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CAMPUS, NEWS

Ben Shapiro at BU says America was not built on slavery

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by Daily Free Press Staff

By Angela Yang and Vanessa Kjeldsen

Conservative pundit Ben Shapiro spoke at Boston University Wednesday evening after weeks of controversy on campus surrounding his impending visit. Individual protesters raised their voices inside the venue at various points throughout the event.

Shapiro, who was invited by BU's chapter of Young Americans for Freedom, gave a speech titled "America Wasn't Built On Slavery, It Was Built On Freedom" before turning the event over to a question-and-answer session.

The Daily Wire editor-in-chief and podcast host opened his speech by addressing recent protest efforts by Students Against Hate Speech and other students, and gave a "quick shoutout" to those who [vandalized a poster](#) advertising his event outside Warren Towers.

"Thanks to — really, I'm serious about this — to the protesters who showed up outside, demonstrating again that the lecture that I'm giving is almost pointless," Shapiro said. "Because if America had been built on slavery, not freedom, you wouldn't have literally hundreds of protesters outside exercising that First Amendment freedom."



Conservative commentator Ben Shapiro speaks at the Boston University Track and Tennis Center on Wednesday night at an event organized by BU Young Americans for Freedom. GABRIELA HUTCHINGS/ DAILY FREE PRESS STAFF

The free event, which sold out 1,500 seats, took place at the BU Track and Tennis Center. The first 1,000 tickets were distributed free to BU students and faculty, with the remaining 500 sold to the general public.

Shapiro read excerpts of an [open letter](#) from student movement Black BU expressing the group's grievances surrounding BU's decision to allow Shapiro's appearance. The letter specifically took issue with the title of Shapiro's event.

"To deny slavery, and its economic role in the creation of the US as a nation is to deny the systematic degradation of Black bodies, the generational trauma, natal alienation, and social death that has marked and affected Black communities in the US since 1619," the letter stated.

Shapiro responded to the sentiments and said that he had not yet given his talk.

"If just the title of the speech makes you feel 'abandoned, triggered, frustrated, disheartened, devalued, infuriated, overwhelmed, ignored and embarrassed,' see your doctor after four hours," Shapiro said, drawing laughter from the audience.

Shapiro's speech delved into the history of slavery and analyzed the ideals rooted in America's founding documents.

"Here's the thing: the story of America is not the story of unending tolerance for slavery," Shapiro said. "Far from it."

The extent of freedom today wouldn't be possible if America was built on slavery, Shapiro said, who said that although history leaves a "lasting impact," liberties in America have "expanded" with time.

"The story of America is a story of a nation cleansing itself up in vindication," Shapiro said. "Stop conflating the past with the present or the tremendous unforgivable evil done to your great great-great-great-great-great-grandparents with your experiences today in America. They are not the same."

Shapiro said the idea that slavery and Jim Crow enhanced the American economy is "obviously untrue." An economy run by free citizens is more economically efficient than slave labor, Shapiro said.

"If slavery had been an economic winner, the South wouldn't have been roundly defeated by the industrialized North," Shapiro said.

Shapiro also said income disparity between races is due mainly to "individual decision-making" rather than racism. He did not elaborate on which decisions send people into poverty.

After the speech, upon announcement of the Q&A, protester Mateo Cox, 24, approached the stage holding a transgender pride flag.

"You stand there and speak about racism saying that you're on a high pedestal," Cox said, "but continue to deny our community and existence."

Shapiro, who in the past has said transgender people have a “mental illness,” responded to Cox.

“You’re a human being,” Shapiro said. “I just deny that if you’re a man that says you’re a woman, you’re a woman.”

Cox, met with boos and expletives from the crowd, was one of multiple disruptors throughout the event.

“Mr. Ben Shapiro, we will not be erased,” Cox said before exiting the venue.

Security in yellow vests lined the indoor venue at the Track and Tennis Center. Diana Soriano, YAF chair and a senior in CAS, said after the event that Shapiro pays for his personal security and that the security provided by BU was in response to potential threats posed by protests.

