


A stylized, blue-toned illustration of the Statue of Liberty, set against a solid red background. The statue is shown from the waist up, holding a torch aloft in her right hand and a tablet in her left. The crown is visible, and the robes are draped. The overall style is graphic and minimalist.

Liberum Verba

2012 Patriotic Essay Contest

The background of the page features a faded, blue-tinted image of the Statue of Liberty. The statue is shown from the waist up, holding the torch in its right hand and the tablet in its left. The background is a solid, light red color. The text is centered over the image.

Henry Imperial

Elizabeth High School

Grade 12

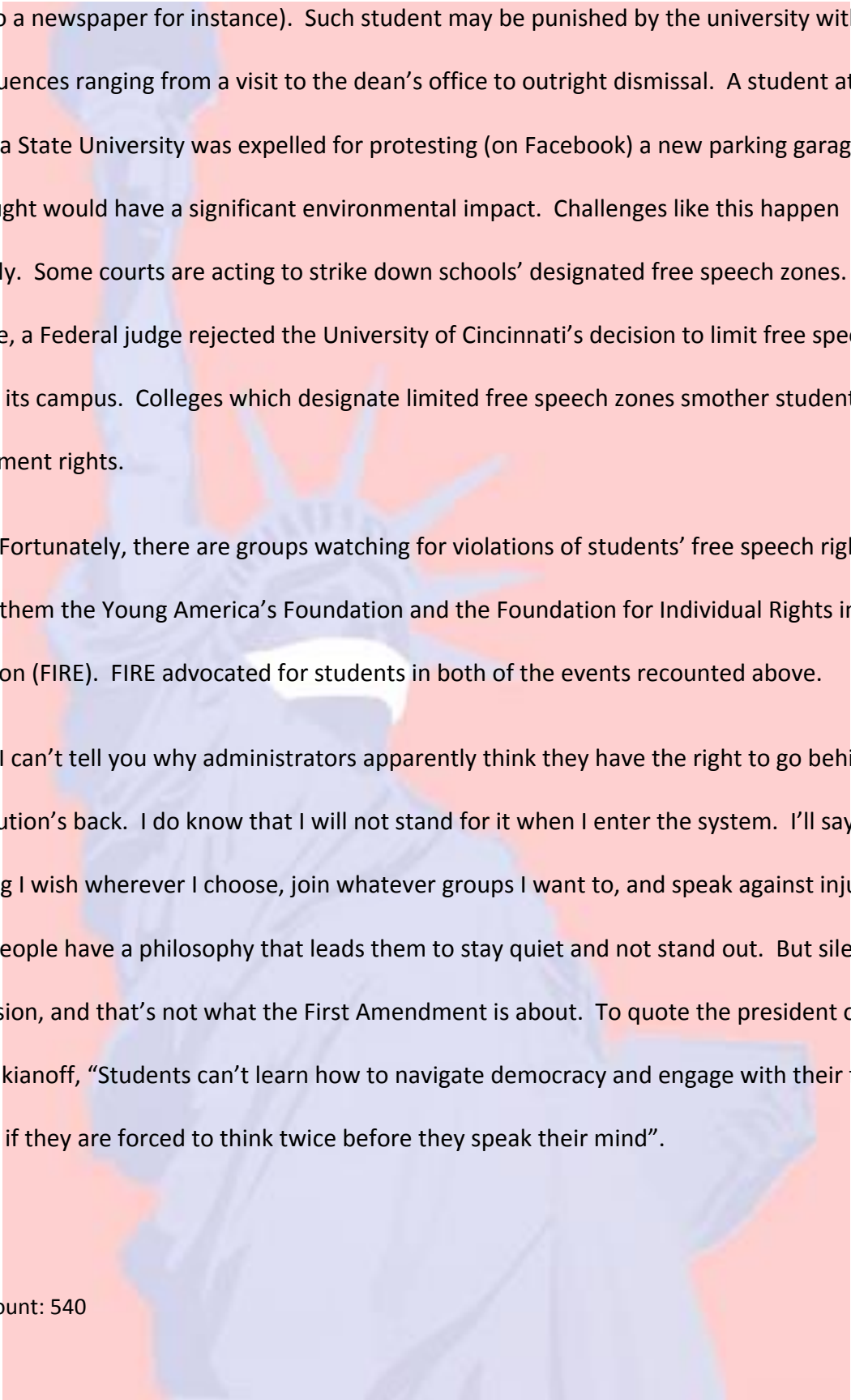
Liberum Verba

People in at least 15 states want to secede from the Union! The true U.S. unemployment rate is double what the government reports!! FDR was a worse President than Johnson and Carter combined!!!

Please pause to consider these statements. A Conservative audience may be open to these views. However, other audiences would express outrage and disdain. Those who are offended might try to silence me in court, on the web, or even at gunpoint. But I have no fear in saying any of it, whether the statements are provable or not. Anywhere in the world, freedom of speech from birth until any memory of you fades from the sands of time should be a right that is unspoken. In the U.S., we are fortunate that this right is a pillar of our highest body of law – the U.S. Constitution. Thanks to the First Amendment, Americans have full rights to free speech.

In America, the push for diversity, increased sensitivity, and the rise of the information age have brought threats to the sanctity of the First Amendment. Some changes, such as the rise of social media, are positive. But many people have tried and still try to impose legislation and speech codes to abridge our rights under the First Amendment. They say that the ends justify the means, as they seek to further their various causes. One of the many forums where law and right is set aside for conformity and sensitivity is where I'll be spending the next 4 to 6 years of my life – the U.S. college campus.

Across the U.S., public universities are pushing the limits, seeking to stifle free speech. A common case is that of a student who criticizes the university he/she attends (a non-favorable



letter to a newspaper for instance). Such student may be punished by the university with consequences ranging from a visit to the dean's office to outright dismissal. A student at Valdosta State University was expelled for protesting (on Facebook) a new parking garage that he thought would have a significant environmental impact. Challenges like this happen routinely. Some courts are acting to strike down schools' designated free speech zones. For instance, a Federal judge rejected the University of Cincinnati's decision to limit free speech to 0.1% of its campus. Colleges which designate limited free speech zones smother students' First Amendment rights.

Fortunately, there are groups watching for violations of students' free speech rights – among them the Young America's Foundation and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE). FIRE advocated for students in both of the events recounted above.

I can't tell you why administrators apparently think they have the right to go behind the Constitution's back. I do know that I will not stand for it when I enter the system. I'll say anything I wish wherever I choose, join whatever groups I want to, and speak against injustices. Some people have a philosophy that leads them to stay quiet and not stand out. But silence is submission, and that's not what the First Amendment is about. To quote the president of FIRE, Greg Lukianoff, "Students can't learn how to navigate democracy and engage with their fellow citizens if they are forced to think twice before they speak their mind".

Word Count: 540