

Emily Burden Rees ([00:00](#)):

Emma Camp, welcome to the Higher Ed Now Podcast.

Emma Camp ([00:03](#)):

Thanks for having me.

Emily Burden Rees ([00:04](#)):

We want to start off with understanding your experience with the campus culture at the University of Virginia as an undergraduate, and what inspired you to write about it and how did it end up in the New York Times?

Emma Camp ([00:17](#)):

So I generally really enjoyed my time at UVA. I think it is a little unfortunate that the thing that I am most known for is a little bit criticizing the campus culture there, but I really enjoyed my time there. I had a great time in the debate society that I joined. I lived on the Lawn there and I really enjoyed that as well.

Emma Camp ([00:38](#)):

I look back on my college years with a lot of fondness, but I do think that UVA, like many other universities, and to be fair, mostly quote-unquote, "elite universities" that are populated with mostly middle, upper class, left-leaning people, it suffers from the problem that a lot of those universities are suffering from, which is this kind of turn away from small L liberal values, like free speech, like free expression.

Emma Camp ([01:06](#)):

And you have this student activist class that is often though fortunately not at UVA, typically often joined by administrators who want to censor either faculty, students, speakers on campus who have wrong views, wrong usually being anything that falls outside of a very narrow Overton window, which right now comprises left wing beliefs.

Emma Camp ([01:35](#)):

But I don't think this is an inherently left wing problem. I think the abandonment of small L liberal values happens and in fact is happening on the right. It's just that universities, especially elite universities, are run by left wing professors and administrators, especially administrators now.

Emma Camp ([01:52](#)):

And so I was noticing, especially following summer of 2020. So there was a little bit of this problem when I first started in my first two years at UVA, but it was night and day after summer of 2020.

Emma Camp ([02:06](#)):

I started noticing any time in conversation with my friends, any topic vaguely controversial would come up, they would start looking over their shoulders and literally closing the door and whispering where we didn't really used to do that before, but there was this fear of being found out. And often the fear of being found out was for having a pretty frankly milk toast belief.

Emma Camp ([02:31](#)):

And this phenomenon called self-censorship, it's what data shows most college students do it across the political spectrum, across various demographic groups. Most college students are afraid of having the wrong opinions and they fear mostly social backlash. But some of them, especially more conservative identified students, fear getting worse grades from their professors or even punishment from their schools.

Emma Camp ([02:54](#)):

And so how I came to write about this in the New York Times is really interesting actually. So I didn't pitch it to them necessarily on my own. So what happened was I just got reached out to by a editorial assistant.

Emily Burden Rees ([03:12](#)):

Oh my gosh.

Emma Camp ([03:12](#)):

She said, "I read your stuff in the student paper and we want to publish more early career writers. So you should pitch to us." I had never thought of pitching to the New York Times. I was kind of like, "Oh, I would like to be an opinion journalist, but I am 22, there's no way I'm good enough."

Emma Camp ([03:29](#)):

And then this editorial assistant comes out of nowhere and is like, "Yeah, I read your opinion column in the school paper. You want to pitch for us?" And I was like, "Hell yeah, I'll pitch for you." And I think I also was in the right place at the right time. I don't think it was a coincidence that shortly after my piece came out, the New York Times had this huge editorial board piece about Americans losing the right to free speech and so on.

Emma Camp ([03:54](#)):

So I pitched that article and then I had five months of editing. I pitched it in October. The pitch was accepted in October and it didn't come out until March. So it was a laborious process. And I think part of why I was so unprepared for the reaction that it got was that every step of the way I was trying to manage my expectations. I was like, "Oh, there's no way they're going to take it. It'll probably get shot down at some point editing." And they asked me to rewrite it at one point and they were like, "Oh, they won't accept that."

Emma Camp ([04:23](#)):

I literally did not allow myself to genuinely believe it would happen until five hours before it was getting published before 11:00 PM on the night before it was going to get published. I got a little excited. I was like, "Oh, I'm going to be published in the New York Times." And then of course the next morning it was a tidal wave just crashing into me. So I wish I prepared emotionally a bit more than I did.

Gabby Anglin ([04:46](#)):

So when you talk about self-censorship and that fear of students closing their doors and whispering and making sure that you're in a like-minded group, of course they're concerned about their potential beliefs getting out and the social repercussions of that, but they're also afraid of supporting students in class

that they think were treated unfairly. Because if they were to say, "I think the student has that right to say that," then they are suddenly associated with that belief even though it's not necessarily theirs.

