

Audio file

[119070-StoryvilleSpeechlessPart1.mp3](#)

Transcript

Speaker 1

This is not a trigger warning. You'll be fine. Just some ground rules before we start. Everyone in this film is a real person. You don't have to agree with them, but let's keep it civil. No doxing, no trolling, no cheap shots. Because this isn't just a story, it's a mirror.

Speaker 2

We're asking that there be no restrictions on the content of speech, and that's an enormous amount of freedom.

Speaker 3

I'm confident that the students will exercise their freedom with the same responsibility they've shown in winning their freedom.

Speaker 2

Yeah, **** free speech, *****. You need to get out. You are being racist. You are being offensive.

Speaker 3

Some of the words now forbidden at Stanford. There has been a.

Speaker 4

Flurry of loud and angry debate about what can be said and what ideas can be expressed.

Speaker 5

I want you to be offended every single day on this campus. Your crime is ***** effective! And then to learn how to speak back.

Speaker 2

The law is a manifestation of white supremacy that continues to oppress.

Speaker 3

When somebody doesn't approve of my views on things like this, what I'm called is a white supremacist.

Speaker 2

If you're a ***** Nazi.

Speaker 6

Get the **** *** campus! The time has come to reclaim our once-great educational institutions from the radical left.

Speaker 2

Get your ***** camera away.

Speaker 6

I will fire the radical left accreditors that have allowed our colleges to become dominated by Marxists, maniacs, and lunatics.

Speaker 3

The government's response to this problem has been Orwellian.

Speaker 4

Columbia University grad Mahmoud Khalil was arrested...

Speaker 3

Arrested by immigration authorities. Back up! Back up! Donald Trump is trying to silence academic freedom. I will sign an executive order to begin eliminating the federal Department of Education. Once and for all.

Speaker 1

How the hell did we get here? These days, even asking that can get you cancelled quick, depending on who you are. Full disclosure, I'm a cisgender, left-leaning white woman of a certain age, not a Birkenstock lefty, more like a suede Chelsea boot. yeah, and I'm Canadian. I'm also a documentary filmmaker. I've been at the epicenter of an Ebola outbreak. I've gone undercover in Turkey to find a trafficked woman. I exposed corruption in the boxing world. And I tracked down Dr. Frankenstein, the world's most notorious organ traveler. This time, I'm heading into a conflict zone to make what might be the most dangerous film of my career. Why are you filming this? I'm going back to school. It's not a perfect school. No, you shut the **** **. For me, university was a place where you wrestled with new ideas. The collision of views and ideologies is in the DNA of the academic enterprise. Sex, politics, religion, war, we argued about all of it. But somewhere along the way, the climate changed. Students didn't just disagree with

ideas, they felt harmed by them. And the only way to feel safe was to silence the people expressing them.

Speaker 2

And now I want your job to be taken from you.

Speaker 1

All in the name of social justice. Maybe it was, but it felt different. I am disgusted knowing that you work at Yale University. Like you had to watch every word. My kids were heading to university, and I wanted to understand the world they were stepping into. I didn't know it then, but this was the start of a journey that would last nearly a decade and reveal how clashes over speech and identity put universities in the crosshairs of a political backlash. And in 2017, Evergreen State College lit up my feed. For over a year, at one of the most progressive colleges in North America, students were protesting. Well... everything. **** your neoliberal **** to make this school run like a corporation. **** racing tuition, catering the racists, homophobes, transphobic, bigots, neo-Nazis, rapists. **** you.

Speaker 2

Evergreen paints itself as this progressive, social justice place. It is very anti-all of that. Dr. King stated that the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice. after Keith drops off dead. **** yeah. Everyone, do not have cocktail parties on indigenous land. The students here have organized in an attempt to improve student empowerment on campus. What did you do for like the black students on campus? What did you do for the LGBTQ people on campus? What did you do for the Latina eds people on campus? What did you do?

Speaker 3

Safety is more than just being physically protected. It's, you know, it's being free from emotional harm. If there are people at our campus who feel unsafe, and it is unsafe.

Speaker 1

I quickly discovered that Evergreen reached a boiling point during an annual campus event.

Speaker 3

Every spring quarter since the 1970s, Evergreen has hosted a Day of Absence event.

Speaker 7

Where students, faculty, and staff of color...

Speaker 6

Voluntarily stay off campus to raise awareness of the contributions of minorities... But this year, it was turned on its head, with white students and staff reportedly asked to leave the premises.

Speaker 7

With minority students remaining on site. However, it didn't sit well with one biology professor. It is one thing to protest by not showing up somewhere. It is another thing for one group to tell another group, Don't come here.

Speaker 4

Some faculty felt as if it was discriminating against white people to have a role reversal.

Speaker 7

There was a couple of inflammatory emails that were sent campus-wide that students had access to. It made a lot of students here feel uncomfortable.

Speaker 1

Well, are you talking about the e-mail where Brett was saying that he didn't agree with the concept?

Speaker 7

Yeah. You may take this letter as a formal protest of this year's structure, and you may assume that I will be on campus on the day of absence.

Speaker 2

I feel like Brett's like a piece of the white supremacy that exists here on this really ***** place. Let's go, hey, hey! Ho, ho! Let's go, hey, hey! When the e-mails came out, and black people were like, This has racist coding in it. It's racist language. Can we address this? Can we talk about this? People were like, Well, we didn't say the N-word, so it's not racism.

Speaker 7

On a college campus, one's right to speak or to be must never be based on skin color.

Speaker 2

I have read the e-mail so many times, and I can't find anything racist about it.

Speaker 7

I would encourage others to put phenotype aside and reject this new formulation.

Speaker 2

For me, even hearing the word genes on anything related is--.

Speaker 1

Use the word phenotype.

Speaker 2

Phenotype, anything connected to that kind of thing is immediately like something--
shit's about to happen.

Speaker 7

You're disrupting my class.

Speaker 2

No, you're not alive. You're disrupting your class. How many times has gene pool,
genotypes, been weaponized in a racist way?

Speaker 7

It's a completely uncontroversial biological term to describe that we are talking about
people's physical characteristics.

Speaker 4

You don't have a right to report either. With very little repercussions for spewing racist
hatred on public emails and to students.

Speaker 7

I'm not a racist.

Speaker 4

You're not a racist.

Speaker 2

That's your racist. English is not a language that black people consented to. It's a
language that's been used to colonize our people, and so then when people say things
like the definition of anything, I'm like, good and great. So what I'm saying is, now I'm
claiming this language that I didn't consent to and my people didn't get consent to or
that were raped into our mouths. And now we're saying, this is actually what I need this
word to mean to serve me. We come here as students against campus racism and
against anti-blackness on campus. Brett was not very receptive.

Speaker 7

He did not try to interact with our statement at all.

Speaker 2

May I answer your question? No, it is not You asked, you're gonna leave me?

Speaker 7

You asked me a question. I would like to answer it. Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Brett Martin has got to go.

Speaker 1

Hey, hey! Do you think Brett is a racist?

Speaker 4

Yes, Brett is a racist. All white people are racist because we.

Speaker 1

Live in the white supremacist world, and colonization has been, like, still in session. That was the moment I realized the word racism had been redefined. Black activists from the 1960s onwards, who are my accepted experts in what racism is, have defined racism as prejudice plus power. And so I might be prejudiced against a white person, but I don't have the power that a white person has. to cause real harm. In this framework, racism isn't only about intent, it's about power. And power was seen as running through white-controlled institutions. So as a white person, unless I'm challenging the system, I'm racist by definition. Not because I mean harm, but because I benefit from that system. And Jacqueline can't be racist because she doesn't. What is the message you want to put out? Yeah, send more reporters of colour. That's the message that I want to put out. Fair enough. I could see where she was coming from. And then a student called me a white supremacist. Not in anger, just as a kind of friendly heads up. And one thing you can do is hold yourself accountable to that and embrace that, you know, you're racist. I felt like I stepped into a parallel universe with its own vocabulary. I just didn't speak the language yet.

