

Audio file

[119071-StoryvilleSpeechlessPart2.mp3](#)

Transcript

Speaker 1

And as these stories piled up, you could feel the pressure building, the pendulum picking up speed. Because ideas that start on campus don't stay there. They migrate outward into bureaucracy, politics, and law.

Speaker 2

Can you provide a definition for the word woman?

Speaker 1

I can't. You can't? Not in this context. I'm not a biologist. The question now being asked in the halls of power had been taking shape on campus for years. And that's where this part of the story begins, with gender and sex.

Speaker 2

Let's talk about sex, maybe Let's talk about you and me.

Speaker 3

I think what really focused my interest on trying to understand the evolutionary and hormonal sources of sex differences in humans was my experience out in Uganda studying chimpanzees because it was just so clear. watching the chimps every day and being with them every day. The sex differences they showed and the high levels of aggression in the males and their sort of obsession with sex and status, that has obvious parallels to what we see in humans. So that's really what sparked my interest. Let's talk about sex... In the human evolutionary biology department, I got students from all different majors, but I especially had students from women, gender, and sexuality. Of course, it really challenged the idea that sex differences have anything to do with evolution or biology at all. You know, the idea is that they're cultural and it's the patriarchy. And I always appreciated their input. But what started to happen is I noticed people were becoming much more sensitive about the language and offended by my use of accurate and clear scientific terms. I had been quoted in an article, and it was an investigation of what's happening in medical schools, where medical school professors

were backing away. from using terms like pregnant women and male and female in response to pressure from medical school students.

Speaker 2

One med student in California claiming her classmates shaming police professors for, quote, wrong speak for using words like... Hold your ears. Male and female.

Speaker 3

And I commented in the article saying, you know, These are our future doctors. We should really just be sticking to teaching them about medicine and using whatever language we need to. So Fox and Friends asked me to comment on The ideology seems to be that biology really isn't as important as how somebody feels about themselves or feels their sex to be. This kind of ideology has been infiltrating science. Sex is... a biological category. It's a reproductive category. It is at the center of what I do, my area of expertise, all of my research, right? Do we make eggs, you know, big sex cells, or little sex cells, sperm? And that's how we know whether somebody is male or female. What's powerful and interesting about that is that's it. There are no other traits that uniformly, discreetly, cleanly differentiate males and females. Then I said as a fact of nature it really has no implications for who we are as Humans in terms of our gender identity, you know We can treat people with respect and respect their gender identities and you know use their preferred pronouns So it's really just about the gametes and then sort of everything else is on a spectrum It's very confusing when professors like me or lecturers like me start backing away from certain terms that they're afraid people will find offensive And I'll just say, all hell broke loose after that interview.

Speaker 4

As the director of the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force for my department at Harvard Evolutionary Biology, I am appalled and.

Speaker 1

Frustrated by the transphobic and harmful remarks made by a member of my department in this interview.

Speaker 4

With Fox and Friends.

Speaker 3

So I felt very panicked that the director of our DEI committee went on to Twitter, and this went out all over the, you know, Twittiverse, right?

Speaker 4

You are actually implicitly denying that trans men are men who can get pregnant.

Speaker 3

And I felt like the ground shake under me. I mean, this was, I was scared. Suddenly I'm transphobic, and I'm called transphobic by someone who looks like they're speaking on behalf of Harvard. So I retweeted her tweet, and I wrote something like, I appreciate your concerns. Could you let me, and the Twitterverse, know exactly what I said that you consider transphobic or harmful to undergrads? I think you know that I care deeply about all of my students, and I also care about science. Her reply, It is transphobic to imply that gender-inclusive language limits medical education.

Speaker 4

Quite the contrary. It expands education to match our human reality.

Speaker 3

So what happened from there was, mostly, she was dumped on for attacking me.

Speaker 4

You're an idiot, moron.

Speaker 3

You're a ***** loser.

Speaker 2

You're everything that's awful with academia today.

Speaker 5

You and all your task force should be fired immediately. That would make the tuition fall and the IQ rise at the same time. There's not Hooven who is transphobic. It is you who are fragile, intolerant, and bigoted against people who challenge your beliefs.

Speaker 3

And the narrative that developed was that I retweeted her tweet, which was taken as an aggressive move on my part, where I was punching down. to use my power to harm her, essentially. This was being gossip and news at Harvard. My reputation now was trashed. And it was picked up by newspapers, you know, from Australia to the U.K., in the States. It got a huge amount of coverage. And now I'm just this transphobe at Harvard, because I said something which should not be controversial in an evolutionary biology department to say that there are two sexes.

Speaker 1

I grew up with the same idea that there were only two sexes. You know, the stuff you learned in biology class. This one has a penis. It's a boy. This one has a *****. It's a girl. Over time, the conversation shifted. In the '80s and '90s, gender studies separated sex, the biological, from gender, how you live, act, and identify in the world. The way your body looks on the outside is only part of the story. Then came queer theory, and it blew up the whole idea of fixed categories. Online, that vocabulary exploded. For many who didn't fit the old categories, it was liberating. Finally, words that fit their lives. Then the argument moved again from gender back to biology. Some biologists now argue that biological sex isn't a clean binary either, that anatomy, chromosomes, and hormones vary.

Speaker 4

Sex is a spectrum.

Speaker 1

The more you look, the more complex it gets. Binary is *****. Some push it even further, saying they're up to four or five sexes. To many, that's a bridge too far. What the hell is wrong with you? It's a threat to medicine, sports, safety, and law. And the debate isn't just academic. It's moved into politics, media, and the streets.

Speaker 2

Kathleen Stock has attracted protests over her views on gender identification.

Speaker 1

She is a professor of philosophy at Sussex University.

Speaker 2

Who's been accused of being transphobic?

Speaker 1

Kathleen Stock doesn't believe it's possible for a person to change their biological sex.

Speaker 6

That a trans woman isn't a woman, a trans woman is a trans woman.

Speaker 1

Kathleen Stock drew me to the UK because she was another professor being shut out from campuses with accusations of transphobia.

Speaker 6

Every time I was announced as a speaker at a different institution, there would be a protest and there'd be some kind of attempt to stop the event.

Speaker 4

I am invincible I am woman She is a married lesbian professor. And all she states is that women's spaces should be women's spaces.

Speaker 6

It just became extremely difficult, because they would have to get an extra security at my talks. Students at the University of Oxford have demanded that the feminist academic Kathleen Stock be no platform from its debating society. Free speech is now actually problematic, and if you try and defend free speech, well, what kind of sinister opinions are you really arguing for? Protect trans people.

Speaker 7

We don't think she should speak here because her views are part of a broader hate campaign and moral panic that's really damaging the lives of trans people. We're fighting for our lives! Her speech is dangerous, it's hateful, and it hurts trans people, particularly timely. Amongst those protesters was Riz Posnant, who silently glued their hand to the floor. When it comes to, like, what should be protected as free speech, everyone draws their line somewhere, right? The reason that I felt that Kathleen Stock surpassed that is because I think she plays such an integral part to the way in which transphobia in the UK has massively risen over the past few years.

Speaker 1

Kathleen became a flashpoint in the UK, a philosopher asking difficult questions about law, gender, and identity at a time when many believed those questions caused harm.