Gabby Anglin ([05:20](#)):

So how do you think that that affects empathy, our ability to show empathy to other students and build relationships if we have to support them behind closed doors?

Emma Camp ([05:31](#)):

I think guilt by association is a huge problem. And I think part of what it comes down to is I think there's this growing belief that your political beliefs have everything to do with your moral value. To hold the right political beliefs is to be good rather than there are these apolitical values that we hold to be morally good being kindness, charity, bravery, whatever virtues you think of in this broad, I don't know, Aristotelian sense.

Emma Camp ([06:04](#)):

Now it's becoming to be good is to support this political organization or this presidential candidate or to believe in this policy position. When you actually get to know people who believe different things from you, it's pretty obvious how ridiculous that is. Some of the best people I know I disagree with on policy issues very strongly. Some of the best people I know I disagree with on a lot of policy issues.

Emma Camp ([06:30](#)):

But I think that's how you get this kind of fear of supporting people with the wrong beliefs, even just on principle. Even saying, "I think this person is wrong, but I think they have the right to say this thing that they believe," because what you're essentially doing is supporting something that is deemed as not just wrong but morally bad and that puts a stain on you. And I think that that's really destructive.

Emma Camp ([06:54](#)):

I think this kind of trend where policy is and politics are taking precedence over principles is really, really destructive to our ability to not only just get along with each other but also understand each other. Personally, I don't identify as right wing, but I'm called right wing all the time because I defend right wing people's ability to say things that they think are true.

Emma Camp ([07:19](#)):

There's a very prominent conservative group at UVA called YAF, it's a branch of Young Americans for Freedom. I disagree with them on just about everything. I think they're wrong. I think they host a lot of speakers who I think are bad, who I think their ideas are bad. But I also gained a reputation for constantly defending their right to do what they want to do, to invite Mike Pence to campus, to hold the events that they want to hold.

Emma Camp ([07:44](#)):

And that doesn't necessarily mean I agree with them, it just means that I have principles, which is that fundamentally the best choice is the choice of free speech. We all benefit from hearing each other out, but the fact that to defend something on principle is taken as a sign that you secretly believe the person you're defending, I think is ultimately destructive.

Gabby Anglin ([08:10](#)):

And what I think we're also seeing across the nation at universities that these conversations are becoming more and more hostile. They should be approached with that peace and open mind, but they're not.

Gabby Anglin ([08:22](#)):

So we're seeing these small factions that groups that ultimately have the same goal are creating for themselves and giving themselves different labels. So if you look at the label of a social justice warrior, the connotation of warrior is that it's a fight. So do you think that these self-labels are preemptively setting it up to be a hostile conversation?

Emma Camp ([08:48](#)):

I'm not sure if I necessarily agree on that. Perhaps I'm just confused about the example you used. I don't think many say very authoritarian left wing activists would use the term social justice warrior as a genuine non ironic term they would use for themselves. I certainly have never met someone who self-identifies as a social justice warrior in anything but irony. It's kind of a term used by the right to make fun of authoritarian left wing activism.

Emma Camp ([09:19](#)):

So I think maybe an example of what you're talking about that I definitely think exists and has negative effects is the way in which speech is being presented as violence, where you label things that people say as causing harm, as causing trauma, which is a term that I think really gets overused.

Emma Camp ([09:39](#)):

For example, at UVA, when YAF invited Mike Pence to come speak on campus, the editorial board of the student paper said that it will endanger students lives by him being there. The implication obviously being that gay students will kill themselves if he's on campus, and that the things that Mike Pence believes or that he might say have some effect to cause death, which not only is hyperbolic to the point of being ridiculous and also preventing us from being able to say things that matter about actual oppression, it also I think leads people to be more affected by speech that they disagree with than they would otherwise be.

Emma Camp ([10:21](#)):

When you tell someone that when you feel offense, that's a sign that you're being physically harmed, that you're being traumatized, I think it incentivizes people to view that offense as a physical harm, to respond more dramatically, to feel more wounded. And I think that's bad for people psychologically.

Emma Camp ([10:40](#)):

I'm offended by things that people say and do all the time. And it's real offense, I am mad at the things people say. It upsets me, I am insulted by it, but I don't feel that I'm being physically harmed. I think that someone saying the meanest, dirtiest insult they could possibly say to me is infinitely less bad than hitting me.

