2024-04-03 Panel on Antisemitism Task Force Recommendations - Master

[00:00:00]

Hey everyone.

Great to see some friendly faces, um, in a not so friendly faces time. Um, I'm Catherine Frankie, um, with this wonderful group, um, initiated and organized by my amazing colleague, uh, Mahmoud Mahbat Mamdani. We wanted to take this opportunity for us to offer some sort of, I would say, provisional remarks on the, um, Report number one, Columbia University's rules on demonstrations issued by the task force on anti Semitism.

It was appointed by our president in early November of this year, um, in response to the claims that, um, made by some that the, uh, law university was having an anti Semitism problem. Um, and so this task force is tasked with, um, investigating something. I'm not sure exactly what. Part of the problem is they won't define what anti Semitism means to them.

Um, um, [00:01:00] but this, uh, panel will offer some responses and then we really look forward to your thoughts too. I think, at least I, and I hope all of us regard this as a, a community event to engage this important issue. Of course we all condemn any form of anti Semitism here or anywhere. Um, uh, but we also have a complicated situation here that problematizes both that term, um, what might meet the definition of that term, and what it means to create a task force only on anti Semitism and not have, um, university, significant university resources being devoted to all forms of bias on this campus during this very difficult time.

Um, so, um, let me say a couple of things. One is that we've lost two of our panelists. to, um, uh, illness and family emergencies. So unfortunately, Joe Howley, um, uh, cannot join us, and Monam can't, also cannot join us, who is going to be the moderator, so I will be moderate ish, [00:02:00] and moderate, and, um, uh, and we will do our best to, um, channel our, our really smart colleagues who can't be with us.

So, uh, in order of, um, how people will be speaking, Um, Rashid Khalidi, who is the Edward SAE professor of Modern Arab Studies, will begin, uh, he will be followed by Koma Ahmed, who's an assistant professor at the, uh, Columbia School of Public Health. Then by, um, myself, uh, and I am the James Ldo professor of Law at Columbia University.

And UD will bring up the, uh, do cleanup at the end. Who's the, uh, Herbert Lehman Professor of government, um, in the anthropology department and in Mesas. Um, so we'll offer these comments and then really invite your comments as well. I will say that the spectator is here, so assume, or not assume, everything you say is on the record.

This is not a private conversation, it's one that, um, for which, um, uh, it [00:03:00] is being recorded. And, um, let me invite Rashid to the podium.

Um, thanks everybody for coming on this miserable day. Um, I, I'm making these remarks, uh, to public forum in view of the opportunity to present my observations to the task force itself in person. Um, some faculty members were invited to do so. That invitation never reached me because of an undoubtedly inadvertent mistake in my email.

Um, and when a friend who was on the committee, a colleague, mentioned, why didn't you come and speak to the task force, I said I was never invited. And so I pursued my neighbor, the person who lives in my building, happens to be one of the co chairs of the task force, and told him I would like to talk to you people.

Um, after much back and forth, we arranged a meeting. a meeting, [00:04:00] uh, and, uh, for reasons I never understood, that meeting didn't take place. That meeting was postponed, and for reasons that were never explained to me, that meeting never took place. So, since they didn't want to talk to me, I will talk to you, and I'll send them my remarks.

Um, for me, the formation of this task force raises a number of questions. Um, I'm not going to have time to address all of them in the few minutes allotted to me. Uh, the report number one, Columbia University's Rules on Demonstrations, Task Force on Antisemitism, March 2024, the report that I'm commenting on and which they released earlier, uh, they released last month, is 27 pages long.

In my view, it has dozens and dozens and dozens of objectionable passages in it. And I, I can't possibly deny that. I, I was giving 10 minutes. I can't, possibly 10 minutes. 12, 12, 12. I can't possibly cover the 27 pages of obfuscation,

conflation, [00:05:00] misidentification, misinterpretation, um, and other long Latinate words that, um, adorn this report.

Um, but I think the first question to ask is why has Columbia University formed such a task force and no of. In the United States, over the past few months, since the war on Gaza and in Gaza began, um, the only people who were killed, the only people who were shot, the only people who were assaulted with noxious gas, the latter incident happened on this campus, have been people identified as Palestinian or supporters of the Palestine cause.