Speaker 6

I was mostly interested in intervening in a political arena, because in the UK at the time, we already had laws which allowed people to change their legal sex, but they had certain... safeguards built into the process. Like, you needed two doctors to give you a diagnosis of gender dysphoria. You needed to live as the opposite sex for a year. In 2018, most of the political parties were in favor of this new policy called self-ID. Basically, if you identify as the opposite sex, you should be able to change your sex legally. and whether or not you've changed your sex legally. You should also be able to access whatever spaces and resources are traditionally connected to the opposite sex.

Speaker 7

No hormones, no lipstick, no going under the knife. You even get to keep your nuts. It's easy peasy. Go a line, click, click, click.

Speaker 5

Now I'm a bird.

Speaker 7

Much of the opposition to the introduction of self-ID in the UK was about this idea that it was getting rid of all of these things that made sure people were actually trans and actually anyone could walk in and say, I'm a penguin and you have to recognise me now. In reality, the processes you had to go through in the UK in order to have your gender identity recognised without self-ID were deeply pathologizing. It's contributing to this idea that transness or gender dysphoria is like some sort of mental disorder, right? A, you can't trust them, and B, you have to diagnose them in some sense.

Speaker 6

I started writing blog posts, and I just raised a few questions. There's this law change that's being proposed. Don't you think we should be talking about it? Do you think we should be questioning whether trans women are women? I didn't say either way, but I said, I'm a philosopher. I'm trained for this. I've got the arguments. There are no voices that I can see coming out of philosophy departments saying, There's some problems here. There was plenty of voices coming out of philosophy departments saying, This is brilliant. You know, Trans women are women. Get over it.

Speaker 7

I think the reason that I find it harmful in this sense to say trans women are not women, they are trans women, is it creates a subcategory. It like literally segregates them out, not being recognised with the right identity so they can't get bank accounts properly, they can't register for housing, they can't get rents, they can't get mortgages, all of these things because they're not recognised within the system. That is a massive component of the reasons that trans people face so much discrimination and so much transphobia in their lives.

Speaker 6

The set of ideas that were being pushed, that I rejected, was the idea that everyone's got a gender identity. It's a feeling inside you, basically. A male, a biological male, who has penis, testicles, you know, the usual, can strongly feel that they are female, or that they want to be female, or that they should be female, or something, and that's their female gender identity. Only you can know your gender identity. No one else can tell you what it is. And as soon as it emerges, as soon as you express it, you have to be affirmed. What's the real-world impact? Well, there's sports. There's fairly obvious consequences letting you on the sports team that fits with your gender identity. Also, more importantly, you have to say, Yes, come into the ladies' changing rooms. Come

into the rape crisis shelter, come into the domestic violence shelter. You're a woman now. There are women in domestic violence shelters being forced to share a dormitory with a male who says he's a woman, because the policy of the shelter is that he is a woman, and if you complain, you're transphobic and you need to leave. We've got issues, ethical issues, at least to be explored. Even if you think I'm wrong, you know, you would think, well, we should maybe talk about this, but we were also being told, no debate. And as soon as you raise any problems about this, you are transphobic.

Speaker 2

Trans rights.

Speaker 1

Now! I get why this subject is so charged. It's deeply personal about people's lives, bodies, their sense of who they are.

Speaker 2

Trans people aren't going anywhere.

Speaker 1

But I thought universities existed to test ideas, even uncomfortable ones. And when questioning ideas becomes off limits, what happens to the pursuit of truth?

Speaker 3

At Harvard, I felt so lucky to be at a place that valued veritas, truth, more than anything. Veritas, which is inscribed in stone all over the campus and in a shield, so When things started to change, that value veritas started to somehow be overshadowed by the messages coming through the growing DEI infrastructure, not only down from the administration, but also up from a lot of the students. Then we started to get messages about how important it is to protect people from offense. this idea to keep our students safe, and that ideas can harm, and that knowledge itself can be harmful. And so, according to the director of our DEI committee, not only was I transphobic, because I said that sex is not a belief, it's a physical property of your body, but she was saying it's specifically harmful to the students in our department. What is ironic is that I was that person who sort of made the department feel like home and safe, you know, for our students, because they would come to me often when going through problems associated with things like gender identity. Dr. Hooven is an incredible professor. At the heart of her love for endocrinology is so clearly her care for the well-being of people with all kinds of differences in sex development, gender identities, and sexualities. I don't know what to say outside the fact that Carol was one of the only professors I've had who genuinely cared about what I'm going to do in the world and wanted more than any... Sorry. And wanted more than anything to teach us about the world and ourselves

and to make us better off. I had assumed, of course, the administration is going to have my back and protect me and my right to make statements about my area of expertise. That was so stupid and naive of me. Instead, my department chair and the chair of the other biology department wrote a letter with a team of administrators, including a DEI person, that I begged not to be sent out. Dear colleagues, science has always created conflicts with people's social, political, and religious views. At its best, science has pushed against ancient orthodoxies to open broader vistas on our place in nature and in the universe. Okay. Recently, tensions have increased within our community, and in some cases shifted to an important discussion about the intersection of science, communication, and language use. In our role as chairs, we should always strive to be responsive to the varied concerns, but must also balance the needs of the entire community and our shared values of open dialogue. That sentence right there is anti-academic freedom. It's saying that, okay, you might have your views, but you got to consider how they're going to land on people in a way that maybe you shouldn't express them.

Speaker 8

It was not the intent of the committee to cause damage to Dr. Hooven's reputation.

Speaker 3

It wasn't our intent to, like, **** her over for the rest of her life. We simply wanted to point out that she shouldn't have said what she said because it might have hurt others. We apologize. That e-mail was sent out, which only made things worse for me. I literally was walking around with my head down. I was afraid that people would recognize me and think that I am that transphobe or something. I felt totally isolated. I felt so betrayed and let down and just disoriented. And ultimately, I was unable to teach my course in the spring because no graduate student would agree to be my teaching assistant. And I lost any hope for being able to ever do my job the way that I knew I needed to do it, which is to tell the truth. And I knew that what had happened to me was scaring other people, other faculty members. And they started modifying what they taught and researched in response to these fears about how students would react. And I know that because they told me. No individual felt that it was worth it to them to be the one to go out on a limb and stand up for somebody like me. Ultimately, I ended up getting a lawyer and negotiated a retirement. So it's so hard-- it's hard every day, because they're still right there. Academic freedom might be held up as a value that Harvard supports, but in reality, in practice, we do not have true academic freedom. We don't have a culture of free speech. And that is because people know what can happen to their reputation and their livelihood if they express the wrong view.

Speaker 7

Stock is desperate for attention.