Emma Camp ([11:03](#)):

And I think that through this idea that speech can cause emotional distress and that emotional distress can cause these kinds of physiological symptoms that are harmful, therefore speech is violence, I think really is both bad for people psychologically as well as just being wrong.

Gabby Anglin ([11:25](#)):

That makes me think back to a quote from Margaret Thatcher. She once said that she enjoyed when attack was personal because at that point that meant that they didn't have a political argument left. They didn't have something of substance, so they had to resort to hurting you personally somehow. And that's interesting.

Emily Burden Rees ([11:46](#)):

And likely what you experienced with your New York Times op-ed.

Emma Camp ([11:52](#)):

Yes.

Emily Burden Rees ([11:53](#)):

Unfortunately, right? And I think we fail to prepare college students for a society with a greater exchange of ideas when we try to put these boundaries on what speech and what appropriate speech is at the college level, when we limit students from the kinds of conversations they should engage in or what the orthodoxy of ideas should be. Then when they get to the professional space and they discover that there are perhaps fewer restrictions on what free speech is, then the students are not prepared for a professional life.

Emma Camp ([12:36](#)):

I strongly agree with that. And I think the kinds of college students who were socialized under this environment where censoriousness is allowed to occur are transforming a lot of our institutions. We look at the way media institutions function now where if enough employees revolt, you can get someone fired or their pay suspended for a fairly innocuous tweet.

Emma Camp ([13:02](#)):

You have these kind of internal revolts at a lot of companies, say, a good example would be over Dave Chappelle's latest special. I don't know if he has had another one after that, but after the Dave Chappelle's special where he made some jokes at the expense of trans women. And a group of Netflix employees walked out and protested and tried to get his special taken off of the platform, rather than saying, "I think he's wrong and here's why," we're starting to say, "You should not have the right to say that at all. You should be punished."

Emma Camp ([13:32](#)):

And this is something a lot of free speech advocates say, but I think the solution to speech we don't like is more speech. It's saying, "I think you're wrong and here's why," not you should not have the right to say that at all or you should be out of a job. I think this impulse to punish speech, has the name cancel culture, in a lot of contexts, it's a bad trend.

Emma Camp ([13:58](#)):

And I think a lot of it, where it's starting to affect our institutions, be it either media companies, so on, stems from campus. I think something Andrew Sullivan said that I think that all the time is that we all live on campus now and that is unfortunate.

Emily Burden Rees ([14:17](#)):

It's a small L liberal value like you were talking about, to engage with ideas with which you disagree. Can you speak a little bit more about your high school experience, how that gave you expectations of what college would be like and to which college you attended? I understand you went to a liberal arts high school.

Emma Camp ([14:38](#)):

It wasn't liberal arts, it was fine arts. So it was basically a performing arts high school. I studied creative writing. So I spent several hours a day, for six years writing, working on fiction, nonfiction, poetry. I did a senior thesis of maybe 25 pages of poems my senior year. So that obviously is different from liberal arts.

Emma Camp ([14:59](#)):

I think my high school experience, it was interesting in that it was a very liberal bubble in a very conservative area. So I went to a fine arts high school where it was a very left-leaning school. You had a lot of LGBT students and teachers. I mean, it's people who are in theater and dance and art, and so of course it was very left wing and I was even more left wing then than I am now.

Emma Camp ([15:25](#)):

I was sort of the school SJW in many ways when I was 16. But of course we were in Alabama and actually one of the things that I often get very annoyed when people claim, because it was a public magnet school, that these public magnet schools are only for rich kids. Because in my experience, most of the people who went there were attending the school to escape an underfunded rural school district or an underfunded inner city school district.

Emma Camp ([15:53](#)):

And that was certainly the case for me. The public schools I was zoned for and that I attended until I was 12 are some of the worst in Alabama. It's just a rural area. It's underfunded. You can picture it. And so I grew up going to elementary and middle school where no one agreed with me on absolutely anything.

Emma Camp ([16:11](#)):

So my parents were straight ticket voting Democrats who were college educated, who happened to live in an area where almost no one was like that. And so I was in second grade watching Rachel Maddow every night with my dad and going to school with kids who are mostly evangelical Christians who were very conservative.

Emma Camp ([16:29](#)):

I can remember being in sixth grade and I was in this history class, there were maybe 25 kids in it. And we had a substitute teacher who for some reason was like, "We're talking about the Scopes Monkey Trial today. Raise your hand if you believe in evolution." It was only me and for the next two weeks I had people proselytizing to me.