Um, other people have obviously been affected deeply by what has been happening. Israelis, Palestinians, Arabs, Jews, Muslims, ordinary citizens, um, but the people who've actually been the most harmed have been either Palestinians or people identified as Palestinians, or people who were involved in [00:06:00] demonstrating in support of the Palestine cause.

In this situation, is this the overriding and exclusive problem to which the Columbia University administration should devote a task force? I would point out to you. That the budget of this task force would be well over a quarter of a million dollars. They've advertised a salary for a senior researcher of a range of 125 to 140 thousand dollars.

When you add benefits to that, 30, 40 percent. You add the salaries of the three advertised research assistants, and you add the cost of administration. We're talking about at least a quarter of a million dollars. Now, I don't think these are, these are questions that actually have a very clear answer. I believe we all know that the answers related to these questions about why they did this relate to the powerful one sided internal and external pressures that operate on the administration.

Political pressures, financial pressures, congressional pressures, media pressures, and other pressures. Um, I [00:07:00] will skip over, though I would love to comment on, the composition of a task force on anti Semitism. that rigorously excludes the many faculty members on this campus with deep experience in studying anti semitism, in studying anti Palestinian hatred, and in studying the Middle East.

Nobody who has any of those fields of expertise was chosen for this task force. Uh, the people who were, uh, uh, at least the co chairs are, if they're distinguished for anything besides their experience as a tax lawyer or as a professor of journalism, are distinguished for their committed support for the State of Israel.

Um, I'll also skip over the absence of any significant university response to the harassment of many Jewish, Muslim, Arab, Black, and other students for their engagement in Palestine advocacy. Uh, the university has done absolutely nothing, to the best of my knowledge, from my discussions with a number of students who have been harassed in this way, [00:08:00] absolutely nothing to support them.

Quite the contrary. It has been, I would say, generally cold, if not hostile, uh, towards them. Um, this is the subject of a lawsuit against Columbia, and I don't want to talk about that. Uh, instead I'm going to focus my remarks this afternoon on a very few of what I see as the most troubling features of the task force, the task force's report number one, uh, which relates to rules on demonstrations.

And the first question that occurs to me, is why is a task force supposedly established to look into anti semitism on campus devoting a report to demonstrations? What business is it of theirs to regulate public speech? Which is in fact the burden of this report. It's in fact Columbia University's Rules on Demonstrations.

That's the title of the report. What business is it of theirs to regulate public speech? Um, the report touches on a few other things, [00:09:00] it touches on, for example, disruption of classes, uh, a few other matters, but the, the focus of it is regulation of speech. And the irony of it is that the voice of this task force has already been heard loud and clear by the administration as the task force report admits on page two when it says of new university rules on demonstrations that were adopted in February that they were, quote, pleased to provide input on these policies.

So they've already been listened to. Uh, this is, this is icing on the cake. Um, and incidentally they say that, uh, these new policies on demonstrations adopted by the University in February, are policies which the task force endorses. Uh, and they go into this at some length in the report, and I want to talk about this.

To me, the depressing answer to the question of why they're devoting a report to demonstrations, is that in their panicked response, to outside pressure, outside and internal pressure, to shut down [00:10:00] speech some do not like. The university and the task force, both of them, have both willfully abandoned the time honored tradition of protest at Columbia University.

Now, some of you may remember, or have even been alive in 1968, or have read about it. Some of you may have heard of even participated in, uh, a whole range

of protests at this university. In the 70s, in the 80s, in the 90s, in the 2010s. Um, this is a tradition that actually Professor Franke wrote about eloquently in a recent article in The Nation.

If you want to learn about some of the things that have happened on this campus, and then in my view, uh, distinguish and, and, and, and honor this campus, read, read Professor Franke's article in The Nation. Instead of honoring that tradition, they have adopted an approach that privileges the perceptions and the prejudices of some over free speech [00:11:00] rights.

And I stress the perceptions and the prejudices, rather than the rights of some over free speech rights. When 17 deans at Columbia wrote a public letter In December and stated that hearing certain terms like is perceived by some as antisemitic and deeply hurtful. I responded in a public letter, in an open letter that what they had done by saying this by in fact admonishing, uh, students and others for using terms like , uh, or from the river to the sea, uh, uh, in, in so doing, they had established a new norm.

The privilege is a politics of feeling in a fashion that while it is perhaps appropriate to a kindergarten, is antithetical to and not worthy of a university, and I would argue that this is equally true of the spirit that animates this entire report. It would be a perfectly suitable document for [00:12:00] regulating a kindergarten.

