

In the Independent Party, the question, “What do you believe?” really has only one answer — not a diatribe against the major political parties, or a non-confrontational retreat to the center. Rather, the only appropriate response is to ask in return: about what?

At Yale, undergraduates have a rare opportunity to meet, learn from, and cultivate friendships with people whose diversity of opinions and backgrounds you will scarce find again in your life.

My name is Roy Lee, and as the 154th Chairman of the Independent Party, I invite you to make the most of this opportunity. Join us in moving past the strict confines of uniform thought and association.

We like to tell people that the Independent Party spans the political spectrum, from aggressive neoconservatives to liberal redistributionists. The truth is, our members stubbornly defy categorization. What we all share in common is a resistance to prepackaged opinions and an insistence on discovering our own sets of belief, issue by issue.

Ours is the party of independent thinkers who value questioning and argument over conformity, who build and test their deepest beliefs in an environment of intellectual accountability and respect, and who have the strength to defend their values but the humility to admit that they are fallible.

We in the IP believe that debates — if they are to shake your convictions, question your beliefs, and, God forbid, change your mind — must engage on first principles. Our debates draw students from across campus into thoughtful and articulate discourse about a variety of issues that cut across the tired lines of liberal and conservative. Our position in the Union as the largest and most intellectually diverse party uniquely enables us to debate contemporary political questions, age-old philosophical dilemmas, far-reaching international issues, and pressing cultural quandaries with the vigor and intellectual discipline that our motto, “Hear All Sides,” demands.

Our vibrant community welcomes fierce disagreements with people who are not merely some of the most interesting at Yale, but also charmingly eccentric, disarmingly hilarious, and remarkably well grounded. But between our lively debates and penetrating conversations lie the unshakable bonds of friendship that are forged over Friday lunch at Union League, after-debate milkshakes at Yorkside, Sunday dinners, and old Yale toasting sessions (followed by — the infamous afterparties).

But we in the IP strive to gain insights not just from each other, but also from leaders at Yale and the world at large. Several times each term, we are joined at lunch by distinguished professors like constitutional law expert Akhil Amar, beloved psychologist Marvin Chun, and Greek historian Donald Kagan. And once a semester, we venture to New York to meet with leaders in government, industry, art, and journalism. In recent semesters we’ve met with former New York mayor Ed Koch, Obama administration health care expert Dr. Ezekiel Emmanuel, and the global head of capital markets at Credit Suisse, Tom Mercein.

Defending your beliefs is a challenge, and having the honesty to admit you may be wrong requires courage. What we do is not easy. But if inquisitiveness, intellectual curiosity, and a thirst for the truth unfiltered by partisan lenses have a claim to the person you want to become by the time you leave this place, I invite you to join us at our debate, tomorrow evening at 7:30 PM in the Pierson Common Room on the topic Resolved: Yale Shouldn’t Punish Hateful Speech.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.