Emma Camp ([16:47](#)):

But the lesson that's interesting is that I believed or not. By nature, I'm not the kind of person who doesn't say something if I think it is true. So I'm again in these political arguments in elementary school just parroting what my dad was saying at the dinner table of course. But I was getting in these political arguments at a very young age, but I still had friends. I learned too that both, it is important to stand up for what you believe, but also you have to get along with people you don't agree with or you're not going to have any friends.

Emma Camp ([17:19](#)):

And so I think that value growing up with this more politically liberal background in a very conservative area served me very well. It's part of why I never really had a problem with being friends with people with whom I disagreed. It's why most of my friends now I have very strong political disagreements with, but that makes our friendships more fun. We get to talk about more interesting things from more angles. And so I think that served me well in college. I think it kept me from getting trapped in a political bubble, which I think a lot of people do.

Emily Burden Rees ([17:58](#)):

It adds a richness certainly to our interactions with other people when we can disagree, we can disagree well and remember that, like you said earlier, their political beliefs are not the primary thing about them that's the defining characteristic of a relationship between two people. I love that story about the Scopes Monkey Trial. I'm picturing little Emma with her hand up.

Emma Camp ([18:23](#)):

No, that's exactly what it was. Even at the time I was like, "This is going to be a good story." Because I think by that point I knew I had gotten into the fine arts magnet school, so I was a little, I'm ready to blow this popsicle stand in whatever way a 12 year old can be. And so I was like, "Oh, this is going to be fun."

Emily Burden Rees ([18:42](#)):

And continuing to do that with your New York Times op-eds. You're like, "I'm going to introduce some good conversations at dinner tables tonight."

Emma Camp ([18:48](#)):

Yeah, Reason Magazine better watch out. I guess I have a history of blowing things up right before I leave.

Emily Burden Rees ([18:54](#)):

Now with higher education, what is your overall philosophy of what higher education should provide?

Emma Camp ([19:01](#)):

I mean of course the dream is that it's there to teach people to think, that it's there to usher them into this era of intellectual maturity within themselves where you learn to consider ideas from multiple perspectives, you learn how to analyze an argument, you can learn to commune with your fellow man and it's wonderful. Do I think there's any hope of this actually manifesting itself in any way? No.

Emma Camp ([19:27](#)):

I think part of it is I want college to be more than a job training program and I think it can be. The realistic goal is just that it does more than just give you the skills to find a job. And let's be real, there are many majors that don't even do that. But I say this as someone who majored in Renaissance literature and philosophy. But I wanted to be more than the thing that middle class kids have to do because their parents tell them to do it and I think it can be.

Emma Camp ([19:55](#)):

I think that right now there is such a fear of going there and actually considering the unpopular ideas, actually thinking about them, daring to act in good faith that I think is making that harder to accomplish. And also frankly, the interests of college administrators who are even more left wing than professors on average and who often are a lot of times the source of the desire to actually have policies at colleges that punish students for their speech. Speech codes are a huge problem.

Emma Camp ([20:34](#)):

I was very lucky at UVA. UVA has basically no rules that violate the first amendment for students. UVA on principle does not punish students for their speech. That is not the case in most universities. There is often a huge administrative apparatus around bias reporting and certain forms of diversity training, which can be compelled speech depending on how they're run, interested in educating students on what the right political opinions to have.

Emma Camp ([21:02](#)):

And I think that that is inching college further and further away from this fount of knowledge dream that I think a lot of people hold onto where you can explore any idea where you pursue the truth. And even if there is a more realistic version of that, that we can get to and maybe had been at one point, I think the current political environment is taking us further away from that. And I think part of what takes us further away from that is a lack of ideological diversity. I think if we had more professors and more administrators who believed in different things, we wouldn't have this problem.

Emma Camp ([21:39](#)):

Again, I've said it before and I'll say it again, I think if we had the same ideological diversity problem but it was on the right, we would be seeing the same problems. It would just be the exact kind of suite of beliefs that are favored would change, but the group that's in power usually likes censoring those that are not in power because it helps preserve the domination.

Gabby Anglin ([22:01](#)):

Thinking about those in power and who has the ultimate call when it comes to these policies and potential punishments, who do you think should be responsible for keeping colleges and universities accountable when it comes to safeguarding free expression?

Emma Camp ([22:17](#)):

When it's public universities, it's the government, right? In the sense that public universities are not legally allowed to introduce policies which violate First Amendment protections for speech. That's it. There are many, many public universities which do violate the First Amendment. So if they are sued, the government can tell them you will use lose funding if you do not fix your policies.