“People who complain about the security costs are the people who participate in those things,” Soriano said. “They are the reason why the security costs are so high.”

Soriano said YAF expected backlash before and during the event, attributing it to the environment of today’s college campuses.

“People are taught that they have to feel comfortable all the time and they’re indoctrinated with a specific narrative and they literally cannot hear other opinions,” Soriano said. “And they have to slander people and it’s just really sad that this is where we’ve come to.”

YAF Secretary Joe Spinosa, a junior in Questrom, said YAF did not select the theme for Shapiro’s speech.

“We have nothing to do with that. Ben Shapiro writes his own — we had no idea of the topic until the public found out,” Spinosa said. “I understand, based strictly on the title, being hurt or offended. I think it’s important to hear what he has to say.”

Spinosa said he thinks it important to bridge the divide between polarized perspectives.

“I don’t expect anyone who listens to Ben speak to become conservative, just as if a liberal speaker came here, they wouldn’t expect me to become liberal,” Spinosa said. “I think it’s more about seeing each other as people with good intentions — who just view how to solve problems differently — rather than a terrible awful bigot.”

Jack Jahn, 18, of Needham is a high school student who said he feels isolated as a more conservative thinker at a majority-liberal school.

“I feel like at my high school, there’s not a lot of representation of conservative ideas and conservative thought, so I wanted to hear more of a conservative person like him speak,” Jahn said. “Online, there’s a lot more sound bites so it kind of makes him seem like he is more like almost aggressive, but I feel like here he was really calm.”

Seth Anderson, 37, of Fenway said he leans center-left politically, and that he considers himself a “free thinker.”

“I like to be exposed to all kinds of ideas whether I think I agree with them or not, because if you only know your side of an argument, you don’t know the argument,” Anderson said. “I disagree with [Shapiro] on many things. But I also think he is free to share those ideas and that we, as thinking, rational people, have a right and responsibility to listen to ideas and debate them.”

Daniel Treacy, YAF recruiting chair and a sophomore in the College of Communication, said the organization put in heavy work to successfully request Shapiro as this semester’s speaker.

“I had a lot of fun with the pushback on campus, it was entertaining. We kind of had a front row seat for all the reaction on campus, good and bad,” Tracy said. “But for the most part, I think the reception of it was good. Most people, even if they disagreed with him, were willing to let him speak, and that’s a good sign.”



Author: Daily Free Press Staff

3 Comments



Victor DeRubeis

November 14, 2019 at 11:31 am

Thank you to The Daily Free Press for coverage that appears to be fair and comprehensive.

A someone who considers himself an alumnus of DFP (1978), I remember catching crap for having the audacity to include as many views as many views as possible in my news and feature articles.

It’s distressing to see journalists at Harvard and Northeastern being intimidated into suppressing the reporting of views that some might find offensive.

Freepers, stand your ground and continue your efforts to report fairly, accurately, and thoroughly.



alan donovan

November 14, 2019 at 12:33 pm

As the first General Manager of The Freep, almost 50 years ago, I was heartened to see the present staff keep the tradition of fair reporting. Unlike the papers at Harvard or Northwestern, who receive extensive support not only from their schools but also their alumns, you retained journalistic integrity.

Well done



Shawn Cosby

November 17, 2019 at 5:37 pm

This idea that America has tried to eradicate the stain of slavery and that it wasn't built on the backs of people treated like cattle might have more weight if the facts didn't immolate that hypothesis. We can go back to the financial power of the South before the Civil War and see how dependent it was on slavery and how it was plunged into poverty after slavery ended and how Jim Crow helped to corral black dollars in black neighborhoods while at the same time devaluing black economic buying power but that's not going to sway fans of Mr.Shapiro who want to clean the blood off the foundation of our country. Mr. Shapiro is the epitome of bro online culture. He spits out a word salad of pithy phrases and nonsense that he Hope's sounds intelligent but is actually just a dressed up way of saying: things were not that bad for minorities and if they were oh well. I don't disagree with him being allowed to speak but I will vehemently oppose what he is saying

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