It is completely unsuitable for regulating a university that has any self-respect. Certainly a university like Columbia with a tradition of protest. Beyond these major

flaws, the report is full of other fallacies. It says that some hear calls for intifada as calls for violence against them and their families. Similarly, the term Intifada has been described by Columbia University officials as quote unquote genocidal. The ignorance involved here is boundless. The term in Arabic means uprising.

In this context exclusively, an uprising against an illegal, enormously violent, 56 year military occupation. What is genocidal in that? If anything should be protected political speech, it should be a call to overturn such an unjust law. The feelings of those who for whatever reason identify with this illegal occupation and the land grabs, the colonization, the [00:13:00] unjust imprisonment, the torture and the violence that are the foundation of this occupation should be of no concern to Columbia University or to this task force.

If they feel bad about that, that is their problem. This is an illegal occupation. Opposition to it should be considered. A matter of free political speech. Indeed, if anything is genocidal, it's not calls for an uprising against this monstrous regime of control over millions of Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, but rather this regime itself and the latest instantiation of genocide being perpetrated in the Gaza Strip for nearly six months.

The feelings of students, the feelings of students, while a perfectly appropriate pastoral responsibility of universities. is not something that should be allowed to infringe on free speech. Moreover, I would suggest that such concerns, they're important concerns, how people feel. Students should not feel bad when such concerns pale in light of the mass atrocities we are [00:14:00] witnessing daily in Gaza.

The report mentions chance of, quote, death to the Zionist state at demonstrations. Language never authorized by student groups here at Columbia, and to the best of my knowledge, never used at Columbia. This brings us to the core of the problem with this report and the task force itself. Is the problem anti Semitism?

In other words, the age old hatred of Jews as Jews and its more recent manifestations. This is a definition that the task force members cannot bring themselves to offer. There, I have done it for them. That's what anti Semitism is. Is the problem anti Semitism? Or is it opposition to the policies and practices and ideology of a specific nation state?

The indecent conflation of these two entirely different phenomena has become an art form in the hands of those whose arguments to defend this state's practice have become utterly threadbare. They have nothing to say. How do you defend administered detention, a colonial practice the British started [00:15:00] with and the Israeli state has used ever since its inception?

How do you defend torture? How do you defend genocide? You call the people who criticize it anti Semites. To show how insidious and how dishonest this conflation is, imagine for a moment that those who see themselves as being on a divinely mandated mission to colonize and seize Palestine from its indigenous population, or Danes, who happen to be Christian, would resistance to their endeavor be anti Christian.

Because I don't have unlimited time before concluding, I want to address, uh, recommendations that this task force has put forward that have apparently already been considered, and in some cases I think adopted, uh, for regulating

the timing and location of protests. I will repeat, this attempt to regulate these protests is a violation of a time honored tradition at Columbia.

Were it not for student protests, the struggles for civil rights, against the wars in Vietnam and Iraq, and for abortion rights, gay rights, [00:16:00] and many other freedoms, would have been hobbled or extinguished in the United States. This country is a better place for these protests, which small minded defenders of the status quo, of an unjust status quo, have always sought to stifle.

This tradition of protest is one of the greatest distinguishing marks in the history of an institution whose history is otherwise blemished by its links historically to slavery, to the opium trade, to racial discrimination, and to systemic anti Semitism. Protest is one of the bright lights in the history of Colombia.

It is obscene for this task force and this administration to try to limit public protest by students and places them, and places this administration in opposition to the tide of history. external and internal forces that are pressuring them might want. The protest suggests, sorry, the report suggests that protests interfere with the rights of others to speak, teach, research, and learn.

While this may be true of actions inside campus buildings or classrooms, of which there have been very, [00:17:00] very few, perhaps two in my experience over six months, it is complete nonsense in general. It conflates what we are all expected to do in the classroom. Where civility and consideration and collegiality are absolute necessities.

And what happens in the public space. These are two completely different things. You put them together, and of course you're going to restrict what can be done in the public space. By pretending that we have to be civil and collegial when genocide is taking place. When we're exercising our free speech rights.

In public, it's an absurd conflation. In public, all have rights. Whether they're supporters of Israel, or whether they're citizens. very much. And at 8 billion dollars of whose taxes annually go in weapons used to exterminate so far over 33, 000 people, 13, 000 of them children, and to starve and displace nearly 2 million people, 2 million survivors so far of this campaign.

