleges and universities have speech codes which have to be obeyed on pain of expulsion. Commanders in the armed forces are required to demand that their troops don't use terms offensive to homosexuals. It is no longer possible to refer to a person as “retarded.” It is ordained that such individuals be described as “mentally challenged,” a term which flies in the face of physical and psychological realities. For years now, the publishers of school textbooks have been forbidden to use the word “Indian,” instead being ordered to refer to the country's aboriginal population and their descendants as Native Americans, as though others born in this country don't qualify for such a description. The list goes on and on. Even under the Soviet system of totalitarianism, the Russian language was not distorted to the extent that the English language is being now. And for each of the offenses against the prescribed nomenclature, there is a prescribed punishment. This means that Americans are being denied freedom of speech contrary to the Constitution and without due process of law. There's been nothing like this in the long history of the Western world.

To be sure, people in the Roman world paid a price—often the heaviest price—for standing up for the freedom of Roman citizens. Because he spoke out in the Senate against Caesarism and threats to his beloved republic, Cicero was seized by agents of the triumvirs. And his head and hands were cut off. A pin was stuck through his tongue. To date, no one has as yet been put to death for committing the new social-political-ideological crimes, but Americans already have lost opportunities, which mean financial loss. Can imprisonment for these new offenses against a radicalized America be far away? George Orwell's prescient book *1984* makes clear the lengths the new totalitarian thought controllers will go to enforce total ideological conformity.

Clearly, the American people do not realize what is happening to their society and system of government. They don't comprehend the pervasiveness of thought control mechanisms and practices. They don't grasp the fact that the new order in

America would not be recognized by the people who wrote and approved the U.S. Constitution or even by the generation that served in World War II. They would not have considered it possible that Americans could be told how to think and speak. Yet they are under continual pressure from government and nongovernmental organizations to behave and respond as the thought controllers require. And, tragically, many of them are bowing to the pressure, kowtowing to the new totalitarians.

Cicero provides us with a guide to what we should do in the current circumstances. While others in Rome did little or nothing to save the republic, Cicero spoke out constantly to alert Roman citizens to the threatened loss of their historic freedoms. Ignoring the peril in which he placed himself, he upheld republican institutions until his dying day. American citizens today aren't exposed to physical threats. Nevertheless, a grossly inadequate number fail to speak out against the thought controllers or resist their totalitarian design for American society. The need now is for citizens to fight tooth and nail against the ideological control system that is being pushed on them. They need to resist now before it is too late. They need to use their free speech before it is abolished by those who want to set the terms of every private and public discussion. The Ciceronian example should guide us as we seek to preserve the liberties guaranteed to us in the Constitution by our forefathers. Ω