Speaker 6

Independently of her transphobia, she has always been a mediocre philosopher. The first kind of pushback came from within philosophy, some extremely aggressive pushback that compared me to racists and said that I was basically a bit like someone committing indigenous genocide. You know, these are from philosophers, professors. And everyone liked, like, like, tweet, tweet, tweet, read this, you know, repost, repost, repost. So it just was spreading around. I was like, But hang on, you know? I had not got the capacity, I thought, And to fight that, so a new post would come out. I'd read it. I'd sort of go into some kind of catatonic depression. I would lie on the floor, like, crying my eyes out. And then about three in the morning, I would wake up and go and write a response to that blog post. And I would fire off, like, rebuttal, rebuttal, rebuttal. Every point I would press send, and I would feel relieved, like I'd fought back. And then the next one would come out. So that went on for a few months, where I was just basically felt like I was under siege. This mass character assassination was going on. So it was just like a free-for-all, basically, on campus, on my campus, in my department. People I knew, you know, people I had hung out with were liking and retweeting all these things. It was quite a bad time. That was probably the worst time, because I felt like philosophy was my home and my community. Turns out it wasn't. I had a lecture. It's 9 in the morning. And I was walking down the tunnel. It's like the main thoroughfare into the campus. And along every bit of this tunnel were these big posters saying, fire Kathleen Stock, Kathleen Stock is a transphobe. We're not paying our fees to be taught by a transphobe. And then things obviously escalated and escalated. Then these protests happened. They were letting off flares. There was graffiti. And then from then on, they said they were basically going to come back every day until I left. One thing I couldn't believe is that my colleagues in the philosophy department just all acted like it wasn't happening. And I just thought, perhaps they'll put out a statement in defense of me, just even my academic freedom to do as I've done. So I wrote and said, you know, there are masked men on campus with posters saying that they want to get me fired or sacked. What more do you need to put out a statement in my support, and they never answered. So... nobody answered. I'm not transphobic, and they... it's just the... sometimes just the wall of misrepresentation just comes at you. It was just like I was... I'm sorry. Sorry. I don't want to cry in camera. Anyway, it's fine. It was like I was a contaminant. That's how it felt. And I just thought, I don't want to be here anymore. So I resigned, basically. So...

Speaker 7

Kathleen Stock is not going to be coming back to the University of Sussex as a professor. Good ***** riddance. This is a monumental victory for trans and non-binary students who have protested the ways that this university has enabled transphobia, abuse and discrimination. **** the national press media who happily

collaborated with the university and Stock to turn this into a debate about free speech and academic freedoms. This has been a campaign to get Stock out of Sussex and it ***** worked.

Speaker 6

We acted as a community built on solidarity and love, and that's ***** powerful. Trans resistance will always overcome, united, never to be defeated.

Speaker 3

Obviously, this all had a tremendous effect on me psychologically. But I do think people should know the cost that people face now, truly, for just saying how they feel or what their view is. I questioned my existence, my very existence. And I've talked to a lot of people who've experienced the same thing, when you are socially ostracized and when the kind of rug is pulled out from under you. And that is suicidal ideation. I talked about suicide so much. But in front... in front of my kid, and I feel awful about that. But I was-- had to talk about it, 'cause it's all I could-- I thought about it constantly, and I wanted it to stop, and I couldn't make it stop. And I thought very hard about meaning in life, and what gives me more meaning now is, like, talking about the issues I'm talking about, and I-- things have really crystallized, 'cause I didn't really know how important free speech was to me. I didn't really get what was so great about democracy before, and I never just paid that much attention to it, but I now really firmly believe that each individual kid is so important, and all of their views are so important in learning. and challenging each other, and that we should respect everybody's different perspectives and experiences. And if we don't have free speech, we don't have that, and that's robbing individuals of their right to be heard and seen. Just cut it.

Speaker 1

Watching what happened to Carol, Kathleen, and all the others I met, I kept waiting for institutions to defend their free speech, even a little. Mostly, they didn't. And as more people went quiet out of fear, the silence created a vacuum. One conservative politicians were quick to exploit. And their first stop was Florida. Somehow, it's always Florida.

Speaker 2

New College of Florida was founded in the Civil Rights era with a mission. To become an institution inclusive of students regardless of race, religion, national origin, or cultural status. Welcome to America where everything is made in China Where a girl can have a penis and the boys can have vaginas Welcome to the home of the woke We're going broke You'll get canceled for a joke By folks who voted for joke Welcome to the Democratic USA You're homophobic and racist if you ain't black or gay Where the stars and the stripes, they go up in flames But every classroom in the country has a rainbow

flag Now, despite that history, or maybe because of it, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has targeted the public liberal arts honors college as part of his war on wokeism. Florida is where woke goes to die. You ain't gonna shy me off I'll be saying what I want at the top of my lungs You ain't gonna shut me up You will hear what I say 'til I'm six feet deep You ain't gonna shut me up You can hate all you want I got freedom of speech And you ain't gonna shut me up That was aggressive.

Speaker 1

I heard about a government-led shakeup at a small liberal arts college in Florida.

Speaker 2

We have witnessed harrowing incursions on academic freedom. Focused on academic excellence and not the imposition of trendy ideologies.

Speaker 1

When DeSantis took over the Board of Trustees at New College, he installed loyalists like Christopher Rufo.

Speaker 4

Rufo, who was vowing to remove focuses on race and gender from the school's DNA.

Speaker 1

Known for its quirky, progressive culture, New College suddenly became the new front line in America's culture war.

Speaker 4

New College is coming out on a united front because we love our school.

Speaker 8

New College has a culture problem. Three phrases that most describe the culture here, quote, politically correct, Druggies, weirdos.

Speaker 1

I think New College has a reputation as a leftist bastion. A majority of our students have identified as LGBTQIA, and we do have a fairly large percentage of trans students on campus. Unfortunately, New College's comfort in being a place where students who didn't fit in could fit in has led to the situation where we seemed like we were the easy target.

Speaker 8

Political leaders abdicated their responsibility. They delegated power to left-wing activists, academics, and administrators. They gave them the keys, and they ran the car into the ditch.

Speaker 1

Meet Christopher Rufo, the right's greatest anti-anti-racist weapon. In 2020, as social justice initiatives spread across institutions, Rufo cast them as a threat. and identified critical race theory as the cause.

Speaker 8

It's absolutely astonishing how critical race theory has pervaded every institution in the federal government.

Speaker 1

Critical race theory, or CRT, is a theory taught in law schools that says racism isn't just individual prejudice. It's also systemic, built into laws and institutions. The problem isn't in the people. The problem is in the institutions. But Rufa wasn't interested in the legal definition. During Trump's first term, he appeared Fox with a message for the president. CRT is a Marxist ideology threatening to destroy America.

Speaker 8

And I call on the president to immediately issue this executive order and stamp out this destructive, divisive, pseudoscientific ideology at its root. The next morning, the president's chief of staff gave me a call and said, Hey, the president watched you on Tucker. He agrees with you. He's instructed me to design an executive order abolishing CRT from the federal government. Can you help? President Trump signed an executive order to crack down on so-called critical race theory. So that's really when the CRT movement went from some reporting I was doing, some activism, some policy work, to, you know, national spectacle.

Speaker 1

By branding all kinds of DEI initiatives as critical race theory, Rufo turned an academic theory. into a political weapon.

Speaker 2

And the thing is, it ***** worked. CRT, or crucially, Rutho's definition of it, was suddenly absolutely everywhere.

Speaker 1

Within months, Republican-led states weren't just banning CRT. They were scrapping DEI trainings, rewriting curricula, and eliminating mandatory diversity statements. And

Rufo became the go-to strategist for turning culture war outrage into policy. That caught the attention of Florida's Governor, Ron DeSantis.

Speaker 2

We are also going to eliminate all DEI and CRT bureaucracies.

Speaker 1

Handing Rufo something even more potent, the machinery of state power. Rufo and his conservative cohort now have the power to make immediate change.

Speaker 8

Good morning. Today is a big day in the history of New College of Florida. The trustees are meeting in Sarasota. I'll be joining them virtually. And our task today is to select a permanent president for the college.

Speaker 4

And their first order of business was to fire New College's president.