The report's suggestion of limiting protests to designated areas, which it calls demonstration areas. led a [00:18:00] graduate student of mine to ask, Is this like the calm down corner at my nephew's daycare? This represents a demeaning infantilization of students who are motivated by burning moral

passion at perhaps the worst genocide of their lifetimes and the only one they have ever watched in real time on social media for almost six months.

Now they may be right, they may be wrong. Demonstrators on the other side may be right, may be wrong. They may be animated by burning passion. Moral passion, too. But in both cases, to infantilize them in this way is absurd and is wrong. My last words have to do with yet another abhorrent recommendation of this report.

To crack down on faculty members for speaking at student demos. Oops. Or otherwise, supporting students who have been completely unsupported by this hostile and biased university administration. Not content with arrogating to itself. The State Department is the only state in the world to have the right to [00:19:00] regulate speech and protest.

The task force outrageously sees fit to tell faculty what they can and cannot do, infringing on their freedom of speech and action. They suggest that department chairs and deans enforce these rules, turning them into cops regulating our behavior and our infringement of rules made up on the spot in an ad hoc manner in violation of established university procedures and in response to pressures exerted bi powerful external forces.

This is not yet a society, or a university, where all our freedoms can be casually infringed at the whim of these forces. We still have the power to resist, whether as students, as faculty, as alumni, or as parents. However, the report of this task force, and the administration that chose it, inspired it, and has already taken some of its recommendations into account, are taking us down that dark path.

We cannot allow them to succeed. Thank you.

Thank you so much everyone, uh, for inviting me to form part of [00:20:00] this fascinating panel. I, um, I'm really honored to be among incredible, uh, scholars and leaders like, uh, uh, Rashid, um, Mahmood, and Catherine. Catherine, in fact, served as my, uh, legal advisor when I was a student here. I got into trouble for protesting white supremacists who were brought onto campus during the Trump administration.

And Katherine, Rashid, Mahmood have all signed a very wonderful letter of support in my defense together with a hundred other faculties since my removal from teaching at the school of public health because I introduced the idea of the settler colonial determinants of health into a lecture. And so I'm very grateful to have been invited Uh, to this panel today.

Uh, the title of my talk is Columbia's Task Force on Antisemitism, An Analysis of the First Antisemitism Report in Three Acts. Act [00:21:00] One. This is why we dance. The first report of Columbia's Antisemitism Task Force identifies three fundamental principles. Namely, free speech. free speech responsibilities and anti discrimination.

And this paper, this presentation examines one of the task force's fundamental principles, namely free speech responsibilities, which proposes, as Rashid mentioned, limitations on when, how, and where free speech can occur. These limitations are also referred to as time, place, and manner restrictions, and include the creation of these demonstration areas, or the naughty corner as Rashid calls it, that will be accessible, according to the report, at designated times, inviting members of the community to [00:22:00] reserve these spaces.

These restrictions on demonstrations proposed by the task force will be examined through the lens of international human rights law principles on free speech, which the anti Semitism report ignores entirely. And at the same time, I recognize that there are some inherent limitations of the international legal framework itself, as well as the liberal ideology itself.

underpinning the concept of free speech. So acknowledging these impediments, I therefore seek to deliberately interrupt this legal analysis of Colombia's anti Semitism task force report by abruptly inserting voices of Palestinian scholars, artists, and poets into this analysis. According to the task force report, [00:23:00] the right place for demonstrations is in outdoor spaces like the south lawn and the sundial.

So by inserting Palestinian voices into this analysis at the wrong place and at the wrong time, this methodological device aims to metaphorically violate. The time, place, and manner restrictions that the Task Force's report attempts to impose. This disturbance of the prosaic antisemitism report can be seen as an act of epistemic disobedience, modestly contributing to what Frantz Fanon calls a program of complete disorder.

This is why we dance. If I speak, I'm dangerous. You open your mouth, raise your eyebrows, you point your fingers. This is why we dance. [00:24:00] Because screaming isn't free. Please tell me, why is anger, even anger, a luxury to me? Muhammad Al Kurd, this is why we dance. Act two, against the loveless world.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Free Speech has noted that any restrictions imposed on freedom of speech must be necessary and proportionate

to the aim pursued and warns against the practice whereby authorities allow a demonstration to take place but only in the outskirts of the city or in a specific square where its impact will be muted.