Emma Camp ([22:39](#)):

That said, the government does a bad job doing a lot of things. I work for a libertarian magazine. Believe it or not, I don't trust the government most of the time. And so that is why you have the good people at FIRE, who I did also use to work for, full disclosure, who are taking up the mantle that frankly the ACLU has dropped on actually doing the hard work of litigating and sending very angry letters to universities, particularly public ones who violate students' rights.

Emma Camp ([23:10](#)):

I think private universities, it's a little more complex. FIRE, often say that private schools are violating contractual obligations that they have to students because a lot of private schools will promise free expression in their handbooks and then will punish someone for having a Black Lives Matter flag in their dorm window or Trump flag in their window.

Emma Camp ([23:29](#)):

I think in terms of who is accountable, I think the people that hold them accountable are people like FIRE and then hopefully very nice judges. But I think because the way bureaucracy works is that there's no one you can blame. That's the whole point of having a bureaucracy is it's just the system. It's the faceless mass of people. So I think by having so many administrators, for example, Yale has more administrators than undergrads.

Gabby Anglin ([23:55](#)):

Wow.

Emily Burden Rees ([23:55](#)):

Wow.

Emma Camp ([23:55](#)):

The kind of bureaucracy which so harshly goes after student speech is left completely unaccountable because you can't blame any one person. It's just the rules enacted by thousands of people.

Emily Burden Rees ([24:11](#)):

And I think you have to give more credit to yourself as well. As an undergraduate, you were vocal about the free speech, not necessarily policies, but students can do a lot to both change the culture, but to hold their universities accountable for instances like you mentioned, when their peers are censored for a certain type of expression. Or when faculty have been seen often for expressing their views on social media outside of work time and it's their personal views, but then they are also censored or even they go under, what was it called, faculty investigation.

Emily Burden Rees ([24:49](#)):

What do you think the role that students and alumni have, if they have any role in keeping their alma maters accountable?

Emma Camp ([24:59](#)):

I mean they can certainly exert public pressure. Activism does work to a certain degree. I think student activists are very powerful. A lot of why we have the problem that we do have is because student activists are so powerful. I think student speech activists can certainly make waves.

Emma Camp ([25:17](#)):

And I think alumni have a really important role because the university wants to squeeze sweet, sweet dollar bills out of them. So saying we won't give you money if you're using it to stifle student speech, if you're using it to write the paychecks for people whose job it is to be censors, that also gets universities listening to you. I think the worst thing UVA has ever done in relation to speech was because alumni were mad. And so I think we can use that power in the opposite direction.

Emma Camp ([25:52](#)):

But of course it also relies on presenting a somewhat united front, which I'm not sure it's going to happen, because you'll have one alumni group that says we won't support you unless you commit to free speech, but then also if you commit to free speech you'll lose another chunk of alumni. But I think that if you care about this issue, I think it is certainly worth trying to convince your alma mater to change course if they are making bad choices.

Gabby Anglin ([26:20](#)):

Being so vocal as a student and involved, do you see it as your duty now as a graduate to continue having that voice as an alumna?

Emma Camp ([26:30](#)):

I think it depends on what UVA does. I think they've been pretty good so far. The bad policy that I alluded to earlier, I essentially convinced them to change. And so I think UVA generally has a good track record, but of course if they introduce a bad policy, I would speak out against it. I think because I have the platform that I have being a journalist, I have the opportunity to speak about a lot of abuses of censorship on college campuses, not just for my own.

Emma Camp ([27:04](#)):

And so I feel that by nature of being a journalist who is tentatively on the education beat, I can talk about a lot more than my university, which I think is important because again, UVA students have it better than the vast majority of other college students.

Emma Camp ([27:18](#)):

And a problem that I think I am also somewhat guilty of perpetuating is that so many of these conversations about speech focus only on elite universities, they focus on name brand universities, but the schools that do the worst forms of suppression of speech, the schools that FIRE is often litigating the most or sending letters to the most are the schools that not that many people have heard of. They're schools like Sam Houston State in Texas or Truman State in, I believe it's Ohio. I could get that wrong.

Emma Camp ([27:48](#)):

There are schools that not that many people have heard of and certainly don't have the kind of national name recognition. They're less quote-unquote, "elite," but the speech violations that happen in those schools really matter too, even if their graduates are not necessarily likely to be on the Supreme Court.