Speaker 7

At that point, the protesters moved on to the administration building, and they confronted administrators and President Bridges. No, **** you, George.

Speaker 2

You don't want to hear a ***** thing you have to say.

Speaker 1

You've talked so ***** much. You shut the **** **. This is college president Dr. George Bridges. He believed the students deserved to be heard and seemed willing to endure almost anything to show he was listening.

Speaker 7

Protesters ended up in a meeting demanding of the president that special provisions be granted to effectively corral professors in science and technology, professors in the STEM fields. A commitment towards I'm really targeting STEM. And a lot of this, regarding targeting clients. In fact, they discuss me in that meeting.

Speaker 1

It just doesn't make sense to me why he's still here.

Speaker 7

I think the man used the word genetics anyway. Protesters argued that special remedies are necessary.

Speaker 6

What I hear us stating is Bring 'em in, train 'em, and if they don't get it, sanction. Right. They're gonna say some things that we don't like, and how do we stop people from speaking offensively? That's a challenge.

Speaker 3

There is this concept of free speech.

Speaker 2

The way free speech is used is so dangerous a lot of times.

Speaker 7

There was a plan for a meeting in an old cafeteria, and I felt like the right thing to do was to be at that meeting, an indication that I was very willing to talk to them about whatever it is they thought needed to be addressed.

Speaker 2

White people in the back. I was first told that I couldn't enter the room where the meeting was being held because I was white. That was not okay with me, so I just, like, kept moving forward towards the room, and somebody stopped me again and was like, We'll allow you to go into the room, but you are not allowed to speak, voice your opinions, or ask any questions because you're white. You don't need to do that. You're black. Let the white people do that.

Speaker 6

Thank you all for coming.

Speaker 3

First and foremost, I want to outline what we discussed with a group of students about action items we can take.

Speaker 2

I'm tired of white people talking about what black and brown people need. You don't know. I'm just trying to respond to the concerns you were.

Speaker 1

I was trying to make sense of the student demands, which seemed to shift by the hour. Some were reasonable, important even. More diverse faculty, better support for marginalized students. But it didn't stop there. They wanted Brett fired. There's a faculty who's promoting racism on this campus, who's sitting over there smirking, enjoying this.

Speaker 6

And you're doing nothing to take them off this campus. You're doing nothing.

Speaker 1

And then, their outrage started to drown out their message. Okay, George, so, so ***** full of ***** and like, don't make a damn what you have to say.

Speaker 2

Real quick, let's do it real quick. The people, the vice presidents. The people's the ***** state. You fascists, ***** you. ***** you, George.

Speaker 1

I saw that as very aggressive, not constructive.

Speaker 2

I just want to ask you, like, what do you mean by aggressive? Yes.

Speaker 1

Someone yelling, ***** you, ***** *****. That's Einstein.

Speaker 2

Okay. I feel like as a person of color and many other things, when we are nice.

Speaker 3

***** never gets done. And.

Speaker 2

Let me remind y'all, that's how whiteness works. Whiteness is the most violent ***** system to ever breathe. It's not an accident that all of our administration is white. Right. It's not an accident. That **** is systematic as ****.

Speaker 7

George was clearly not in control of the meeting at all.

Speaker 3

Put your hand down.

Speaker 2

That's my problem, George. You keep doing these little hand movements or whatever. Moving hands in a situation, like, where you're already in the position of power. Using your hands and sort of dismissing things. That was a microaggression. It's a higher aggression. You want your microaggression with your hands and your posture, please? That's not appropriate. You got to put your hands down. No, you got to put your hands down. Thank you. I'm working on my hands.

Speaker 7

The real point is power. We have the power. to make the president of the college not use his hands when he talks. **** you. And he may have been surprised by the degree to which they were willing to humiliate him publicly, but I do think it was a monster of his own creation. This is all security right now. Students are taking furniture and putting it in front of the doors.

Speaker 2

Make sure all those exits are covered. So we've shut down, like, this entire hallway. Hold on, hold on.

Speaker 7

Sorry. I speak with my hands. It's very hard to know for sure where Dr. Bridges was in all of this. He describes himself as unconcerned about having been barricaded in his office by protesters. The only priority is that y'all stay in this case until that estimate can happen, so that's the only thing that we're going to do. I was calling the president, and I was talking to him, and you could hear the yelling and the screaming in the background, and it sounded so chaotic. So I'm thinking, do we have a hostage situation here? And I said, can we come in? And he said, No, stand down. These racist teachers have got to go! The world needed to know what was going on because the college itself was spiraling out of control. Time now for campus craziness. Dr. Bridges is allowing this mob to effectively control the campus. Fox News contacted me. I agreed to do it because nobody else had asked. It's not like The New York Times was banging down my

door. It's not like CNN had contacted me. You said some racist . I didn't apologize. I did not. I assume you're no kind of right-winger. If you teach at Evergreen, I'm sure you're, you know-- I'm a deeply progressive person.

Speaker 3

The fact that someone who could identify as a progressive would go on Fox News, make our school a target for white supremacists. Hello, dispatch, can I help you?

Speaker 4

Uh, yes, I'm on my way to Evergreen University now with a 44 Magnum.

Speaker 3

I'm gonna execute as many people on that campus as I can get a hold of.

Speaker 7

Thousands of people dispersing from the campus, shrieking, This is your fault. There was no shooting. Nobody came to campus. But after the threat was phoned in, my wife and I told our kids out of school in the middle of the day. We bought a plane ticket, and we left the state.

Speaker 1

Two weeks later, a right-wing group descended on campus, and Evergreen became the site of a very different kind of protest.

Speaker 3

Making a call on Evergreen State College to get some real leadership, to stick up for the professor who was treated like trash. They're telling you how racist free speech is, how racist white people are.

Speaker 7

There's no question that there was a canary in the coal mine aspect to what happened at Evergreen. If people are telling you what ideas you are, allowed to voice. There's nothing that is not placed at risk. And I think it would be a mistake just because this looks like confused college students to underrate the danger that this poses to civilization.

Speaker 1

Evergreen was my crash course. chaotic mix of old ideologies and new disruptive thinking. I had no idea that over the course of the next decade, it would spill out onto campuses everywhere. And I certainly didn't understand what it all meant. That lesson

came later, in a classroom at York College, Pennsylvania, where students were studying what happened at Evergreen, like a case study.

Speaker 8

Okay. I want your initial reaction to the Evergreen story. I'm sure somebody has something to say.

Speaker 2

The people of color feel that they're being suppressed by the faculty members and the professor.

Speaker 8

All right, so we have two things going on here. My name is Eric Smith. I am a professor of rhetoric at York College of Pennsylvania. They're looking through this lens of victimhood. Rhetoric, in its simplest description, is the study of persuasive communication. Can we say a narrative of victimhood, or maybe oppressor oppressed? As a rhetorician, I'm trying to prepare my students for success here in a diverse and civil society. So I give them the tools for that. How do we create a society with a bunch of different people, a bunch of different discourses? How do we all live together peacefully? Evergreen is the perfect microcosm of the detriments of what is often called woke ideology or critical social justice. So this can be boiled down to the conflict between classical liberalism and critical social justice. So a classical liberal ideology emphasizes free speech, equality before the law, and the idea that we all get together and deliberate and make decisions that way. Critical social justice is perpetuating this oppressor, oppressed dynamic. So this is the bulleted list of critical social justice, kind of what constitutes critical social justice.