In Sasko versus Hungary, the European Court of Human Rights examined time, place, and manner restrictions imposed by the authoritarian Hungarian government and concluded that the measure was not necessary in a [00:25:00] democratic society. Similarly, the Inter American Court, uh, sorry, Inter American Commission on Human Rights has emphasized that If a protest or demonstration seeks to deliver a specific message to a person, group, or organization, it should, in principle, be able to be held at a place and time that allows for the visual and audio dissemination of the message, in accordance with a principle known as sight and sound.

So it is therefore evident that the task force on antisemitism advocates for free speech responsibilities that fundamentally limits the right to free speech through its time, place, and manner restrictions. If power oppresses and controls and manipulates and everything that resists it is not morally equal to power, is not neutrally and simply a weapon against that power, Resistance [00:26:00] cannot equally be an adversarial alternative to power and a dependent function of it.

Edward Said, Travelling Theory. But these restrictions imposed by the antisemitism task force are not only designed to limit free speech, they are also constructed to make it easier to prosecute protestors. The anti semitism task force notes, and I quote, sorting out facts related to protest rule violations is not always easy.

In contrast, the question of where a protest was and whether someone actually attended it is easier to answer if protests are restricted to specific times and places. In other words, by forcing protesters into a specific place at a specific time, the anti Semitism task force recognizes [00:27:00] that rules violations can be more easily and efficiently enforced.

So these time, place, and manner restrictions are therefore driven by an ideology of efficiency, which seeks to criminalize and sanction protestors. The anti semitism task force thereby effectively creates a hierarchy that places the criminalization of protest above the right to protest. She seemed disappointed, but moved on to ask how I became involved in the resistance.

She called it terrorism. She asked about my prison cell, which she called a nice room. Then qualified, but I know it's still a prison. Susan Abuhawa against the loveless world. Act 3, breaking news. The task force on antisemitism's failure to

uphold international legal [00:28:00] principles on free speech reflects a particular disregard for international law.

that is also evident in Israel's genocidal campaign against Palestinians. This common thread that connects Israel's impunity and the task force's restrictions unveils the emptiness of the international legal framework and its principle of free speech. It is therefore unsurprising that the Zionist organization stand with us.

Which describes itself as an organization and I quote inspired by our love for Israel, love of Israel, our belief that education is the road to peace and our commitment to stand up for Israel and the Jewish people has fully endorsed the anti Semitism task forces recommendations. The title of the endorsement reads as follows stand with us urges universities nationwide.

to adopt [00:29:00] best practices for anti Israel protests on campus. The anti Semitism task force recommendations are therefore specifically designed to prevent and control pro Palestinian protests. The recommendations demonstrate greater concern for regulating the timing and location of protests than the lives of Palestinians.

And so the anti Semitism task force argues for content and viewpoint neutral time, place, and manner restrictions. But there is nothing neutral about this place. At Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health, I teach on stolen land, stolen through a genocide of indigenous Lenape people, at a school named after me.

After a wealthy white man with no discernible connection to public health, in a building named in honor of another white man who made his fortune in the pharma industry, [00:30:00] in a classroom that takes its name from a bank implicated in the 2008 financial crisis. There is nothing neutral about this place.

Our School of Public Health is a place for all. where discussions of Israeli settler colonialism and the bombing of al Shifa hospital are prohibited, where professors like me who have lived through South African apartheid are prevented from teaching about the impact of Israeli apartheid on the health of Palestinians.

So these time, place, and manner restrictions are therefore not only limited to protest outside the classroom, They have already shaped what can and cannot be said inside the classroom. The Anti Semitism Task Force fails to recognize that this place is more than a mere place that speech occurs. It is the speech.

And so the [00:31:00] Task Force's attempts to separate the substance of the speech from the site on which the speech occurs ignores the tangible connections between place and the words we speak in that place. The recommendations are nothing more than a thinly veiled attempt to prevent those of us committed to Palestinian liberation from exercising our right to free speech and academic freedom.

But these recommendations should not be viewed in isolation from broader systems of white supremacy. Capitalism and patriarchy. The recommendations, in fact, reflect these systems of power which are inscribed into Columbia's colonial epistemic architecture. Dear victim of capitalism, of oppression, of police brutality, of racism, of misogyny, of America, of colonialism, of racism, you [00:32:00] Are more than the shadow I write you through.