Emma Camp ([28:06](#)):

But I think why this happens too is because people who end up in media jobs like me went to quote-unquote, "elite schools." So there's a little bit of naval gazing that happens there that I am certainly guilty of doing. But I also think it's important to write about the speech abuses that happen at schools that aren't constantly making national headlines.

Emily Burden Rees ([28:25](#)):

The undergraduate experience is so formative and memorable that I really think having a robust set of policies for encouraging free speech and expression is what can set up our future in this country as one that promotes the free exchange of ideas. So what advice do you have for university and students and faculty who feel this pressure to self censor? How do we change course in higher education to have campuses where you can have that free exchange of ideas?

Emma Camp ([28:58](#)):

I think my biggest advice for students is find the places on your campus that embrace a diversity of ideas. So for me at UVA was the Jefferson Literary and Debating Society, which it's kind of a misnomer to call it a debating society. It's not like a debate team. It was a group of nerds that instead of partying on Friday nights would get together and basically either have debates on serious issues of policy or whether the Kool-Aid man was the jug or the juice, and people giving presentations on poetry or philosophical ideas, or if you're like me, doing a dramatic retelling of the Shakespeare play Cymbeline emphasizing how crazy the plot is and just having a lot of fun.

Emma Camp ([29:50](#)):

And really one of the things that was so formative about that for me is that everyone there had different views and we were still all friends. That's where I met friends that are hardcore Marxists Leninists and also conservative Catholics and also people that volunteered for Republican presidential campaigns or Democrat governor campaigns.

Emma Camp ([30:14](#)):

And I think why these groups often succeed is that they get people with the same kind of principles. You have people who have different political beliefs and are willing to talk about them and argue about them and still be friends afterwards, still get a beer after yelling and screaming at each other about whatever political topic, but have, I can only describe it as a temperamental propensity towards, I don't know if I would call it not being easily offended or just being open minded.

Emma Camp ([30:47](#)):

I think finding people who are open minded is very important. And so that might end up being a debate club. It might be a political organization, it might be an acapella group. There are lots of places where this might exist on college campuses.

Emma Camp ([31:01](#)):

And then of course you have organizations like BridgeUSA and Heterodox Academy that do have campus level clubs where you could actually go. The club is basically a talk about political topics and disagree club. Going to those can also be a way of finding that. But in whatever way that you can, seeking out

people who are different from you and who don't see that as an impediment to liking you, I think is really important for students.

Emma Camp ([31:30](#)):

For faculty and administrators, I don't know because I think that's particularly hard for faculty who are tenure track. I also don't know what it's like to be a faculty member. So I'm sure that my advice will be bad, but I definitely think tenured faculty can be a bit braver, but I definitely have some compassion for the tenure track faculty or the non-tenure track faculty who could easily lose their jobs for getting on the wrong side of administrators.

Emma Camp ([31:59](#)):

But I also definitely think that university presidents need to be doing more and university administrators. Fundamentally they need to stop caving to mobs because how often so many of these, for lack of a better term, cancellation mobs are successful is that university administrations freak out. It's like, oh, a professor said something on Twitter or a student club wants to host a controversial speaker and everyone is getting mad at us on the internet. It's such bad press. How do we make it go away? Punishing them, caving into their demands. And what it does is it sets this really bad precedent.

Emma Camp ([32:35](#)):

And so I think that university presidents and administrators need to stop being cowards and stop caving to the demands of bad faith actors and say, "No, we're not going to punish this student because they said something you don't like. We're not going to fire this professor. We're not going to cancel this speaker, deal with it. We live in a liberal society."

Emma Camp ([32:56](#)):

And thankfully that is what schools like UVA have largely done, but also that is definitely rare. I think the people who hold the best cards are administrators and university presidents and I think if they change their behavior, it can change a lot of what students do.

Emma Camp ([33:14](#)):

A good example of this is speaker shout downs, which is a common way that student activists will prevent a speaker from happening either by physically shouting or playing music or rushing the stage to make an event not be able to occur. This is also not protected by the First Amendment. They're very common at universities. They never happen at UVA. And I don't think it's because the student activists at UVA are somehow just made different than those at William & Mary.

Emma Camp ([33:39](#)):

I think instead the UVA administration has made it very clear that they would not put up with it, and so students don't try it. And so obviously it doesn't fix everything, I still clearly have issues with the UVA student environment, but the worst forms of campus censoriousness can be solved by having administrations who are brave enough to not cave to student activist demands.

Emily Burden Rees ([34:00](#)):

Can I retweet that whole last line?