Speaker 1

Hang on, I kept hearing critical social justice. But I didn't actually know what it meant. So I started digging and found a set of four ideas that planted the seeds. But we have to go back. Well, I'm not a crook. The people have the power. For most of the 20th century, the university was guided by one big idea, classical liberalism. Free inquiry, open debate, follow the truth wherever it leads. It didn't always live up to it, but that was the ideal. After the free speech movement of the '60s, a new set of ideas started to gain influence. Enter critical theory. Philosophers like Herbert Marcuse focused on power, who has it, who doesn't, and how the whole system keeps it that way. The goal? Don't just study society. Expose and challenge anything that looks like injustice, which over time would become a lot of things. Meanwhile, another fire was burning. The Black Liberation Movement. America's brutal racist history fueled the Civil Rights Movement, but by the late 60s... We're gonna walk on this racist power structure... Activists saw that the law had changed, but their lives hadn't. And we're gonna say to the whole damn

government... Groups like the Black Panthers weren't asking anymore. We come for what's ours. They were demanding change. Now here's where it all comes together. Radical politics meets radical theory, and it happens on campus. Suddenly, social justice isn't just a rallying cry. It's A curriculum. Ethnic studies, black studies, women's studies, new departments, new reading lists. The revolution didn't burn the system down. It rewrote the syllabus. Next up, post-modernism. I'll be honest, this one's tricky. It argues that knowledge isn't neutral, it's shaped by culture, language, and power. Truth, subjective. Language, tool of power. Objectivity, impossible. Bottom line, science, law, history, even your textbooks don't just reflect reality, they also reflect who's writing them. Then came critical pedagogy, a philosophy of how teaching should work. School isn't just a place to learn, it's a place to challenge injustice. This is where education becomes activism.

Speaker 2

And we have the right to peacefully assemble and protest.

Speaker 1

So you take critical theory's focus on how society keeps power in place, add black liberation's revolutionary energy, mix in post-modernism's distrust of objectivity. Stir in critical pedagogy's activist approach to education, and you get the foundations for what many scholars now call critical social justice. Not one movement, a set of ideas converging over decades, influencing how we think about race, gender, colonialism, identity, and oppression. It didn't just stay in the classroom. It slowly reshaped the mission of higher education. as the pursuit of truth was increasingly filtered through the lens of activism and social justice. And it helps explain how we got here.

Speaker 8

If you're trying to understand it and get to the nitty-gritty of it, Evergreen is an excellent textbook. The idea is that there is an oppressor and oppressed narrative, and that narrative drives everything. Everything is racist is a primary tenet of critical social justice. So if racism is always already there. You're projecting that on the people you may or may not even know. You're telling them who they are before they even open their mouths, right? This is the opposite of civil conversation. This is shutting down, this is silencing, and it's bullying.

Speaker 2

You're brainwashed. You, you, you're brown-skinned. People who look like you were targeted. ***** we fighting for you. Like, come on. You're not-- They're not Oppressed.

Speaker 8

Okay. Okay. Why is the student who doesn't see oppressor oppressed so dismissed?
Yes.

Speaker 2

It doesn't fit into, like, the argument they're trying to get across.

Speaker 8

Right. If we have people of color who don't feel oppressed, well, that's-that's weakening the narrative. That can't happen. My authenticity as a Black person has been challenged my entire life, really. There's this idea that Black people are a monolith. We all think the same. We all love the same. We all interpret things the same. So if I say things that are against the acceptable ideology, right, then I am not authentically Black.

Speaker 1

For Eric, challenging these ideas came at a cost.

Speaker 8

There was a keynote address at our flagship conference, a conference on college composition and communication. I can say, you know, quite honestly, that I can split my life into two parts. Before that day and after that day.

Speaker 6

All right, get ready for 60 minutes of talking.

Speaker 1

This is Professor Asawa Inouye, a widely respected scholar in rhetoric and composition, headlining at the field's biggest conference.

Speaker 6

How do we language so people stop killing each other?

Speaker 1

And listen closely, because he's about to connect English grading practices to, well, everything terrible.

Speaker 6

In a world of police brutality against black and brown people in the U.S., a border wall and harmful immigration policies, increasing violence against Muslims and LGBTQ, of women losing their rights, of mass shootings in schools, a complete disregard of indigenous people's rights to their lands and cultures, where do we really think this violence, discord, and killing starts? If you use a single standard to grade your students'

linguaging, you engage in racism. You actively promote white language supremacy. White language supremacy is the supremacy of every single standard that comes out of elite, white, monolingual, neurotypical language links in the world. So that's all the people in power have made the standards in schools and professions. And then it continues to ensure benefits to that group. We must stop saying that we have to teach this dominant English, because it's what students need to succeed tomorrow.

Speaker 8

And a quote from the speech says that there is inherent racism in teaching students of color what's considered standard English, right? Uh, it's oppressive, apparently.

Speaker 6

They only need it because we keep teaching it.

Speaker 8

Um, I took some issue with that, uh, for a variety of reasons, which you can probably imagine. And I voiced my opinion on the online forum for my field. The current leadership will have you believe that students and scholars of color are traumatized by having to learn an English deemed standardized.

Speaker 6

If I'm a black English speaker and I come into a classroom and they say, okay, black English is good and you can think in those ways and use that, but let's translate it to standardizing because you're going to need that down the road because that's what's going to get you successful. That still privileges the academic English and it subordinates that other English, black English or whatever.

Speaker 8

African American English or African American vernacular English or Black English or Ebonics, right? It is a dialect with its own conventions. It's not broken English. It's unbroken African American vernacular English with its own, you know, tonality and magic. You know, it really is a great, you know, great dialect. So no one is saying that shouldn't be appreciated or respected. What I'm saying is go ahead and add to that, something that may come in handy, in certain situations, and by certain situations I mean most. I thought I was walking into a conversation. a potentially robust conversation about what we're doing as educators. What is our goal as rhetoric and composition instructors? Here's what I notice. If you go to Twitter right now, you will see a bunch of white people praising an Asian person for telling them not to give people of color valuable tools for professional and civic empowerment. And the response was not exactly what I expected. It's a strange feeling to be called a white supremacist by a white person. I was not expecting that at all.

Speaker 4

Teaching composition in a way that doesn't challenge and decenter standard American English is to continue to uphold white supremacy rather than expose it.

Speaker 6

Standardized English is very much a tool of the oppressor. The language came from a particular place, and that particular group of people, historically, I've done a lot of racist things. Um, bad, racist, horrible things. Language justified it. Language explained it. Language made it into a science. I'm saying you can't ignore all that.

Speaker 8

The idea is that to acquire that skill, that standard English, is to be successful in the world. And the world's the problem. You're perpetuating this oppressor, oppressed dynamic, and therefore, it's a bad thing. This is not good for anyone, especially students of color. Thank God these were my professors when I was in college. I would be steeped in negative emotionality and learn helplessness. If I had hopes and dreams, I would not have the courage to chase them. I don't know if you've all noticed yet, But I'm Black. And I'm against this ideology. Why? Because I really like being Black. And this ideology is infantilizing. It's anti-intellectual. And since I am a mature, intellectual person, it doesn't align with me. I am too good for this ideology, and so are many others.