Speaker 8

All in favor? Let her finish. Please. Let's let her finish.

Speaker 4

Please.

Speaker 1

I do not believe that students are being indoctrinated at New College.

Speaker 4

So this is the part of the meeting where we have a call for public comment.

Speaker 8

And I would like to remind all of us that we are in a time that requires a specific type of character. One minute for each comment.

Speaker 4

I am here to object the appointment of Richard Cochran.

Speaker 2

Corcoran banned Brooks, distorted history, including black history, and attacked LGBTQ+ students.

Speaker 8

He has demonstrated the unique kind of character that we need. Making our students feel unsafe, vilifying diversity, equity, and inclusion, repressing free speech and academic freedom, making me lose sleep every night. Under Richard Corcoran's leadership, we've engaged in this ambitious difficult and challenging process reinvigorating the institution.

Speaker 2

What you're doing here is not about education. This is political theater.

Speaker 8

And this requires a character that has strength.

Speaker 7

I hold you responsible for using college students as political pawns and unwilling subjects in your great educational experiment.

Speaker 8

That is willing to radically shake up an institution.

Speaker 2

So you can be a bull in a china shop, Corcoran, shattering academic freedom. Your time is up.

Speaker 4

Your time is up.

Speaker 2

It's the most draconian attack on academic freedom in the nation.

Speaker 8

Richard Corcoran has earned my confidence. And for that reason, I'll be supporting him as the permanent president of New College of Florida.

Speaker 4

Richard Corcoran has a majority. So Richard Corcoran will be the new president of New College of Florida.

Speaker 8

Finally, I want to publicly shame our president.

Speaker 2

Who has shown nothing but apathy and disregard for our student body and our traditions, and to remind them that he is not welcome or wanted on this campus. **** you, Richard Cochran! Please, please have him removed. You're out. Officer, please take him out.

Speaker 4

This is not a hostile takeover. This is like, let's get back to what was so wonderful.

Speaker 2

It's clear as day that the church that founded us wanted to create a wonderful, great.

Speaker 5

Free speech, civil discourse, classical liberal arts institution.

Speaker 8

Activist professors and administrators say very explicitly, we want to turn the university into a recruiting ground for partisan activists, to join the cause for BLM or for trans activism, to participate in violent protests, to push, you know, pseudo-scientific and pseudo-academic disciplines like gender studies as a great truth. And this is really the first attempt in American history for conservatives to fight back against this process and demand that the institution reflects the political will of the people of Florida. One of the items that I discussed today with Governor DeSantis and with legislators present is that diversity, equity, and inclusion, which sounds great, but in practice, divides people and offers separate judgments on the basis of race and identity? My opinion does matter, actually, unfortunately for you.

Speaker 9

Can I ask the audience to please offer... My profession has always been around diversity, equity, and inclusion work. I've been working in higher education for over 14 years, creating an inclusive campus environment and enriching experiences through programs and events and partnerships that we can cultivate.

Speaker 8

It's a dead-end job for a dead-end ideology that attracts dead-end people.

Speaker 9

What I'm trying to do is create a more positive and welcoming community where everyone feels like they're being valued and that they can be who they are without judgment.

Speaker 8

We became the first public university in the United States to abolish its DEI department. We fired the DEI director, and it's been a smashing success.

Speaker 9

You have a due diligence as a board of trustees to protect the institution and those who are attending it. How are you going to support them? How are they going to feel like they're a part of the institution when you erased everybody of color from your executive team? If we look at the board of trustees, if we're looking at who the leadership is now at the table at New College, what do they look like? And that's divisiveness, not DEI. I don't call it a cultural war.

Speaker 1

What do you call it?

Speaker 9

I call it white nationalism. I call it racism. I call it political erasure.

Speaker 1

The changes at New College move fast. And it didn't start with textbooks.

Speaker 9

Students had already been doing work to get more bathrooms on campus labeled as gender neutral or unisex. One of the things that the new administration did not long after they arrived was literally rip the signs off the wall, like there were pictures of, like, the paint missing where the sign used to be. Hit the road, Jack And don't you come back No more, no more, no, no, no more Hit the road, Jack At the same time, a very cruel slate of anti-trans bills went into effect in Florida. and one of them said that trans people must use the bathroom that matches their sex assigned at birth. I hit the road, Jack So the bathroom that I've been using in my workplace for the last five years, legally, I'm not supposed to use that bathroom anymore, even though all of my legal documentation lists me as male. I hit the road.

Speaker 8

Jack If you believe that a man can become a woman, or if you believe that a man can get pregnant and give birth to a child, what you're saying is simply not true. And if you're saying something so obviously untrue that could be easily debunked by anyone over the age of maybe three or four, you do not merit a place in a scholarly institution.

Speaker 9

I feel like the assumption that's underneath that is, like, if queer people have a place where they can be happy, something is wrong.

Speaker 8

We have not only the right, but we have the obligation to say, I will not participate in this. And that's why, for example, I don't use they/them pronouns or z/zer pronouns, much less. I'm currently under a Department of Education civil rights investigation, following a complaint that I did not use z/zer pronouns for the New College of Florida's DEI director. And I met her briefly when I first became a trustee.

Speaker 1

You met Zur.

Speaker 8

I met your lady, Rosario Hernandez. She was very sweet. She was very nice. I had a nice, pleasant engagement with her. And people always say, well- You just misgendered. Misgendered, yeah. You misgendered, yeah.

Speaker 1

You just misgendered Zur again.

Speaker 8

A synonym for misgendering is accurate sexing.

Speaker 9

When we're looking at pronouns, right, it's very subjective to the person and for me and who I am and what rings great to me is Z-zers-ers, um, as someone who identifies as transfluid and has a really great adoration for both feminine and masculine energies, right, as well as gender-neutral energies.

Speaker 8

I'm not going to, um, use Z-zer pronouns. And you could say, Well, that's unnecessarily aggressive, or, or, That's, you know, not being, uh, kind, nice, respectful, empathetic. you know, whatever therapeutic word you want to insert there. The reason I'm doing that is because I want New College of Florida to be the kind of institution that will not buckle to fads, trans, ideologies. And so we became the first public university in the United States to abolish its gender studies program. And we did so unapologetically because it was the right thing to do.

Speaker 1

Gender studies has been a firm part of the mainstream of American academics for 50 years. This is not some fly-by-night pseudo-discipline. This is an interdisciplinary area of study. It combines science, social sciences, and humanities. And it is recognized as central to the American liberal arts. In May, DeSantis visited New College to sign three

controversial education bills. Florida's new bills spelled out what could and couldn't be taught. Suddenly, it was conservatives wanting safe spaces from ideas they found harmful and writing them into law.

Speaker 2

Some of these niche subjects, like critical race theory, other types of DEI-infused courses and majors, Florida's getting out of that game. If you want to do things like gender ideology, Go to Berkeley. Go to some of these other places. That's fine.

Speaker 4

Next to Governor DeSantis was Christopher Rufo, a conservative activist.

Speaker 8

So when we arrived, this was interpreted by the kind of activists on campus as a great front.

Speaker 4

We are going to win this fight! All of this shows Ron DeSantis who New College is and why we care about what we care about.

Speaker 8

I think we're louder in here than they are out there. All right.

Speaker 4

And it was Trustee Rufo who decided that instead of leaving campus peacefully, he was going to walk through the crowd of protesters, clearly as a stunt and a way to provoke us.