Emma Camp ([34:03](#)):

Yes, please do.

Emily Burden Rees ([34:04](#)):

You hit so many nails on so many heads both for students, what they have in their power, and especially university leadership. We see, like you said, UVA is a good example. University of Chicago president Robert Zimmer has made this very clear, of course that's where the Chicago free speech principles have disseminated from. We have good examples, but like you said, unfortunately they're less common. However, those are the brave examples that we should continue to look to and point to when other instances happen and then we can hopefully move to a place where it's more common.

Gabby Anglin ([34:46](#)):

We're seeing a lot of one-off instances. So you have Dorian Abbott uninvited from MIT, and it seems like we've lost the ability to give grace to people reminding that their opinions can change over time. So we're going on social media and we're digging up these old tweets and posting them and saying, we can't have this person because in 2012 they said this. And how do we get back to being able to say this person can change over time, and I know that they can? But also what extent do you allow them to? At what point do you call it this person's never going to change?

Emma Camp ([35:29](#)):

I think mercy is a very important value that I think our culture has forgotten, but I also don't think it's unique. I think that being able to be righteously cruel is a very valuable political tool and it's certainly good for gaining this kind of social capital where it's like you can say, this person had this belief that is bad, therefore they're bad, therefore I am good because I think they're bad.

Emma Camp ([36:02](#)):

I think that being able to actually accept apologies when they're genuine is really important. I think that one of the ways the censorious mob functions is by say when there is some kind of legitimate wrongdoing, or ... Of course, I believe on principle pretty much all speech should be legal, but a lot of speech is really bad, when someone has, let's say, said a racial slur or something that we all agree is a wrong thing to do and the person apologizes and says, "I was 16 years old, I didn't understand the way I understand now. I'm sorry for people that I hurt," or whatever.

Emma Camp ([36:40](#)):

But I think there's often this tendency for the mob to never accept it to basically say BS, when it's like, no, a lot of times people do mean their apologies. And I think it's a good practice to accept them and to allow for a sense of redemption when people have done things wrong. I think it's just a very good moral principle. Forgiveness is very important.

Emma Camp ([37:08](#)):

There's this cycle wherein not accepting apologies is justified because the mob demands them when they're not necessary. And so people will often give them when they don't mean it, but because someone, either their PR manager or their boss or whoever said, no, you have to apologize for doing this kind of innocuous thing, and so people detect that they're not genuine. But then when someone genuinely apologizes, it's politically convenient to keep someone in eternal purgatory, I guess.

Emma Camp ([37:37](#)):

I think that being more merciful and more compassionate is very good for people just even psychologically. Of course there can be reasonable limits to our forgiveness, but I don't know, I'm basically getting a little deep, but I found it very valuable when people were saying horrible, terrible things about me online to forgive them.

Emma Camp ([37:57](#)):

I know, this is getting very deep, but I feel like a lot of people who are in that position can very easily get in a very dark place. But I was just like, "Nope, I forgive any wrongs that are done to me here." It was very good. I let it go. It's very, I don't know.

Emma Camp ([38:15](#)):

And maybe it's just important to me to because of some of the personal beliefs I have, but I believe I'm commanded to pray for my enemies, to forgive them. And I don't just think that that's a good moral value to have, but I think it's psychologically good. I think part of why I was able to go through my weird cancellation period essentially unscathed was that I let it go and I felt I wasn't responsible for what people said about me. And I also didn't despise the people who said bad things about me. I don't really harbor ill will towards them.

Emily Burden Rees ([38:50](#)):

I actually think that's a really good summary, a really good close. Do you have another question?

Gabby Anglin ([38:56](#)):

No, I just want to talk ... An experience that I can speak to is during my undergraduate career, there was an instance where a racial slur was used and then they called for the student to be expelled. The student was a freshman, they just got to college. They just started being exposed to all of these things, but that mob could not accept that there was the opportunity to change. They couldn't accept that college is for learning, not perfecting. You're not expected your freshman year to be perfect. You need that time. And for some reason it seems like we're unwilling to accept that these days.

Emma Camp ([39:34](#)):

Yeah, I think it comes from this propensity towards being really suspicious towards thinking that people are fundamentally bad, that people are bad until proven otherwise. And so I think this often happens in response to mistakes. Instead of viewing mistakes where people do something or say something that is hurtful and that an apology might be appropriate for.