Speaker 6

Folks who might ascribe to a view like Eric's that says, This is what my students need. They need this to get power in the current systems, so they have to do this. I'm not interested in helping white supremacist systems continue. I'm interested in dismantling those.

Speaker 8

As an educator, I want to create self-reliant, empowered, and resilient, anti-fragile people, because I firmly believe that that is the quickest way to happiness and success, not just success, happiness as well. I think you are beyond Stockholm syndrome at this point. You're just uncritically performing the things that made you successful in a very white academy. This was what many theorists would call a degradation ceremony, right? And with a degradation ceremony, the point is to ridicule somebody. Right? Not listen to them, but ridicule them A, so that they shut up, and B, show other people this is what happens when you speak up. Uh, I was called a fascist, but who isn't these days?

Speaker 6

How do you have more white fragility than some of my white colleagues?

Speaker 8

Being born into poverty is not a choice. Being victimized by police brutality is not a choice. But being hurt that you have to write isn't instead of ain't is definitely a choice. Perhaps that is the real fragility here. So my civil response was deemed an attack, right? To the point where other people chimed in and said, You don't have to respond to him. You do not have to respond.

Speaker 6

Especially if it comes in response to intellectual and emotional blackmail.

Speaker 8

It's a heck of a thing when experts in communication refuse to communicate, which makes me often conclude that They're not so much professors of rhetoric doing activism. They're activists doing rhetoric.

Speaker 6

My colleagues of color, I hope I offer you fuel, words of charcoal, and fire to go back to your schools and institutions and make things burn. Melt the steel bars of racism and white language supremacy.

Speaker 8

Many people think that academia is a lost cause. Critical social justice activists will say, you know, Tear it all down. We can go there. and figure out how that's going to benefit society, or we can go in another direction and remind people that the problem with classical liberal values aren't the values in and of themselves. It was our inability to live up to those values. So you fix that, you live up to those values, you allow everybody in this country to enjoy those values, and now we're getting somewhere. I don't want to Revolt. I want to reform. You know, I don't want to tear down a house. I want to build an addition. You know, I want to get an interior decorator in there and, you know, you know, change the color scheme or something like that. That's fine. But the house stands.

Speaker 1

While Eric's views were dismissed by his colleagues, Assau's views were spreading. And I was curious to see just how far his influence extended, which took me to Penn State and another writing professor.

Speaker 5

My immediate supervisor chose Asawa Noy's work for an entire academic year, almost like an adopt-a-whale could be, like, a weird birthday gift a kid gets. This is like an adopt-a-scholar. He was our scholar for the year. My name is Zach De Piero. I'm an

Italian-American. These are the laws of dogs and man. I'm just a guy, you know? I'm a teacher. I've been teaching since 2005. Taught in the Philadelphia school district for a couple years as an English teacher, grades 7 to 12. I've been a college professor post-PhD since 2017. I accepted a position at Penn State for Assistant Teaching Professor of English and Composition.

Speaker 2

I got you.

Speaker 1

Zach's story stood out. He's suing his university for racial discrimination and, well, he's white.

Speaker 5

One month, we were... required to watch a White Teachers Are a Problem video.

Welcome.

Speaker 2

I'm Paul Corrigan, here with Dr. Asao Noy, recently associate dean at Arizona State University, author of several very influential anti-racist books in writing studies.

Speaker 5

You might be wondering, what was the title of the video? The title of the video was White Teachers Are a Problem. Um... Um...

Speaker 6

This came out of me needing to tell my white colleagues, most of whom I love and care about, that it ***** sucks and hurts and is hard to be the problem. So it's a paradox.

It's-- it is-- and a paradox cannot be solved.

Speaker 5

You spent your whole life trying to get better at this profession, but now all of a sudden, I'm just this vessel of white supremacy in the classroom. In that White Teachers Are a Problem video, The teaching of standard, edited American English was equated with the murder of Black Americans somehow.

Speaker 6

We can see or understand how white language supremacy leads to killing people of color.

Speaker 4

Killing Black and brown bodies on the streets and in prisons.

Speaker 6

If we think that someone who languages in Black English is not articulate enough, that cannot analyze something well enough, or just is not appropriate, the next linguistic step to that You are dangerous in this place. You don't belong in this place. You-you-you now threaten me and my existence in this place.

Speaker 1

But can you see how linking that to the killing of-of people of color is just a-a mental stretch?

Speaker 6

I can see that that's a mental stretch for someone who doesn't teach writing. I'll tell you, no writing teacher has ever told me that is a stretch.

Speaker 5

I used to think of teaching as a calling. It's very serious to me. You can take what you do seriously without taking yourself seriously. Like, that's who I am. You know what I mean? And if you know what you're doing, you should be able to just ***** be yourself. Who gives a ****? You know what I'm saying? Really. I still, you know, I still love teaching. So much has changed. You show up to work and you're in this identity politics pressure cooker. It's different now. It's not... It's not just about teaching anymore. What's up, buddy?

Speaker 3

Here, sit down.

Speaker 5

All right.

Speaker 3

So, as you know, tomorrow is game time. Stay humble, answer the questions. There's going to be difficult things in any litigation that come up. Maybe people don't like fighting references, but you're kind of going into the ring, you know, and no one comes out of the ring, even a winner. without taking a few shots. Time to suit up.

Speaker 5

We're looking here.

Speaker 3

Yeah, it looks good.

Speaker 5

Enough. I did the one knot, not the two knot thing.

Speaker 3

Flip the collars down.

Speaker 5

You're like the manager of, like, a-- like a wrestler. I'm the wrestler. You're the manager.

Speaker 3

I've got to manage the wrestling. You want a walkout song? What do they call those? The entrance song? The entrance song. My name is Michael Thad Allen. I almost exclusively represent students and faculty against universities. There is a statute in America that obligates any institution that receives federal funding not to discriminate on the basis of race. Remember, stay calm. You're ready for this. You're prepared for this. You can do it. That's why we're suing Pennsylvania State University, Abington. Professor DiPierre, you understand this is a formal legal proceeding today, right?

Speaker 5

I do, yes.

Speaker 3

And you're under oath.

Speaker 5

Yes.

Speaker 3

And you understand what that means?

Speaker 5

I believe I do.

Speaker 3

Tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, like you see on TV, right?

Speaker 5

Yes.

Speaker 3

Deposition is an extension of the court. You're going to be testifying. Everything you say will potentially appear before the judge. appear before the jury. One thing a lot of people, especially professors, think is they're smarter than the attorneys, and they think it's a time to lecture the attorney about why their case sucks.

Speaker 5

Sure.

Speaker 3

That is an extraordinarily bad idea.

Speaker 5

I confess to feeling that instinct a couple of times.

Speaker 3

Well, don't give in to it.

Speaker 5

Okay. What happened at Penn State is illegal. It's racial discrimination. It's harassment. It's destructive and divisive, not both for teachers, but for students, too. When I started teaching at Penn State in fall 2018, it was a breath of fresh air. It was cool. People were normal. Colleagues were friends. Training meetings were focused around, you know, reading strategies or critical thinking. Fast forward to the spring of 2019.

Speaker 3

You were his writing program coordinator, right?

Speaker 5

I was the writing program coordinator.

Speaker 3

And you weren't aiming to institute an anti-racism program at Penn State University? What do you mean by program?

Speaker 5

My immediate supervisor e-mailed just a handful of us, and she wrote that, Racism is in the results if the results draw a color line. That's a quote, and in that same breath said that a teacher's good intentions don't matter. The translation of that is, if more, let's say, black students fail than white students, racism exists in the results if the results draw a color line. Okay, that means as a teacher, you're a racist. That's absolutely terrifying. It is. I mean, that's like, shakes you to your ***** core. If you're serving

minority students who might come from underprepared, underfunded backgrounds, and if they don't meet the task for whatever reason, whether they're not willing, they're not able, they're working too many jobs, they're taking too many courses, I find it repulsive and disgusting that a teacher could be painted to be a racist because their students fail despite their best intentions. That's appalling.