Speaker 8

This is a student who is very excitable, very passionate, very dedicated, but she took it way over the line. She was screaming at us. suck my ***** **** which was very artful and anatomically incorrect, as we found out.

Speaker 4

I approached him, and as a form of protest, to show my disgust, I spat towards the ground, and it is alleged that some of that spittle may have landed on the toe of Christopher Rufo's shoe.

Speaker 8

She spat on me. And, I mean, that's gross, right? It's unsanitary. It's disrespectful. I said, you know, this is kind of protest politics. It happens. It's not, you know, necessarily the

end of the world. But one of the officers called me and said, Hey, look, this is a crime. This is a first-degree battery. This is a violent crime under Florida law. And when students cross that line from free speech to illegal violence, there have to be consequences.

Speaker 4

So... a deal was struck. Rufo told my lawyer that he would have the charges dropped if I were to, and this is how he put it, Leave and never come back. Um... which... was devastating.

Speaker 8

That, to me, was an adequate resolution that established the standard of civil discourse, but allowed this young woman to go on with her life and be successful elsewhere.

Speaker 4

I was removed from campus as a form of political retaliation, and it didn't stop with me.

Speaker 8

We're going to create a foothold at New College. We're going to inspire the next generation of academics, the next generation of citizens, and the next generation of legislators who will look at this little, small university on the beach in Sarasota, Florida. as the blueprint, as the model, as something to be pursued, not just in Florida, but everywhere.

Speaker 1

Well, there you go. Rufo had laid out the battle plan in detail, abolish DEI, reshape the curriculum, and use higher education as a political weapon. In the lead up to the 2024 election, Trump was campaigning with the same promise.

Speaker 2

We're going to smash the Marxist diversity, equity, and inclusion bureaucracies. I will also take historic action to defeat the toxic poison of gender ideology.

Speaker 1

And this was where my film was supposed to end, with a warning. The campus culture war had come full circle and opened the door to a hostile takeover.

Speaker 2

The days of subsidizing communist indoctrination in our colleges will soon be over.

Speaker 1

Not with reform, but with blunt force intervention that didn't distinguish between what was broken and what wasn't. And then came a shock that redrew the battle lines.

Speaker 2

It began at dawn with Hamas militants firing thousands of rockets into Israel from Gaza.

Speaker 1

October 7th changed everything.

Speaker 2

Israelis woke up today to find their worst nightmares had come true.

Speaker 8

A massive surprise attack. Hamas using motorised paragliders carrying heavily armed fighters deep into Israeli territory.

Speaker 2

It is not clear right now how many Israelis have been taken hostage by Hamas.

Speaker 1

While Israelis were still counting their dead, and families waited for news of hostages, a wave of Western campuses were already blaming Israel.

Speaker 7

Harvard, in the hot seat now, after failing to swiftly respond and denounce a letter posted by a student-run Harvard-Palestine solidarity group.

Speaker 2

The letter was co-signed by 33 other student organizations.

Speaker 7

Holding the Israeli regime entirely responsible for all unfolding violence.

Speaker 1

For me, the shock wasn't just what the students were saying, it was the timing. In the months that followed, the human cost in Gaza would be overwhelming. But this was only one day after Hamas's gruesome attack on Israelis. And already, across campuses, it was being framed as a reasonable form of resistance. The origin of martyrs! The origin of resistance! We will liberate the land! By any means necessary.

Speaker 4

Do you guys remember the photos of the bulldozer breaking through the deathly borders?

Speaker 1

Yes! And the several other joyful and powerful images which came from the glorious October 7th? Yes! Images of the paragliders Hamas used in the attack were turned into campus poster art, transformed into symbols of liberation by any means necessary.

Speaker 8

We are so horrible for showing a paraglider. What about their jets? Israeli jets have killed thousands and thousands of thousands of Palestinians, but that's okay. As.

Speaker 1

This was playing out on campuses, Christopher Rufo was watching.

Speaker 8

Much has happened since we first met, especially in the field of higher education. The events of October 7th in Israel and Gaza, I think, changed everything. I think anyone with even a meager conscience could see that this was a barbaric act of terror, savagery, butchery. And it seemed like the only people who could not immediately see that were American academics.

Speaker 2

Breathe for the first time in years. It was exhilarating. And if they weren't exhilarated by this challenge to the monopoly of violence, by this shifting of the balance of power, then they would not be human. I was exhilarated.

Speaker 1

I've always believed in free speech, defended it. Even when it was hard, but this felt personal. I'm Jewish, and I have family and friends in Israel, many who oppose their own government's policies and sympathize with Palestinian suffering. So watching a Cornell professor call the October 7th attacks exhilarating, energizing, was hard to process. He wasn't some anonymous voice online. He was a tenured Ivy League professor who appeared to be celebrating mass murder. I needed to know what was happening on that campus. So I headed to Cornell.

Speaker 8

A Cornell professor is under fire after he called the attack on Israel exhilarating.

Speaker 4

Russell Rickford spoke out at a pro-Palestinian rally in Ithaca on Sunday. Listen to the absolute bile coming out of this man now. I saw Russell Rickford's speech because I was the speaker who followed him at that rally. That speech talked about the long history of Jewish and Black resistance and civil rights. It talked about the ways in which that, as a community that is fighting for justice for everyone, we need to love each other and support each other.

Speaker 5

Professor Rickford, um, he made his comments, which I still maintain were taken out of context. That became an international, um...

Speaker 7

I hope that people can go back and read the transcript, because if anything, that speech brought people together in a way that I have never seen before.

Speaker 1

So I did go back and watch the entire speech, but I didn't hear the rally Bianca heard, unifying a movement for love and support.

Speaker 2

We'd have to call Israel what it is. We'd have to call Israel an ethnic racist speech. We'd have to call Israelis, the genocidal march.

Speaker 1

There was no room for Israelis, Jewish or not, who wanted peace, but also a country to call home. He was framing it all through an anti-colonial lens.

Speaker 2

Their project is settling a colonialist's death.

Speaker 1

And through that lens, Hamas was an anti-colonial force.

Speaker 2

You don't have to be a Hamas supporter to recognize that.

Speaker 1

And he came uncomfortably close to justifying the deliberate targeting of civilians.

Speaker 2

I was never presumed to tell oppressed people how they should seek their liberation.

Speaker 1

Disturbing as I found it, I knew it was his right to say it. Still, I kept thinking, What if this man was teaching my kids? It felt like an oversimplified lens projected onto a conflict half a world away. and it shut down any chance of conversation.

Speaker 2

There exists a colonizer and a colonized, an oppressor and the oppressed.

Speaker 1

People are complex, and this binary of oppressed and non-oppressed, white or non-white, is ludicrous and against the very ideals of nuance and understanding that progressivism is supposed to be at least the way I thought it was supposed to be.

Speaker 5

Every Palestinian is a civilian, even if they hold arms.

Speaker 2

Every settler is an aggressor, a soldier, and an occupier, even if they are lounging on our occupied beaches.

Speaker 5

Campus protests against Israel's war in Gaza are continuing to grow across the U.S.

Speaker 8

Cornell University has joined the list.

Speaker 1

Dozens of students from groups including the Coalition for Mutual Liberation...

Speaker 8

Started a pro-Palestine encampment.

Speaker 2

Free, free! Palestine! Free, free.

