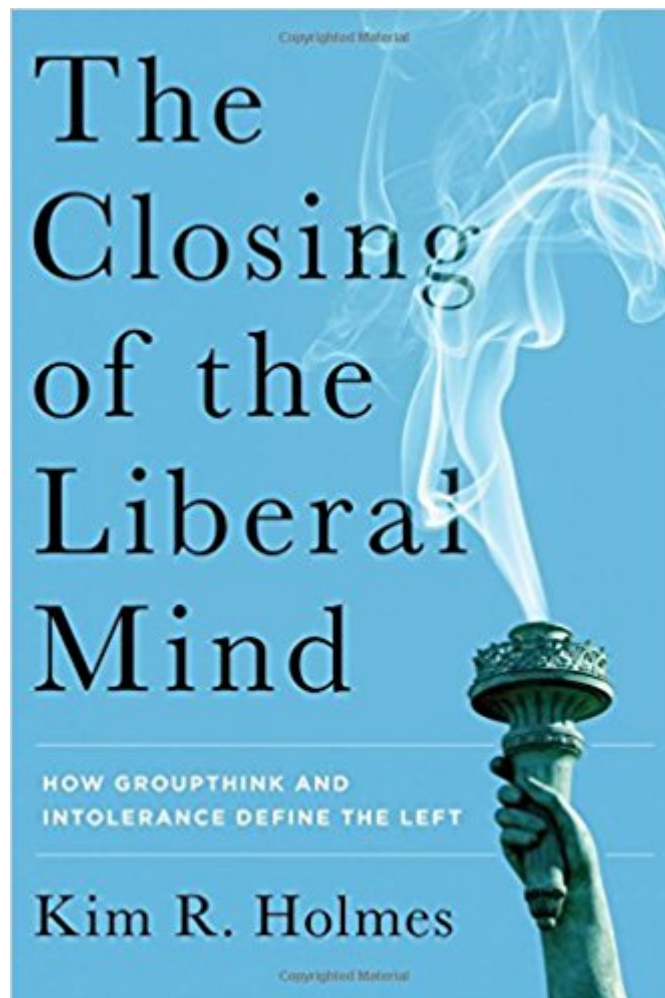




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The Closing Of The Liberal Mind: How Groupthink And Intolerance Define The Left



Synopsis

A former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State and currently a Distinguished Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, Kim R. Holmes surveys the state of liberalism in America today and finds that it is becoming its opposite—illiberalism—abandoning the precepts of open-mindedness and respect for individual rights, liberties, and the rule of law upon which the country was founded, and becoming instead an intolerant, rigidly dogmatic ideology that abhors dissent and stifles free speech. Tracing the new illiberalism historically to the radical Enlightenment, a movement that rejected the classic liberal ideas of the moderate Enlightenment that were prominent in the American Founding, Holmes argues that today's liberalism has forsaken its American roots, incorporating instead the authoritarian, anti-clerical, and anti-capitalist prejudices of the radical and largely European Left. The result is a closing of the American liberal mind. Where once freedom of speech and expression were sacrosanct, today liberalism employs speech codes, trigger warnings, boycotts, and shaming rituals to stifle freedom of thought, expression, and action. It is no longer appropriate to call it liberalism at all, but illiberalism—a set of ideas in politics, government, and popular culture that increasingly reflects authoritarian and even anti-democratic values, and which is devising new strategies of exclusiveness to eliminate certain ideas and people from the political process. Although illiberalism has always been a temptation for American liberals, lurking in the radical fringes of the Left, it is today the dominant ideology of progressive liberal circles. This makes it a new danger not only to the once venerable tradition of liberalism, but to the American nation itself, which needs a viable liberal tradition that pursues social and economic equality while respecting individual liberties.

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A very interesting book. It is not surprising if a conservative refuses to listen to an alternative viewpoint (not saying all conservatives operate this way). But it is amazing (too me) when a person says, "I'm a liberal!" and then they refuse to listen to an alternative viewpoint. I think the word Holmes uses "illiberal" is quite fitting and accurate regarding today's environment. Is is depressing how the word liberal has been tainted by non-liberal behaviors. Some parts of the book drift from the liberal subject matter and focus more on governmental norms (how much government is good, where does it cross the line). Holmes definition of 'liberal beliefs' does not exactly match mine...but that probably because I'm a 19th Century type guy (see below)! I also think many of the same arguments could be applied relative to excessive conservatism. Just one example of this is where people have a certain belief about the bible and christian beliefs. When people push for 'their belief' to be part of a public education, it seems to me they are crossing the line. If someone wants education to be structured according to their particular belief it should be done in a private not a tax payer funded institution. So it would seem to me that people on the far left or far right have both become more extreme and narrow minded. Rarely is a decision all good or all bad. There are trade-offs if you get more of "X" you get less of "Y". In an environment of extreme right and left you don't get to have a meaningful discussion about the trade-offs. And this is not good. In the interest of full disclosure. I am a liberal; what I learned in reading this book though is I'm a 19th Century type liberal.

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