

FREE SPEECH IS VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE IS “FREE SPEECH”

The argument

Because speech hurts our emotions, that can cause physical damage to us and therefore it could be considered a form of violence.

If words are “violent,” then it is self-defense to physically attack those who would “assault” us with their words.

See Lisa Feldman Barrett, [“When is speech violence?”](#)

Where it falls short

For one thing, this is not the view of the law, which makes a clear distinction between words and physical violence (with the exception of threats to commit violence.)

The conflation of words with violence is not a new or progressive idea invented on college campuses in the last two years. It is an ancient and regressive idea.

Freedom of speech is the eternally radical idea that individuals will try to settle their differences through debate and discussion, through evidence and attempts at persuasion, rather than through the coercive power of administrative authorities—or violence.

The majority of Americans want to live in a liberal order, where disputes are settled with words -- sometimes angry words, wrong words, mean words, but still just words, allowing everyone to walk away with their bones intact.”

Speech is not violence - it is how we avoid violence.

See [Attention Student Protesters: Use Your Words](#)

See *The Atlantic*, [“Why it’s a bad idea to tell students words are violence”](#) by Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff

Also, the suggestion that words can cause harm generally seems to overlook the harm that is caused by being silenced by powerful authorities in totalitarian regimes. In the first case, a person “harmed” by someone else’s speech has a remedy available: counterspeech as guaranteed by the First Amendment. A person silenced has no remedy available for harm suffered. Hence, our cultural preference to the side of allowing free speech.