Speaker 5

Palestine! I think, for me, a university is a key battleground amongst many. I think university is a key battleground. I think the war of narratives, the battle of ideas, which then go on to shape public opinion, happens a lot and is produced at universities. People who have been starved by the colonial Zionist entity of Israel. We hope through

our campaigns that other students become more radicalized. The occupation's got to go.

Speaker 2

We cannot bring down people power.

Speaker 1

There's growing international pressure on Israel to halt the fighting. As diplomacy fails, desperation in Gaza increases. Before we go further, I need to say this plainly. October 7th was a massacre. And the scale of civilian death in Gaza from Israel's military assault is devastating. Both are true. So I understand protest. The need to stand up when you're convinced something is wrong. But alongside the real grief and outrage, I started to recognize something else at work.

Speaker 5

This is the last fight, the last fight of Western imperialism, and it's nearing collapse.

Speaker 1

It appeared on campuses long before this conflict. It was about power, who has it and who doesn't.

Speaker 5

Do you stand with the elite institution, or do you stand with the working people?

Speaker 2

Working people.

Speaker 1

An ideology woven into the fabric of education itself. Who was the colonizer?

Speaker 2

Who was the colonizer? We actually need to crash the U.S. settler state.

Speaker 5

And the moment that you grab the gun like you're no longer oppressed, you're now free. How do we teach that in the class?

Speaker 1

The more I looked, the more it felt familiar. The revolutionary politics of the '60s and '70s back in circulation, like something pulled straight out of an old campus archive.

Speaker 5

I'm a PhD student in Africana. For those who know, Africana was built out of an armed occupation. In 1969, students demanding an Africana study centre occupied with arms illustrate demanding that right.

Speaker 1

I didn't know what Africana was. Turns out it's what's often called black studies. A field born out of the campus protests of the 60s when black students wanted their history reflected in an overwhelmingly white curriculum. One of the most famous protests happened here at Cornell.

Speaker 5

So what drew me to Africana is a long tradition of activism, a long tradition of taking up causes for those who you believe are oppressed. Who is the oppressor? Who is the oppressed?

Speaker 1

These were the same ideas that I'd heard come up at Evergreen. The oppressor. York.

Speaker 5

A lens of victimhood.

Speaker 1

In conferences. We ain't just internally colonized. At Harvard.

Speaker 3

An oppression of minoritized communities.

Speaker 1

The same script adapted to every college major. Science as a whole is a product of Western modernity, and the whole thing should be scratched off. Mathematics has supported white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Gender is a colonial imposition, and sometimes it just lost me.

Speaker 2

Sort of the dimension of queerness and feminism, insofar as Islam, homo-nationalism, pink washing. I think I've practically been the only one to hold my classes in the campus. on queer and feminist BIPOC traditions from decolonial abolitionist perspectives. That's what I was here to teach. Your colonialism is a structure.

Speaker 1

Once this critical social justice ideology was launched, it pulled everything into its orbit. Colonialism, queerness, patriarchy, white supremacy, climate change, and now Zionism, with Palestine at its symbolic core.

Speaker 4

People believe that if you're pro-Israel, you're pro-oppressor. And if you're pro-oppressor, you're pro-slavery, you're pro, you know, like, stealing of indigenous land.

Speaker 2

Cornell's founding was enabled in the course of a national genocide by the sale of almost one million acres of stolen Indian land. And just as Native Americans are the indigenous people of the U.S., Turtle Island, So Palestinians are the indigenous people of Israel-Palestine.

Speaker 4

Professors are deeply problematic at creating this hostile environment by not exposing their students to a range of ideas and only pushing one particular narrative.

Speaker 2

I think it's a diverse faculty, and so I don't think any single professor can or should be bound to give all points of view.

Speaker 4

It doesn't unite. It just pushes us apart, which is really sad.

Speaker 2

So we gather this evening in the spirit of resistance, of anti-imperialism and principled dissent on this campus and far beyond.

Speaker 1

I approached Professor Rickford at several rallies, but he declined an interview. I assume because his viral speech had already made him a target for online threats. Still, I wondered how much influence professors like him.

Speaker 2

And thanks to all the young radicals.

Speaker 1

Had on students like Mamadou.

Speaker 2

Y'all can give yourselves a round of applause. The anti-racists, the anti-fascists, the anti-sexists, the anti-imperialists, and oh yes, the anti-capitalists, you inspire us, keep organizing, keep raising hell.

Speaker 5

We're taking over this building. No one should feel comfortable while genocide is taking place. The reason why I find myself having an affinity to Palestine is that my faith commands me and instructs me to, like, stand for justice and always side with those who are oppressed. Last week we saw the Honorable Aaron Bushnell achieve martyrdom. He gave the greatest act of refusal.

Speaker 2

My name is Aaron Bushnell. I am an active duty member of the United States Air Force. And I will no longer be complicit in genocide.

Speaker 1

I'm about to engage in an extreme act of protest.

Speaker 5

Hi, sir, can I help you? No, sir. Rebound. Hey! Rebound! Rebound.

Speaker 4

We will carry on the torch of protesting and fighting against the superialist system.

Speaker 5

I think what Aaron Bushna has done for many of us is a call to action. And for us, someone who's a Muslim, martyrdom, or dying in the way of a just cause is very much a weighty, lofty, and rewarded thing. So I was trying to make the connection between Aaron Bushna and martyrdom in Islam.

Speaker 1

I hope you're not suggesting that people do the same thing.

Speaker 5

Absolutely not. But I think the fact that he's got to that desperate says something.

Speaker 1

Well, people said he was mentally ill, though.

Speaker 5

Yeah, I mean, it's not, again, I see his, when I read his post, this is someone who has clear mind, who knows what they're doing. And I think it's unfair to say he was a madman or because he was very lucid and his will was quite clear why he's doing what he's doing. Again, that's not for me a tactic that ever should be like promoted. But for me, it's not about focusing on the act itself, but rather what he represents. He gave the greatest act of refusal. He engaged in the greatest act of protest. And the bare minimum we can do to honor his legacy is to say, not in our name.

Speaker 1

Protest has always been part of campus life. But praising self-immolation as the greatest form of protest isn't what I expected to hear on an Ivy League campus. And it left no room for dialogue.

Speaker 4

I was walking outside my class and there was an installation of about 100 white flags on the ground, scattered in a circle. And I walk up and I found two women and I said, what is this? And they said, oh, it's a memorial to commemorate like the lives lost in the genocides of Congo, Palestine and other places. And I said, What about those who were brutally killed in Israel on October 7th by Hamas? And they said, Well, we actually have a rabbi, Jewish representatives coming, and they are represented in these flags. And I said, Well, that's, like I said, thank you. That's exactly what we need. We need to stand together. We need people to see a rabbi standing next to an imam. So we had a conversation that was fairly heated and emotional. And then they did the same thing to the father. And they raped their mother. And they got the boat to the head. And they sat down at their lunch table and ate the family's shot lunch. So another family... For 45 minutes with two Arab women. Each cried at one point. We exchanged numbers. And at one point, you know, they asked me, Well, then why are you here? And I said, Well, I'm here because I'm a proud Zionist. And what it means to me to be a Zionist is to push my country to continue being better. And I want to stand with you, and I want to understand what I can do. And Mamadou overheard me say I was a proud Zionist, and he immediately came over. And at this point, he said, You said you're a Zionist? You're the reason we're all here. You're the reason they're all dead. You're a racist country. And then he, like, turns to everyone around, and he says, Here, everyone, you know what? This girl, she's a proud Zionist. She's a racist, and that's how we're going to know her. And I was like, I was just dumbfounded. And at one point he said, You're disrupting us with your Zionism. And I looked at the two women I was speaking to and I said, Have I been disruptive to you? And they both said, No, Mamadou, stop. He didn't stop berating me. And then at that point I turned to him and I said, This is the problem that we have, that people like you are so angry that we can't even have a proper discourse in this country.