Speaker 7

Does Dr. Naidan say that the teacher is a racist or that the results are racist.

Speaker 3

Objection.

Speaker 5

I believe that this line of thinking gets you a soft bigotry of low expectations, that they somehow think black students aren't capable of achieving success on their own, which, of course, they are. It's just-- it's exhausting, and it just took away from the foundational mission of a school, which is teaching and learning. That anti-racism mission took over the entire university. All of a sudden, now, the high priests of this movement are emerging. You understand what I'm saying? This cult is taking shape, and these figureheads are appearing. This Asao, annoy clown, your D'Angelos.

Speaker 2

I believe that white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color.

Speaker 1

In case you don't know, Robin D'Angelo is the author of New York Times bestseller, White Fragility.

Speaker 2

And I'd like to be a little less white.

Speaker 5

You're ex-Kendis.

Speaker 3

What's the problem with being not racist?

Speaker 1

Ibram X. Kendi is the author of the mega-hit, How to Be an Anti-Racist.

Speaker 3

The claim of not racist neutrality is a mask for racism.

Speaker 5

And everybody bows down to these people as if they're somehow these moral overlords that have some kind of enlightened wisdom about racial dynamics. and who can say what and who should believe what in the world?

Speaker 3

We need to eliminate the concept of not racist. We're either being racist or anti-racist.

Speaker 1

I set out to understand what that actually means, especially on campus. Anti-racism shifts the focus from individual prejudice to racism embedded in systems we once wrongly assumed were neutral. That's the problem. Kendi had a solution. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination. In other words, discrimination can be justified to correct historical wrongs. So add anti-racism to the critical social justice mix, and entire disciplines start to change. History, math, music, and yeah, even writing and composition.

Speaker 5

On the university DEI site, there is a sub-tab called anti-racism. On the anti-racism resources tab, you see nothing but books, articles, podcasts that attribute negative characteristics to white individuals, which is a textbook definition of discrimination, okay? So you had things titled white rage, white immunity, white people, comma, enough. You know, they would tell you these things required discomfort. We need to sit in the discomfort. Feel the pain, you know, have these uncomfortable conversations. Through that, I guess you'll come out on the other side as this enlightened individual. I didn't buy that. Fast forward to George Floyd's murder, which was late May 2020. Cities across the United States remain in a state of high tension tonight. The outrage comes after and over the death of George Floyd.

Speaker 4

Protests tonight in Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago, and Philadelphia.

Speaker 5

After that, in hindsight, it's almost like seeing this big tidal wave coming. You know what I'm saying?

Speaker 4

Do you recall on June 5th, 2020, someone named Alina Wong leading a Zoom session called Conversation on Racial Climate?

Speaker 5

Yes. In the meeting, she said that she wanted attendees to hold their breath, white employees to hold their breath until they felt pain to commemorate George Floyd's murder.

Speaker 2

And so the challenge for all of us today, and especially for white and non-Black people of color, is to hold our breaths just a little bit longer, to not give in to our privilege, to not give in to our ability to release, to exhale. Hold it in for as long as you can, to feel the pain just a little bit, knowing that it is nowhere near the pain. It is metaphorical at best.

Speaker 1

So let's do that now. What's so egregious to you about that?

Speaker 5

I watched the George Floyd clip when it happened, just like everybody else did. It was disgusting. I welled up. It was awful hearing him cry out for his mother in his dying breaths, you know? Like... Why do I, in the workplace, all of a sudden need to feel like I bear the sins of that somehow happening? And, you know, I-I think it's disgusting that they weaponized that moment and they used it for radical political purposes.

Speaker 1

You find that exhale.

Speaker 5

Later in the meeting, that same individual, an administrator, we're talking, like, top-level brass, characterized what some people refer to as looting as really just getting what you're due. Um.

Speaker 2

You know, and I think, you know, what we call looting, I-I think of just getting what-- getting what you're.

Speaker 1

Due, because we as a capitalist country prioritize material goods and property over lives, over-- over humanity.

Speaker 5

I mean, like, Spidey's senses went... Like, that's... Something's up, you know what I'm saying? That's a call for illegal activity and anarchy and destruction.

Speaker 1

Again, what I'm interested in doing is staying in the destruction and actually disrupting more.

Speaker 5

Looting and violence, rioting in the name of self-imagined social justice.

Speaker 1

You know, one of the things I hear from faculty sometimes is, I teach calculus. There's no racism in calculus. Yes, there is. Racism is everywhere. The sexism is everywhere. The homophobia is everywhere. The classism is everywhere. Classism is built into our higher education system.

Speaker 2

We are founded upon white supremacy.

Speaker 5

You either accept this dogma, or if you push back against the dogma, Well, guess what? We found you. You're the white supremacist.

Speaker 9

At De Anza, my colleagues wanted us to believe that America is founded on white supremacy, and that no matter what we did, we would always be surrounded by racism.

Speaker 1

Turns out Zach wasn't the only one taking on departments built around anti-racism.

Speaker 9

They said, we're tired of being oppressed. This is a white supremacist nation. It always has been. It's still, you know, not right, and we just need to tear it down.

Speaker 1

Zach's lawyer had another client on the West Coast. As.

Speaker 3

Soon as you opened your mouth to say something they didn't like, they took revenge on you, and that's called retaliation.

Speaker 1

Dr. Tabia Lee...

Speaker 9

I go by Lee.

Speaker 1

...Could give me an inside-department perspective on where all these ideas were coming from.

Speaker 9

I'm a lifelong educator. I taught teacher training, teacher support, teacher mentoring, teacher development. And so I saw this position pop up at De Anza. It was for a faculty director for the Office of Equity, Social Justice, and Multicultural Education. When I read the job description, it aligned with everything that I had experienced and done, and I applied for it immediately.

Speaker 1

Faculty director for the Office of Equity, Social Justice, and Multicultural Education, or in plain terms, another version of diversity, equity, and inclusion, DEI. Depending on who you ask, DEI is either a threat... We've ended the tyranny of so-called diversity, equity, and inclusion....or a force for good. DEI is not a threat, it's a gift. So how did three feel-good words become ground zero in a culture war? Here's what I learned. It started in the 60s. Back then, DEI didn't exist, not as a term anyway. But the essential groundwork was being laid through new offices meant to deliver on the promise of civil rights. They had names like Office of Minority Affairs or Educational Opportunity Programs, and eventually Affirmative Action offices. Over time, their scope widened to support students who were gay, lesbian, queer, neurodivergent, disabled, essentially anyone who didn't see themselves reflected in the old school ivory tower. And the purpose of these offices is to help those historically marginalized students succeed. These offices started out doing real, necessary work, challenging old biases, making universities more inclusive. But somewhere along the way, The mission got interpreted a little more broadly.

Speaker 9

And so, as we were having our first team meeting that I was going to be facilitating, so it was my first time batter up, I said, So how do you all keep notes for your meetings, or do you set agendas? And they said, Oh, we just meet, we meet once a week, and we just chat about things. And I said, Well, we're gonna need to have a little more structure than that. Like, how about if we, I started up a Google Doc. And we're all editors on it. It's open. Anyone who goes into it can type into it. And maybe we can put ideas up for agendas. And that's when the person says, Stop what you're doing right now. And I was

like, Okay. And they said, What you're doing is you're white-speaking, and you're whitesplaining, and you're supporting white supremacy. And I said, Pardon me? I'd never in my life been called a white supremacist. And I told them, For you to call me that, I said, Where is that even coming from?

