

U.S. Students Are Using the Tactics of Kim Jong-un

North Korea is perhaps [the most miserable country on earth](#). An almost 100 percent command economy combined with an extremely repressive regime has produced unimaginable suffering for its people.

Dysfunctional mindsets have terrible consequences. Rather than seeing the North Korean mindset as a cautionary tale, some American students—abetted by college administrators—seem to have adopted it.

In North Korea, vast amounts of the country's meager resources are spent on political repression. The highest crime is political disloyalty. In her book [The Girl With Seven Names](#), North Korean defector Hyeonseo Lee explains how the Bowibu, the secret police in North Korea, "weren't interested in the real crimes that affected people, such as theft, which was rife, or corruption, but only in political disloyalty, the faintest hint of which, real or imagined, was enough to make an entire family – grandparents, parents and children – disappear."

The Bowibu did not have sophisticated electronic monitoring systems. Lee explains how they relied on informers:

"Neighbours could be relied upon to inform on neighbours; children to spy on children; workers to watch co-workers; and the head of the neighbourhood people's unit, the banjang, maintained an organized system of surveillance on every family in her unit. If the authorities asked her to place a particular family under closer watch, she would make the family's neighbours complicit."

In short, the vicious North Korean totalitarian state exists

because the vast bulk of the population cooperates in maintaining it.

When a North Korean commits a political crime, the entire family—parents, grandparents and children—are punished too. Failure to properly maintain the portraits of the “dear Leaders” is one of many political crimes.

What is one outcome of this unimaginable repression? A population that is incapable of having an opinion for themselves. Yeonmi Park, another young woman who escaped from North Korea, shares her experiences in her book [*In Order to Live*](#). When first in South Korea she experienced dread whenever asked “What do you think?” She was bewildered when asked “What is your favorite color?” That a person could have their own favorite color was an entirely new idea:

“In North Korea, we were usually taught to memorize everything, and most of the time there is only one correct answer to each question. So when the teacher asked for my favorite color, I thought hard to come up with the “right” answer. I had never been taught to use the “critical thinking” part of my brain, the part that makes reasoned judgments about why one thing seems better than the other.”

Imagine the amount of repression in North Korea. Education is indoctrination. Park was brought up without conceiving of having choices or opinions. She was relieved “to be given the right answer” when she learned her teacher’s favorite color was pink. Thinking with a North Korean mindset, “pink” was then Park’s first answer to the favorite color question.

One of the mindsets that has allowed Western Civilization to flourish is the belief that what individuals think does matter and, in the marketplace of ideas, different views have a chance to succeed.

In a [Wall Street Journal interview](#) professor Jonathan Haidt

explains how the use of the word violence has been twisted on college campuses. To some students, “speech that has a negative effect on members of the sacred victim groups” is now violence. Having altered the meaning of the word violence, Haidt describes a mindset in which “if offensive speech is ‘violence,’ then actual violence can be a form of self-defense.”

Let Haidt’s analysis sink in. He is describing the mindset that suppresses speech in North Korea and other totalitarian states: If words undermine the legitimacy of the government, violence is justified against those harming the security of the state.

Recently in North Korea some [soldiers joked](#) about North Korea’s despot Kim Jong-un being a “kindergartner” and a “mentally ill patient.” Their “hurtful speech” was reported and now the joking soldiers face execution.

How different are things on college campuses? At NYU, where Haidt teaches, there is a “bias response hotline.” Students are encouraged to “to report an experience of bias, discrimination or harassment.” Haidt observes, “It’s like East Germany, with students, at least some of them, playing the part of the Stasi.”

Students playing the part of the Stasi. Repression of speech. Justifying and committing violent acts against speakers you disagree with. Where is all this heading? David Brooks writing in the *New York Times* has [a cautionary warning](#):

“Starting decades ago, many people, especially in the universities, lost faith in the Western civilization narrative. They stopped teaching it, and the great cultural transmission belt broke...These days, the whole idea of Western civ is assumed to be reactionary and oppressive. All I can say is, if you think that was reactionary and oppressive, wait until you get a load of the world that comes after it.”

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