Speaker 5

There should be dialogue. I'm just not that person. I understand the call for nuance. I really do. But I don't understand why there's a call for nuance when we believe it is racism. I would not two sides racism. I want two sides homophobia. I want two sides white supremacy. So I don't-- I'm a bit confused, this call for two sides and of the issue. The Zionists are losing ground. They are cowards. They are scared. And our global movement is growing daily.

Speaker 7

I have seen chat posts that detail Zionism being fascism.

Speaker 4

Zionism is the same thing as being a Nazi. And honestly, it's no surprise to why half the student body, if not more, hate Zionists. It's 'cause they don't know what it means to be a Zionist.

Speaker 5

I think Zionism is white supremacy. I think Zionism is a form of racism and a settler colonial entity. And I think no amount of conflating with Judaism as a religion is going to make me change my mind.

Speaker 4

Zionism isn't an ugly word. It's just been twisted to be that. And it was the idea that Jews have the right to their own homeland, their own state. And it's not intended to preclude the idea that there should be a Palestinian state. And I think that's probably the most important thing that gets lost in translation.

Speaker 2

Rick.

Speaker 4

Yeah.

Speaker 5

I just forwarded you an e-mail that I just got from a professor. Eric, I guess word got out that we've been on campus.

Speaker 8

Check it out. Okay.

Speaker 1

Oh, my God. The following was posted by the camp today, the encampment, right? Perhaps you've seen it. Update on documentary crew. Please wear masks. The director, who is a Zionist, is on site. Be wary of what you are saying around them and guard yourself from a potentially unfriendly crew. I mean, are you kidding? Zionist has become a dirty word, so...

Speaker 8

Why do they think you're a Zionist?

Speaker 1

I don't know. I think we should speak to Zionists, and I think we should speak to anti-Zionists. Well, we're doing that, I think. Last time I spoke with the encampment crowd, they were open to talking, but something changed. I think it's conditional on just Garfield and whoever's, like, filming or doing audio to do the interview.

Speaker 2

The only thing is that Rick is the director, so would it be okay if it was just Rick and the camera person instead of me?

Speaker 7

I don't think so.

Speaker 1

Can I ask you something? Sure. We got an e-mail. Update on documentary coup and the director, who is a Zionist, is on site. Be wary of what you're saying around them and guard yourself. Is that what this is coming from?

Speaker 7

I think, like, in terms of our discussions with Zionists and how Zionists have. towards a movement. They haven't been engaging in dialogue that has been productive.

Speaker 1

What does the Zionist mean to you that implies that it would not be fair? But you can still believe that there could be a state of Israel and care about Palestinian rights and the need for Palestinians to have a homeland. Mm-hmm.

Speaker 7

No, that's a very fair point. That's honestly not something I've heard too much. because a lot of Zionists on campus have been very not open to discussion. And I think, like, that's what a lot of people are wary of.

Speaker 1

Once I was labeled a Zionist without ever being asked what I believe, the conversation was over.

Speaker 5

The Zionists will fall, and I can't wait to see all of you in the liberated Palestine.

Speaker 2

Israel will fall. Israel will fall. Israel will fall.

Speaker 1

I imagined how I would feel if I was a Jewish student right now, walking to class through these protests and hearing these slogans. This one's easy, a call for freedom. No problem standing with that. But on campuses around the world, the chants didn't stop there.

Speaker 2

From the river to the sea Palestine will be free From the river to the sea Palestine will.

Speaker 1

Be free This one's harder. Some hear it as a call for Palestinian liberation. Others hear it as a call to erase Israel. There is only one solution.

Speaker 2

Intifada! Intifada! Globalize the Intifada! Globalize the Intifada.

Speaker 1

For me, Globalize the Intifada lands like a threat. And I heard that fear from students, too. I couldn't help wondering, why not ceasefire now? Peace for everyone. Two states for two peoples.

Speaker 5

As someone who speaks Arabic, it's important that Intifada comes from the root word nafaba, which means just like the breaking off of chains, right? So I think... That language, first and foremost, again, is also rooted in like an Islamophobia, Islamophobia also rooted in the painting the Muslim as the other, painting Arabic-sounding words as the other, painting, like, there's almost a fear around that, right?

Speaker 1

Sure, the word Intifada might have poetic roots, but in modern history, it's tied to uprisings in the West Bank and Gaza and the targeting of Israelis. That's the association

the word carries for me, not because of Islamophobia, but because of history. So when people chant, Globalize the intifada, what exactly do they mean?

Speaker 5

The moment you start chanting, There's only one solution, intifada revolution, which is a genocidal chant.

Speaker 4

I'm sorry, your intentions are not for dialogue or to speak your mind. Your intentions are to cause violence and to hate people.

Speaker 2

Go back to Europe. You're from Europe. I'm a New Yorker. You're from Europe. I'm a New Yorker. Go back to Paris.

Speaker 1

My mother survived Auschwitz in Poland. My grandparents were murdered there. So no thanks. I'm not going back. But if I were a student hearing that on campus...

Speaker 4

Zionists, they're Nazis.

Speaker 1

It wouldn't feel especially inclusive. They're Nazis. They're fascists.

Speaker 4

They're supporters of genocide. Someone in the chat right now?

Speaker 2

Should people who are supporters of genocide, should Zionists, a.k.a. Nazis, white supremacists, should they live?

Speaker 4

Should they live? If you say something about Black people, gay people, disabled people, whomever it may be, you'll probably get kicked out of our school, suspended, canceled, whatever it may be. What I'm seeing is just... there is a defense of everyone's rights but Jewish people's rights.

Speaker 9

I'd say that, as a trans person, I've been very lucky. Uh, Cornell is a very accepting place.

Speaker 1

I've had much more difficulty being Jewish than I have being trans.

Speaker 4

There is absolutely a double standard when it comes to who has the free speech rights to voice their opinions, and when it comes from the hyper-progressive left, there's a free pass to say whatever you want.

Speaker 1

Ms. McGill, at Penn, Does calling for the genocide of.

Speaker 4

Jews violate Penn's rules or code of conduct, yes or no? If it.

Speaker 1

Is... Yes or no. If the speech becomes conduct, it can be harassment. Yes. Conduct meaning committing the act of genocide? This was a turning point. For years, conservatives had been circling, waiting for an opening. Now they had one. A chance to expose how higher education embraced...

Speaker 2

The ideology of the radical left.

Speaker 8

...Illiberal sewers of intolerance and bigotry...

Speaker 2

On your campuses.

Speaker 1

Their first assault was in the political theater of Congress, designed for viral clips. Dr. Gay, a Harvard student calling for the mass murder of African-Americans is not protected free speech at Harvard, correct? Our commitment to free speech... It's a yes or no question.