Speaker 2

Hi. I'm Judy Blair, and I'm an anti-racism consultant specializing in working with white folks. In this series, we're taking a look at 15 different aspects of white supremacy culture. What I'm actually talking about is not white supremacists or Proud Boys or white nationalists. We are talking about white supremacy as the idea that elevates whiteness. that whiteness is the default. It's the assumed. It's the ideal.

Speaker 9

I still didn't know about this alternative definition of white supremacy until many weeks later, as I went to their workshops, and I kept seeing a slide pop up, and it said, White supremacy culture characteristics. We talk about white supremacy. Every meeting, that's what was a focal point, and whatever the speaker talked about, they related it to that graphic. The bottle said things like objectivity, either/or thinking, individualizing of learning, setting agendas, writing things down, mindful of timeliness, because when you talk about being on time, that's a characteristic of a white supremacy culture according to them. And I said, So what are they expecting of me as a black woman? Are they expecting me to be lazy, to not be on time, to not take notes, you know, to never be objective? I said, That's what you're saying, that BIPOC people are not these things. And that's the only framework that's allowed to be used, you know, 'cause as I started to bring in alternative ways of thinking about things, that's when the clamp down on me really happened.

Speaker 1

This wasn't the diversity, equity, and inclusion I imagined about access, fairness, and support. It had become something else. Less about expanding opportunity and more about enforcing a set of beliefs.

Speaker 3

Dr. Lee has taken positions on a number of issues that are adversarial, hostile towards our districts and college values on anti-racism, social justice, and equity.

Speaker 1

When Dr. Lee pushed back on that framework, she was fired.

Speaker 9

Fact that I was saying that there is this other perspective made me an instant enemy that needed to be neutralized, silenced, and eliminated out of the space.

Speaker 1

At many universities, DEI had become a bureaucracy, with real influence over hiring, firing, research, and curriculum. And it looked like, for many faculty jobs, being qualified was no longer enough. You now had to submit a personal pledge explaining how your work advances diversity, equity, and inclusion. Even in physics, engineering, math, if you couldn't show how your work aligned with DEI goals, you might not make it past the first round. That might sound harmless, but these aren't always statements about teaching fairly or support for struggling students. They often read like affirmations of a particular worldview grounded in identity, power, and oppression. Getting the job meant ideological conformity. And on campuses, the DEI bureaucracy kept growing. The University of Michigan alone spent around \$250 million on DEI initiatives and brought them into some surprising places, like their botanical gardens. A 37-page DEI strategic plan for plants, with ideas like reframing the medicinal garden out from extant gender binary, or botanical gardens in Arboreta are deeply enmeshed within interlocking systems of domination. This doesn't feel like a support service anymore. More like an engine for institutional transformation. With a mission to challenge the status quo. White, patriarchal, heteronormative, cisgender, ableist, colonial, capitalist. That's a lot to ask of a garden.

Speaker 5

Is there maybe DEI done well that brings people together? I imagine there could be. I certainly never experienced that in my trainings at Penn State Abington. I tried to communicate with my supervisor multiple times to express my, I think, informed opinion about the shortcomings of what anti-racist pedagogy would mean for writing students. Didn't work. I tried. I tried hard. So I filed a complaint that got sent to the Penn State Affirmative Action Office.

Speaker 3

Ms. Lorfes, do you remember in September of 2021, Zach de Piero submitted a complaint to your office?

Speaker 4

Yes.

Speaker 5

Why did you record that meeting? It struck me as a way to protect myself. Hi, Carmen, can you hear me?

Speaker 2

Yes, I can hear you and see you well. Hi, how are you?

Speaker 5

I'm okay, I'm hanging in there.

Speaker 3

What did he say his concern was?

Speaker 5

Our programmatic focus was on attributing negative characteristics to white teachers. And in my position, I'm hearing this nonstop, I'm a problem 'cause I'm a white teacher. What am I supposed to do about that?

Speaker 6

That is not my question to answer. That's his. I mean, when he says, What am I supposed to do with me being a problem? Well, welcome to my world. Like, that is the question I asked my entire, all the way through into college. Somehow I'm the problem. Every friggin' place I'm at, why am I always the problem? Now, I'm not trying to suggest that we, you know, we have a politics of like, you know, I'm gonna get you back, 'cause that's not what I mean, but I do think it is important for writing teachers, regardless of who we are, to investigate our problemness.

Speaker 5

It feels awful every single day. I've thought about it. White teachers are a problem. I wake up, I think to myself, I'm a white teacher. I'm a problem. I go to bed. I think to myself, My colleagues think I'm a problem.

Speaker 2

It's not about you. We don't carry the burden of our race. of our people. We don't carry it individually. We don't.

Speaker 1

How is it not about him?

Speaker 6

Yeah, well, it is. It is about him, and it isn't. He's primed to see it as an attack on his own person, and I'm more primed to see it as an attack on a system. It sets up people like him to think of himself as an individual who's doing the right thing, who's the hero.

Speaker 3

You encourage Professor Napier to go to the meeting and engage with them critically, right?

Speaker 2

Absolutely.

Speaker 5

So I'm doing what I'm being told to do, you understand? To keep going to this **** until I get it.

Speaker 2

So Grace and I collaborated on this together. So it's from performing anti-racist pedagogy.

Speaker 5

They presented excerpts from this reading, and the first one was something like.

Speaker 2

Without attending to issues of inequity, we unwillingly reproduce racist discourses and practices in our classrooms. Whenever anybody has any comments to share, we'll go from there.

Speaker 5

I have a question. I'd like to jump in here. I wasn't gesturing. I wasn't raising my voice. And I asked, Can you help me understand what you're asking me to do? What does it mean to attend to issues of inequity? Because, uh, if-if I'm not doing that, then I open myself up to accusations that I am, quote, reproducing racist discourses and practices. I think, like, 45 seconds passed. That's a long time in a... Zoom meeting. I mean, that-- that's heavy, you know?

Speaker 2

Grace, this is-- I don't-- I don't know how to respond to this because it's your segment of the meeting.

Speaker 4

I also feel very uncomfortable right now, and I just want to say that. I was not happy to be made to feel uncomfortable by Dr. Zach Tapiero.

Speaker 5

So-- Affirmative action office, call me back in.

Speaker 2

How are you doing? Good. Can you hear me?

Speaker 5

Hey, how are you?

Speaker 2

What's going on? Oh, lots of things going on. Uh, sacked. Yeah. Uh, since we spoke, uh, some other things have developed.

Speaker 5

I thought they were gonna rule on my bias complaint. I thought they were gonna say, Zach, what you reported is extremely concerning. This is a civil rights violation.

Speaker 2

Two complaints have been filed against you.

Speaker 5

I bullied and harassed two of my female colleagues because I asked questions about how to teach with equity.

Speaker 2

They are alleging harassment and intimidation in the manner in which you conducted yourself.

Speaker 5

I felt that throw-up feeling. It was a soul squash. It was a destruction. It was a-- we need to, like, make you evaporate or something.

Speaker 2

I'm going to introduce into the record Exhibit 43. It's the recording of the meeting.

Speaker 5

What does it mean to attend to issues of inequity?

Speaker 3

What about Zach's tone in that clip was hostile?

Speaker 9

Nothing about his tone in that clip was particularly hostile, but what he's doing there is questioning the whole premise of the scholarly conversation we're trying to have.