They are sunflowers sprouting from your hands. Noor Hindi, Breaking News. Thank you.

It was a great delight to meet you. You were in the rules administration process yourself. Um. Uh, I'm gonna, I just wanted to give an overview of some of my objections or concerns about this report. Um, and we have such, uh, wonderful panelists that I think each of us would have different things to add. My first, um, impression of the report was that it was an indictment of Columbia's existing anti discrimination infrastructure to begin with.

We have an EOAA office. Um, that is charged with, um, investigating, prosecuting, and remedying forms of bias on our campus, including anti Semitic or anti Israeli, um, bias. And so to have to, to have to appoint a new special task force, I think in some ways [00:33:00] funded at a greater level than the EOAA offices itself, speaks to the university's sense of incompetence of that office.

Which I will say I share. Over many years of working with students who have suffered forms of latent discrimination in the classroom, or from, um, from, um, other students. We have a faculty member in the law school, a white guy, who uses the n word in class all the time because he thinks it makes him look cool.

Another white guy tells slavery jokes. Not funny, right? America, you actually know these people. The students have filed formal complaints with the EOA office. Nothing has happened. Nothing has happened. So, um, in a way, the creation of the task force underscores the ineffectiveness of that office and the truth of the office, which is there to cover up the university's liability and reputation as being a place where, um, as the university being a place where there is no bias in [00:34:00] our mix, except in this case.

And so both that office and this task force are really created in function for the purpose of an outside audience. Not for the pedagogical or education benefits of our students or for us for that matter as members of this community. So, second thing I want to say about the report is in some ways it's, it's um, irrelevant.

Time, um, time since October 7th has changed, um, in so many ways. Okay, since, uh, how many years ago was it, October 7th at this point? Um, uh, the question of reforms to the rules of conduct seems almost irrelevant at this point because they're not using the rules of conduct in the same ways that they were before.

Um, and in a sense, so many of the, um, specific and I think, um, sort of naive recommendations of the report, others are more nefarious, seem almost poignant, um, now as compared to the, um, what their intent was there. I think, in, you know, uh, in March. [00:35:00] How is this the case? Well, by and large, the university has shifted out of the rules of, um, of conduct process into CSSI, into the, um, university life process, in a process that is not accountable to the Senate, not accountable to shared governance, entirely under the rubric of low library and administration and the executive, not the shared governance that we have in this university, does not provide students with that opportunity.

Opportunity to have an advisor, in fact bars them from consulting an advisor, let alone bringing one in the room with them, does not have any chance for appeal in the same way, or transparency that we get in the rules process, whatever, its flaws and any process will have flaws. Um, so in a way their focus should be on what's happening in the CSSI process, not the rules administration process.

And, um, uh, in a sense this report signals a victory of the undermining of that process. And the rules administration process. But perhaps even worse, and [00:36:00] in the last week we've seen this in real harsh relief, the university has now hired outside counsel and very aggressive investigators to undertake what was the process that the rules administration process used to undertake, to investigate what happened, who was involved, what was said, did it violate the rules, and what might it look like to prosecute it.

Um, and then set out a very clear process for doing so. Um, these outside investigators are scaring the heck out of our students. Showing up at night, banging on their doors, not identifying themselves. Calling them on their cell phones. And threatening them. Literally threatening them. I spoke to somebody in the library today who said, Oh well that was a mistake, that's why we're following up now.

With letters, which are even more threatening for the students. So in a way, the built in process, even at the rules administration level or CSSI, We'll quickly become irrelevant because we are now outsourcing to the NYPD, FBI, and private investigators what had been an [00:37:00] internal system of self governance around our values, of what does it mean to be a part of this community, not a set of rules enforced by corporate operatives who are being paid to do the university's work, or outside the university's work, they're pressuring the university to do this.

Next thing you know, Um, is that this transition to the Shafik administration, with the change in the provost, the hiring of a new COO, um, the creation of new offices within the library advising her, has mean has meant that the university, for the most part, if not entirely, is being run by non academics.

The Senate has been sidelined from any kind of influence. Um, the general counsel and the trustees basically run this university down. And pressured President Shafiq to do their bit. As much as we had criticisms of Lee Wallinger and I know many of us [00:38:00] did, boy, do I miss him. I miss him. I mean, he was committed to the academy, to the idea of ideas, to the goal of the university and it's an honor.