Speaker 8

You have university presidents in the hot seat, and then the congressmen and congresswomen up on the dais, and they're... they're grilling people, trying to get a kind of viral clip. That's how the game is played.

Speaker 1

I will ask you one more time. Does calling for the genocide of Jews violate Harvard's rules of bullying and harassment, yes or no? It can be, depending on the context.

Speaker 8

It depends on the context. And you got to think, like, what is this-- what is she thinking? I mean, this is, like, such a softball, such a slam dunk.

Speaker 1

The damage was done. Universities claimed to defend free speech, but their evasions seemed to reveal a glaring double standard. What's the context? Stefanik and her party now had an arsenal of stories, like Brett's, Eric's, Zach's, Lee's, and Carol's, to use as examples of the university's intolerance. In the end, it was the institution's failure to uphold the very principles they preached that exposed a damaging hypocrisy. It's in the exercise of our freedom to speak, and we reveal the character of our institution. Our university rejects the harassment or intimidation of individuals based on their beliefs.

Speaker 3

No, they don't. They explicitly do not do that. This is offensive to me, because it's not true. It's just not true. She was one person who could have defended my right to express my views. And so this is just empty, very empty to me.

Speaker 4

And our university embraces a commitment to free expression.

Speaker 3

That commitment extends even to views that many of us find objectionable, even outrageous. Even outrageous. In my case, it didn't even extend to views that almost everyone agrees with, which are totally obvious. That is why I became a poster child for Harvard's hypocrisy.

Speaker 2

Carol Hooven, an evolutionary biologist, was forced to resign because she stated that a person's sex is biological and binary.

Speaker 1

And so, President Gay, in what world is a call for violence against Jews protected speech, but a belief that sex is biological and binary isn't? This is why I've called for your resignation. These are unacceptable answers across the board.

Speaker 8

This was so shocking that I think it really cut through the noise. And seeing this anti-Semitism on campus laid bare, and then understanding it within the framework of left-wing decolonization theory, I think connected the dots for a lot of people who, you know, previously might have felt that something was off, but it was not quite clear, and then they couldn't attach it to the ideology. I think that is-- that illusion has been-- has been now, uh, dispelled.

Speaker 1

While anti-Semitism on campus is real, here it was being exploited to score points. And the hearings worked. It depends on the context became the clip that ended careers and attracted conservative activists like moths to a flame.

Speaker 2

I'm actually at Harvard Yard right now, where we have our mobile billboard, along with two U-Haul moving trucks, because after all, it's moving day for Claudine Gay. Hey guys, what do you think about Claudine Gay resigning from Harvard?

Speaker 1

Adam Gillette, known for his confrontational tactics, came looking for outrage and found it. **** you.

Speaker 2

**** you. **** you. **** you. Well, you're cool. You're just walking around. You guys are ***** sick. You're a ***** disgusting, just gross little man. So you don't think the movie trucks are a good idea? Should we have gone with Ryder rather than U-Haul? Should we have gone with Ryder? Get a real ***** job, you ***** prick. How about that, you Zionist ***** disgusting *****? I hate y'all, dude. I ***** hate y'all.

Speaker 1

Claudine Gay wasn't the first, and she wouldn't be the last. Under pressure from Congress, alumni, donors, and the media, a string of university presidents were compelled to resign. But on campuses, the protests dragged on for months. Occupied halls disrupted classes.

Speaker 2

You got to get them out. We all have to go to class.

Speaker 1

The lines had blurred between protest and threat, dissent and disruption, legitimate criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism. The conflict thousands of miles away divided

campuses into battlefields. And now Trump, hot on the campaign trail, had a new rallying cry for his war on higher education.

Speaker 2

Every college president, I say, remove the encampments immediately, vanquish the radicals, and take back our campuses for all of the normal students who want a safe place from which to learn. Give me a reason why you're doing this! Oh, my God! You'd be more fascist! You're hit! I'm peacefully protesting. They're ***** arrested. They arrested over 100 individuals, then suspended them.

Speaker 7

Cornell University is suspending enrolment and study for students that participate in campus protests.

Speaker 5

I've been suspended, and I'm an international student. So I don't know what it means right now for my status, and I'm going to find out shortly. The school's alleging that I was involved in the organization of an unauthorized encampment on campus.

Speaker 8

The tents here have to go. It will be a permanent moral stand on the legacy of this university forever.

Speaker 5

The school is alleging that I led chants that became disruptive for university activity.

Speaker 4

That signals to me that there's something profoundly wrong about our university's ability to guarantee our freedom of expression on campus.

Speaker 8

You have elite academic institutions that are self-destructing. that have been exposed ideologically should power change hands after the election this year. I know for a fact that there are significant changes coming to American higher education.

Speaker 2

Look what happened. Is this great?

Speaker 1

The jukebox is pounding The bar is lit with smoke The patrons, they've been brawling. Free speech used to be a shared value, no matter the politics.

Speaker 2

I'm a very strong person for free speech.

Speaker 1

Now, it's a weapon wielded by those in power.

Speaker 2

Our country will be woke no longer.

Speaker 1

It's Physics 101. For every action, there's an opposite reaction. On campus, a movement for fairness and inclusion slid into zealotry. Supercharged by social media, certain ideas became blasphemy, and disagreements put professors and students in the crosshairs.

Speaker 4

It's not a debate.

Speaker 2

It's not a debate.

Speaker 1

When the pendulum swung back, it was more like a wrecking ball swinging hard to the right with a reality TV grin.

Speaker 2

I've notified every single government DEI officer that their job has been deleted. They're gone. They're fired. You're fired.

Speaker 1

The culture war hasn't left campus. It's been taken over by government.

Speaker 2

We have to honestly and aggressively attack the universities in this country.

Speaker 1

By weaponizing anti-Semitism through lawsuits and funding freezes, Trump was executing on a campaign promise.

Speaker 2

College presidents must end the anti-Semitic propaganda, or they will lose their accreditation, and they will lose all federal support. He has threatened us through extortion with a billion-dollar fine unless we do his bidding. Freezing more than \$2 billion in research funds. The impacts of those cuts will be severe to cutting-edge cures for cancer, cures for diseases. These actions are not about anti-Semitism. They're about authoritarianism. You're going to be under arrest.

Speaker 1

It was a warning to anyone who spoke out. A Tufts University graduate student.

Speaker 2

Handcuffed and taken away by a plainclothes ICE agent.

Speaker 1

And activists like Mamadou suddenly faced the blunt edge of state power.

Speaker 2

Mamadou Tong had his visa revoked and decided to leave the country before I could catch him. It was a ticking time bomb until I'm picked up off the streets. Every time I find one of these lunatics, I take away their visa.

Speaker 1

For all their differences, the extremes have something in common. The same impulse to use power to silence what they can't tolerate. I see you in the shadows. If I've learned anything going back to school, it's this. If we want to hold on to our fragile democracy, we've got to defend free speech. Even when it's hard, especially when it's personal. Because once speech becomes a privilege, granted or revoked by those in power, it isn't free anymore. It's just power. And then it's not just speech we're losing. It's conversation. The ability to speak across differences. That's what's at stake. So we better start talking again before we forget how. At least that's what I think. What do you think?

Speaker 7

Dogs of war next week from small-time criminal to international mercenary and secretive arms dealer, next Tuesday night on BBC Four.

Speaker 6

Or watch more captivating films from Storyville on BBC iPlayer.