Speaker 3

So to you, it's hostile to question the scholarship?

Speaker 9

No, I think scholars question scholarship in scholarly ways.

Speaker 3

Is there anything that was unscholarly about his question?

Speaker 9

Not there, no. I think he is asking me to justify and explain a piece of writing that I did not write.

Speaker 5

We got formally the two conclusion letters from the Affirmative Action Office, one about my bias complaint, one about the one filed against me. My bias complaint, We see no wrongdoing. This is your supervisor's academic freedom. Conversely, the complaint filed against me While it didn't rise to a criminal level, I violated the university values of a professional employee, and I bullied and harassed two of my colleagues. Are you worried?

Speaker 3

Well, of course I'm worried. It's my job to be worried, because it's your job as an attorney to be paranoid and try to figure out what's coming at you. You write, You've heard about all the crazy anti-white ***** they've pushed to Penn State. Did I read that correctly?

Speaker 5

Yes.

Speaker 3

All right. And Josh writes, Yep. And then what do you write in response to his Yep.

Speaker 5

So, even after I reported it to my top supervisor twice, my other sup... This department chair, crazy woke **** just won't stop. And who's the department chair, crazy woke **** that you're referring to? My department chair was Nadon. You want me to read all three texts? Yes, please. But here's this ***** ** ***** saying, ***** ** more people's *****. Here's the quote. Quote, What we call looting, I think of as just getting what you're due. And so how do we continue that disruption? And the ***** ** ***** that's Wong? Yes. Okay. All right, you can put that aside for now.

Speaker 4

Ridiculous.

Speaker 5

What's ridiculous, Professor Di Piero? that you had a Penn State administrator calling for more looting in the name of social justice when you had minority small business owners' own businesses getting looted, their own livelihoods getting destroyed, and she's calling for more of that. It's disgusting. It's absolutely sick. What about calling her a ***** ** *****? Is that okay? Is that illegal? Okay? Is that calling for more looting? That wasn't my question. Well, that's my question.

Speaker 4

Do you want to answer my question?

Speaker 5

What's your question? My question is, he's calling Dr. Wang a ***** ** *****. It's a private conversation with a friend whose private small business got looted twice. And my senior administrator at the university is calling for that to happen a third time. So yeah, whatever I said there stands.

Speaker 3

This question's been answered, and I want to call for a break right now. Sure.

Speaker 5

We're not going across the record. Ridiculous. You who are on the road Must have a code you try to live by.

Speaker 3

And so become yourself.

Speaker 5

Because the past is just a goodbye. Teach your children well. The fathers held it slowly gone by. What happened today is now on the public record. On the public record, I now have called my former supervisor a woke *****. I now call the DEI director a *****. My career as a teacher is probably done. I mean, if... If they got all this dirt on me now, I hated these people for what they were putting me through. But, um, all right, I'm *****. I'm gonna have to not find a new job, find a new industry. Don't you ever ask them why If they told you you would cry Absolutely brutal. Yeah.

Speaker 3

Was it worse than you expected?

Speaker 5

Yes, it was worse than I expected. I guess I started yelling. You started yelling. Oh, ****. Yeah, you did.

Speaker 3

They got you. And that's what they were trying to do.

Speaker 5

It's not a game. It's just, like... This is life, and these so-called anti-racist missionaries, they've **** with people's lives so bad, and they've made people fearful to articulate their thoughts, hate themselves, hate each other. They've divided people. Like, they are the enemy. Don't you ever ask them why?

Speaker 2

If they told you, you would cry So just look at them and sigh And know they love you.

Speaker 1

Watching Zach, what unsettled me wasn't just what happened to him. It was the feeling that campuses were being pulled apart by something meant to bring people together.

Speaker 2

To me, the goal of diversity, equity, and inclusion is just saying we're acknowledging that everybody has not been included in every space. So I took the job at Stanford because it felt like there was a real commitment to addressing historic and current inequalities based on identity.

Speaker 3

My gosh, to think that federal funding is going to a university where you've got a highly paid staffer who takes the stage after a mob shouted down a judge, and instead of saying, Show this man respect, regardless of whether or not you agree with him, joins in with them? Lately, I've become aware that you Are bugged by everything I say and do I could bind my.

Speaker 4

Cues and fees But the juice isn't worth the squeeze.

Speaker 3

She wasn't invited to be the speaker, yet nevertheless, she took to the stage and questioned the notion of free speech and said, Is the juice worth the squeeze?

Speaker 4

We could sit and disagree all night About who's wrong and about who's right Let's not waste time down in the weeds 'Cause the juice isn't worth the squeeze.

Speaker 3

Baby, the two's easy... You do not actually have a civil discussion with anybody.

Speaker 2

I just want to shut them down. Free speech is under fire on college campuses in America.

Speaker 3

A federal judge was shouted down and heckled during his speech at Stanford Law School.

Speaker 2

You attack trans people and LGBTQ people.

Speaker 4

Our speakers don't tell us.

Speaker 2

Our speakers aren't funded by the Koch brothers. Our speakers don't take away voting rights from black people in Louisiana.

Speaker 4

What is your problem, man? Are you 14 years old? I am 96.

Speaker 1

How did you come to inviting Judge Duncan to speak at the school?

Speaker 4

Judge Duncan's on the Fifth Circuit. He's the court in between the district court, which is the initial court, and the Supreme Court. He oversees Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Any case going from those states to the Supreme Court is going to go through him. And in the past year, a lot of interesting things have happened in the Fifth Circuit. There have been big decisions on gun control, on social media regulation. And so for all of those reasons, he seemed like a great guest. So we invited him.

Speaker 2

Mr. Duncan has spent his career working to restrict, not expand, but to restrict civil rights. Kyle Duncan is a gun for hire, targeting LGBTQ people. He has absurdly denied

that contraception is health care at all. His values are grossly out of touch with a modern and inclusive America. I would respectfully suggest all my colleagues to put aside whether they like President Trump or not. Look at this man for himself. So, leading up to the Judge Duncan event, there was a coalition of students who came to the administration and said, The Federalist Society is inviting this federal judge. We don't want this speaker to come to campus who has been an advocate for policies and practices and legal interpretations that are harmful to the communities in which they are affiliated. So it was LGBTQ students, it was student of color identity groups, it was political identity groups, it was a kind of full range of student groups.

Speaker 4

I do fit in some of those identities, right? I mean, I think particularly in gay identity, like I think I have had more drama in my life because of my sexual identity than like most people who are identifying in that group and an unhappy separation from my childhood church when I came out as gay. I've never felt more welcomed or safer than in the confines of a college campus, and I think that they are some of the most gay, queer, whatever, friendly places in the entire universe. And that's the message we should be giving people, not, you know, let us make this place more insulated for you. It was something about how the judge's presence on our campus is violent, or his work is violent, and so it's traumatizing. Great, we'll tell you when and where Judge Kyle Duncan will be visiting us, and you can just not be there.

Speaker 2

So there was a flurry of activity of the administrators at every level. It was decided that I would write a message back to students. So I drafted a response that fundamentally said, We're a school and an institution that firmly believes in free speech as a fundamental pillar of our democracy. And that means having to make what, for some, will be a hard decision, which is to not cancel this event. As I walked up to the classroom with the Federalist Society president, probably a hundred yards off, we heard the protest. There was chanting, there was jeering, there were signs, there was banging, there was stomping.

Speaker 4

They formed this gauntlet. And as we walked through it, we're yelling at him and waving signs in his face. And I mean, I think he heard it independently. I was walking with him. I heard it. I hope your daughters are raped. Like that is, that was one of the things he yelled. And I don't think anybody should be subjected to that.