Emma Camp ([39:56](#)):

Rather than viewing that as a mistake, as a slip up, it's viewed as the mask slipping, as rather than this person through ignorance or bias or whatever said something that we agree is wrong to say, that everyone in a just society should agree is wrong to say, and therefore they can apologize and learn and it doesn't define them it's instead, this person is at their core racist and evil and not worthy of redeeming. And anything good that they have done is just a mask, it's just a cover. And then this instance where they used or mentioned a racial slur was just revealing the essential badness within.

Emma Camp ([40:43](#)):

And I just don't think that's a good way of viewing other people. I think that it is A, I think much more accurate, but I think much more healthy to view people as usually good and often making mistakes rather than usually bad and often revealing their essential badness.

Gabby Anglin ([41:00](#)):

We talk a lot about deciding this was bad, this was wrong, it was going to provoke violence, but who ultimately should be able to make that call? At what point do you say this is the ultimate authority? Is it the students that officially can make the call? Is it administration that could make the decision? And how do you settle that among all of the groups?

Emma Camp ([41:25](#)):

When it comes to whether or not to punish a student for their speech, I think universities, public, A, are required to abide by the First Amendment. I think private universities should just independently decide to abide by the First Amendment. And in that case it's pretty clear cut, it's, is this speech a true threat? Meaning there is a real ... I don't know the actual test off the top of my head, but basically a very real chance that they will do the thing that they're threatening. This isn't teasing, this isn't playing around, this is a true threat. Is this imminently likely to provoke violence? Not just you say something that upsets someone.

Emma Camp ([42:03](#)):

But essentially in order to get a violence provoking exception to the First Amendment, you practically have to be standing in front of a mob saying, "Go get John Smith. His house is right there." Is this illegal harassment? Is this a heckler's veto? There are very clear ways in which speech can violate the First Amendment, and the reality is almost all speech is protected by the First Amendment. There is very little speech that is not protected by the First Amendment.

Emma Camp ([42:31](#)):

And so when it practically comes down to it, in almost all cases that student activists are calling for someone to be expelled for what they're saying, the student said something protected by the First Amendment. When they didn't then sanctioning them is legal, it makes sense. It is probably what schools should do.

Emma Camp ([42:48](#)):

If the student is using their speech to sexually harass another student in a way that meets the Davis standard, they should be punished. And I think that's just generally the best, most principled way of handling that.

Emma Camp ([43:02](#)):

I think social sanctions are different. Of course, people can do what they want. You can call someone terrible names for literally anything, basically. And I think in a free society it's the, I wouldn't call it a paradox, but a little irony in that in order to have a free society where there's truly free speech, people need to be free to use their speech to do things that are incredibly censorious and to do things that are against the principles of a culture of free speech.

Emma Camp ([43:31](#)):

And so of course, I think that people should be open to mercy. People should, while having limits to that mercy and having limits to what they're willing to socially put up with, to put up with a lot of things and to be open to a lot of things. But one of the beauties of living in a free society is that people get to do things that I would personally not like them to do and I think that's how it should be.

Emily Burden Rees ([43:55](#)):

And when individuals use their speech totally lawfully, but in ways that are perhaps morally negative or backwards then, like you said, we can choose to forgive and we can choose to participate in these smaller factions like your Jefferson Literary and Debating Society where we engage with ideas with which we disagree and practice that pluralism that has made our democracy thrive and continues to.

Emma Camp ([44:23](#)):

Right. And I also think part of that pluralism does involve using speech to respond to wrongheaded, morally wrong ways of thinking. I think we should use our speech to call out racism and sexism and xenophobia and any of the terrible, hateful things that people can do. But again, of course, the solution is that pluralism. The solution isn't to try to throw them in jail or get them to lose their jobs, but to say, "I think your use of this racial slur is racist and wrong and against the principles of a society in which all are equal, and here's why."

Emma Camp ([44:56](#)):

And I think not only is that solution maybe even likely to get someone to change their mind, but it also is what allows us to have this free democratic society that we solve problems with words, not with fists. And so I think those principles are really important to hold onto.

Gabby Anglin ([45:14](#)):

I love being solution oriented because ultimately that's going to solve this. We have to come to some form of solution and we have to provide each other resources. This has been an incredibly impactful conversation. I know that I've put a pin in a lot of comments that I will later use with my peers. I think I took a lot away from this.

Emily Burden Rees ([45:35](#)):

So did I.

Gabby Anglin ([45:35](#)):

And we are so thankful that you made the time to come talk to us.

Emma Camp ([45:38](#)):

Well, thank you for having me. I had a great time.