And I don't hear any of those kind of words coming out of our current administration. We know Shafiq is doing a tour going to each of the schools within the university. She came to the law school two weeks ago and had her nice PowerPoint. She sounded like the new mayor of Indianapolis. It was incredible what the presentation was that she had, that she had with key indicators of success.

I didn't even know this was a thing. K I S's were all that were important on the PowerPoint. The philosophy department, this building, East Asian Studies, what are the key indicators of success? Not a little bit of a law school. She then said, all these new things I want to do, we can pay for them. We can pay for them.

By finding cost efficiencies throughout the university. I mean, [00:39:00] that's what the mayor of Indianapolis does. But that's not how, um, a university president should be. No vision of a university, but particularly this university, in this moment. It was incredibly disappointing and frightening to hear from her.

So, you know, make no mistake, we are not being, this place is not being run by academics anymore. And people who have the capacity, let alone will, you know, To defend the idea of the university, to be in a whole uncomfortable

conversation. Ideas that are frightening. When I was an undergrad here at Barnard, I would walk across College Walk.

Some of you have heard me tell this story. On the left side, the Butler side, there were these huge pictures of women going in to meet writers. Very violent imagery. By the anti porn, Catherine McKinnon. On the other side, the little library side, there were all these pictures of women in slings and SN [00:40:00] outfits and whips and stuff.

And here I am, 18 years old, going, what the heck? They're both calling themselves feminine? I mean, where do I belong? And so I kind of bounced back and forth and listened and, you know, that, I learned as much there as I did in my classes inside the building. And it was violent stuff. But it was how we talked.

It was how we learned. It was how we debated. And the university, most importantly, could hold it. Okay. Next thing. Um, You see in this report a reflection of this fact that we are no longer being led by academics who have a commitment to the university. They have a couple of paragraphs on free speech That look as if they were written by Mackenzie.

Right? That free speech is an important value. Even the language they use doesn't resonate in an academic context. Instead they say, um, the frames of free speech are about protecting the causes we [00:41:00] cherish. Causes we cherish? That's not what we're doing here. We're not cherished. Right? We're debating them.

We feel deeply about them. We have an analysis of them. We don't cherish them, so the values of the academy are not in evidence in the way they talk about free speech. I want to echo what Rashid said about how the report is also ahistorical. It doesn't acknowledge the role, fundamental role of protest on this campus.

The fact of that protest and the form of that protest. Since 68, well even before 68, but Starting in 68 and since then, really every couple of years, there were radical protest movements on this campus. A shantytown was built on the steps of Lowe Library to, as part of the, um, Apartheid Divest Program, uh, uh, politics, um, around South African Apartheid.

Buildings were occupied by students for weeks. They kidnapped the dean of the college and [00:42:00] held him in the building. Jack Greenberg! Jack Greenberg! Right. They occupied low library itself over divesting from fossil

fuels. Did those students get expelled? Expelled from the school? Did they get expelled? Did they get suspended?

Did they have to write some stupid essay? Did they have to do community service? No. The amount of punishment that they got was so much less than what our students are getting now for things that are, I mean, the folks in the seventies and eighties. would have thought that what we're doing now is wimpy.

Right? Not really worth it. So, what happened after 68 is, uh, because the university so overreached in its discipline of the students who occupied the campus in protest both of the Vietnam War and of the apartheid gym that they were going to build, um, um, uh, bringing in the NYPD to remove the students, is the community came together and said never again.

We're going to reform our rules. We're going to [00:43:00] create a university Senate from which, through which we will have shared governance, those rules and their enforcement will be accountable to the Senate, to the community and overseen by the rules committee. And ultimately there will be a hearings before a university judicial board composed of peers, not an outside contractor or law firm.

Um, and what we're seeing in these new proposals is a complete repudiation and rollback of those reforms. Make no mistake, that's exactly what's happening, and they're going to take the Senate down with them. They're sidelining the rules by going through CSSI, and they're sidelining the Senate by pursuing a process that has no engagement with the Senate at all.

The Senate is too close in dealing with this. So the, the, the values of shared governments, of accountability, of, uh, uh, transparency. Transparency are all being violated in ways that are going back worse from before 68 than what the university did [00:44:00] in 68. So now it seems, because things are so bad, the reforms suggested in the report are, as many have said, there's no protests in front of buildings.

