

Jeffrey Herf: Maybe instinctively young Americans grow up with a sense that, yes, democracy is preferable and free speech is better than not but it's important to know the arguments, not to have an instinct, to know the arguments. I am concerned that there are too few young people in our universities who learn the arguments. I was just teaching this week about modern European intellectual history and I had the students read a short selection from Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* which they hadn't read before. And I think what was striking was not just Burke's emphatic rejection of the revolution, his disdain for popular politics, but the fact that there would be somebody with conservative ideas who was at all intelligent. And that was a bit of a surprise. We want students to read left-wing intellectuals and conservative intellectuals and liberal intellectuals and to be aware of the disputes that took place. Because the notion of a free society, that it's better that people can freely express their views, this was the result of reflection on a lot of bitter experience. And the Western Tradition to the extent that it has some wisdom to convey is also a gift to world civilization. In 2016 that sounds a bit peculiar to say because for many people around the world when they think of the Western Tradition, they think of colonialism and imperialism, but it doesn't exhaust its meaning. And the fact is that there are wars of extinction and forms of racism and oppression that go on outside Europe and outside the United States, which to this historian at any rate indicate how little people have learned from the history of the West. That the West has a lot to teach the rest of the world, not because people in Europe or the United States are genetically superior or that there is any racial superiority involved, far from it, but that we have been through this thing before and wars and inequality and injustices, the Western Tradition is reflected on all of that. And that reflection is a gift to world civilization. If it's not conveyed, I can imagine in years to come that young Americans will meet young people from China, who may say "we get along just fine without democracy. The government makes things happen, 7% economic growth, GNP growth per year. You are piddling along at 1.2%. We are doing fine, our airports are new, your airports look terrible." What are our young people going to say to them then?

Jeffrey Herf: The British Navy destroyed the slave trade. Did a lot of people in Britain and Europe make money off slavery? You bet. But were there also people in Europe and United States who fought against slavery? Yes there were. And they fought against it because of Western ideas about human dignity and freedom that were violated by the institution of slavery, so that's part of the history of the West also. Martin Luther King is part of the history of the West. The Civil Rights movement is part of the history of the West, the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt is part of the history of the West. Zionism is part of the history of the West too. So, let's not create a straw person called the West and say that it's synonymous with the whole host of evils and it doesn't stand for something else. Young people, our students, need to understand this is the case. Frederick Douglass understood it, Martin Luther King understood it, the Zionists understood it, Karl Marx understood it. I mean this is a gift and it shouldn't be a privilege that only a few of our students have access to.