Speaker 2

Why do you want to cancel people's speech? The students weren't, like, explicitly shouting him down. They were just throwing out barbs, and in a disruptive way, no

question. And he was throwing out barbs back. Where's your respect for queer and trans people? Where's your respect, dude? You're such a victim. In this school, the inmates have gotten control of the asylum.

Speaker 4

There's sort of this crosstalk, and he's somewhat engaging with it, but somewhat trying to do his prepared remarks. But he can't-- he never really can get traction.

Speaker 2

So you've invited me to speak here, and I'm being heckled nonstop. And I'm just asking for an administrator to somebody-- That's an opinion. And I stepped up and said, I'm an associate dean. Which was solely for the purpose of de-escalating the room so that Judge Duncan could speak. That really was the goal. That was the only goal for me. I guess I have prepared remarks, but they're not letting me... Go. Yes, please. I didn't know who she was ahead of time. She didn't identify herself to me before the speech. She came in with a portfolio. She opened the portfolio. She had a printed-out speech. I have to write something down 'cause I'm so uncomfortable up here. I did have a my folder with me with the printout of the e-mail that I had sent that morning. I'm uncomfortable 'cause this event is tearing with the fabric of this community that I care about and I'm here to support. And I don't know, and I have to ask myself, and I'm not a cynic to ask this. Is the juice worth the squeeze? Part of me was really reacting to feeling protective. These were the students that I feel like were part of the community that I was there to serve. It's uncomfortable to say that for many people here, your work has caused harm. And I know that must be uncomfortable here. I know that must be. Let me please finish, and I want to give you space to finish your remarks, too, Judge Dunder. My hope was to get to a point where he could just give his remarks, there could be Q&A, and we would be done with the event. My job is to create a space of belonging for all. That is hard and messy and not easy, and the answers are not good. We believe that the way to address speech that feels abhorrent, that feels harmful, that denies the humanity of people, that one way to do that is with more speech and not to shut you down or censor you or send to the student group that invited you here. And again, I still ask, Is the juice worth the squeeze? My intention in asking the question, Is the juice worth the squeeze? I was asking, Is this worth the fallout of break in community that we've been trying to build? It's something so incredibly important to say that that is worth this impact on the division of these people. I understood why the students were saying what they were saying, and to me, I want be empathetic to it and also help them reframe. Because it does not serve them not to be able to handle people saying words that feel harmful to us and not be able to navigate it. Our job should be, if you disagree with it, then gain the legal skills and argument to persuade people to a different argument. Why didn't you say that in the room? That would have escalated them more. Right? Going to the students and being like, Your outrage is outrageous, does not serve.

They can't hear that. Why would they care? All they can say is, Thanks, Boomer. Cancel. And that's not useful. That's the end of the conversation. I hope you can learn, too, while you're in this learning education. I hope you can listen through. You're the artist. look and see human beings are asking you to take care.

Speaker 4

I was not happy with, uh, what Tiran said in the room. You know, the insinuation that Judge Duncan had done something wrong, that's, uh, not how I view the law. I feel like it's not an appropriate debate for one of our deans to, like, weigh in in that way in that space. And, two, um, it really bought some sort of theories that, you know, your presence is violence, your decisions are violence. I don't think that's true at all, and I really don't think that can be true in context of a law school. I think that we need people to discuss. We need people to come and give talks and answer questions. You.

Speaker 2

Have a choice. You do not need to stay here if this is not where you want to be. And make that choice. If you do choose to stay here, I do think we should give space to hear what Judge Duncan has to say. I'm really grateful to be in this institution. I look out, and I don't ask what is going on here. I look out and I say, I'm glad this is going on. I want to ask that half the folks walk out and protest, and the rest of us, let's tone down the heckling slightly so he can get to our questions, which we so very much want to hear the responses. And the judge could have said his remarks. But he didn't take that opportunity. And he immediately kind of just started, again, yelling, essentially yelling at the students, being like, Ah, you all are so disrespectful. You're idiots. You complain about people like me, or judges like me, or lawyers like me, or whatever. You complain about them denying your rights and erasing your existence. And then you turn right around and do the same thing to somebody else, the same thing. You think you're a bunch of hypocrites. And I literally left that day thinking, Okay, there is going to be a lot of work to do. What can we do to kind of move past this and learn from this experience? You don't respect the inside that. It's disgusting. It's disgusting.

Speaker 4

That evening, an e-mail went out and it was like, we know this day has been very traumatic for many students. If you need any help, you can contact psychiatric services and our in-house counselor, and here's their information. And it was pretty clear that as far as Stanford was concerned, as of that point, we were done. This problem was abated, and I sort of didn't feel that way about it. And it seemed like To get that conversation moving within the walls of Stanford, it needed to be moving outside. Joining me now, Tim Rosenberger. Tim Rosenberger joins us right now. Tim Rosenberger was there. Someone who described herself as the dean of diversity, one of the dumbest people we've ever seen on camera, showed up. Were students applauding her? Did

anyone say, Who are you and please leave? Uh, no one had the temerity to say, Who are you and please leave.

Speaker 2

Did I say out loud... As long as I don't end up on Tucker Carlton, then I'm, like, that's a baseline, like, you know, I'm doing my job, okay?

Speaker 4

That dean was, like, seemed barely literate to me. The administrator at a law school telling law students that they should be scared of ideas that threaten them. Instead of getting up there and saying, Put down your sign that suggests this judge can't find a woman's.

Speaker 2

***** forgive me, audience, that's what the sign said-- she encouraged So then I started getting hate mail, horrible things, or racist, sexist, like, just horrible things. Um, I didn't sleep for days. What does this mean for my family and our safety? What does this mean for a reputation that I spent 25 years building as being someone who shows up with integrity? So, for me, that time was just, like, the most stressful, scary thing I've really ever experienced. So the university sent Judge Duncan an apology letter claiming staff and students acted inappropriately. What happened was inconsistent with our policies on free speech, and we are very sorry about the experience you had while visiting our campus. What I really didn't anticipate is a response that effectively threw me under the bus.

Speaker 3

In response to this incident, school administrators made the decision to suspend that dean of diversity. And I think for conservative Americans, there is a perception that there are kind of hostile winds blowing through academia.

Speaker 1

That's the paradox. Tyrion was hired to create belonging, then suspended for trying to do exactly that. But maybe the real question is, does DEI, as its practice today, clash with the mission of a university?

Speaker 4

I think this is like an ill-conceived job. what she thought this job was, which was fostering real diversity across dimensions, maybe would have been a really life-affirming and fulfilling thing to do. I think what it really turned out to be, which was create a law school that feels hyper-inclusive. And we've now decided that inclusive does not mean inclusive of a lot of viewpoints. It means sort of very comfortable. And

this therapy-tized language of safety and non-trauma and insulation or whatever that is. And so That was a horrible job, and she's above it.

Speaker 2

I resigned on August 20th. I don't want to have contributed to a narrative that says that advancing greater diversity is antithetical to the values of free speech and academic freedom and democracy. Baby, the juice isn't worth the schooling.

Speaker 1

I kept seeing the same pattern. Initiatives that began with good intentions, pushed to extremes, leaving many people alienated and resentful. There were many more stories you'll never hear because people were too afraid to speak. And while these tensions played out on campus, a backlash was brewing, ready to turn these moments into political firepower.

Speaker 4

The pendulum swings in part 2 of Speechless, next Tuesday night at 10 here on BBC Four, or watch now on iPlayer, along with more captivating films from Storyville.