We've had protests in front of buildings for years. The whole point is the place. It's as expressive as the content of what is being said. The speech zones, time limits, no sound enhancement. There is no history in this school of having pre approval for a protest. It kind of violates the idea of a protest.

No hanging of banners. What they did in Barnard about the flag thing, of making up a rule, prosecuting the students based on an ordinance that did not exist, and then coming up with a new ordinance, a new rule, And then applying

it retroactively against those students and not the students who had Israeli flags is shocking.

Um, uh, the use of public safety rather than civilian delegates. I will admit [00:45:00] that a lot of our administrators find it odious to have to be part of the enforcement of these rules. But the solution isn't to bring the cops in. It's to rethink the rules. Um, and then of course as, uh, as, um, it's already been stated the pressure of faculty.

Participating in these protests is also a problem. Okay, last thing I want to say is that the evidence of the incompetence of the members of this task force is no more clear than in their analysis of what the standard, what counts as discriminatory speech or conduct is. This is an easy thing to look up.

I brought it with me. I have it here somewhere. Um, uh, the, the Department of, um, Education's Office of Civil Rights issues Dear Colleague letters occasionally to universities, this one's from November, um, telling universities what is the standard of what is, violates Title VI, that is racist or anti, um, national origin.

And it is not, as the report [00:46:00] says, that the person who is the complainant, the person in the protected class feels it gets discriminated against. That is discriminatory. Experiences that is discriminatory. That's part of it, but that doesn't end it. The standard is that it has to be based on a totality of circumstances and is subjectively and objectively offensive.

And is so severe or pervasive that it limits or denies a person's ability to participate in or benefit from the recipient's educational program or activity. What they are urging is that we lower the bar. So long. that if I felt bad or uncomfortable by what you said, it is, that depends on the discussion of whether it is discriminatory.

And that's not what the law protects. They should know that. It's not that hard to look up. So, um, many other things to say, but let me stop there and just say I'm so thrilled that you're [00:47:00] here.

Even

though the anti Semitism task force was mandated to focus on Jewish members of the Columbia community, its report unilaterally expanded the focus to Jews and Israelis. That's on page three. And then prioritized Israelis before Jews, a

page later. Even without acknowledging this shift or offering it. In these remarks, I seek to understand why.

To understand the consequences of this unilateral shift, and ask what it would take to refocus the task force back to Jewish members of the Columbia community. The primary mandate of the task force was to, quote, engage in a serious and honest assessment. of the sources and extent of the discomfort [00:48:00] that many Jewish members of the Palamite community feel.

I could find only one statement pertaining to its core mandate in the report of the task force. Quote, Some Jewish students have felt isolated in supporting Israel, while others have felt isolated in criticizing Israel. It's a crucial statement. This sentence speaks to a political polarization on campus.

Not between Jewish and non Jewish students, but among Jewish students and also among non Jewish students. In doing so, it illuminates the circumstances under which the task force was appointed and the reasons for its appointment. On April 1, the New York Times published an extended essay by the This is a book by Peter Beinhart, entitled The Great Rupture in American Jewish History.

The essay was republished with the following intro in Quartzsite, [00:49:00] quote, For the last decade or so, an ideological tremor has been unsettling American Jewish life. Since October 7th, it has been an earthquake. The beginning of wisdom is the recognition that there is no single Jewish grievance on this earth.

And that there have been no political consensus in the Jewish community on campus after October 7th. Even if there was one before. To describe growing protests at Columbia as anti Semitism is misleading. The protest points to a growing debate on what constitutes anti Semitism. The problem is political.

It is not a growing order of government. And yet The report of the task force lacks a political analysis and substitutes it with a set of prescriptive rules. So what is antisemitism? The task force has been asked this question time and again, including by faculty [00:50:00] invited to one of its listening sessions.

Unable to come up with an original response, task force co chair Esther Hughes reportedly answered, quote, I know it when I see it. Leading on a well known response from Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, when asked to define pornography. He pressed for a precise answer. Professor Fuchs elaborated that the task force will take a, quote, experientially oriented approach.

Adding, That the task force will, quote, not tell into which of the twenty five definitions of anti Semitism the group would subscribe to. Because, quote, that's not for the purpose, that's not the purpose of what we're doing. The task force seemed to argue that since there was no consensus around what constitutes anti Semitism, it would be best to avoid the question altogether.

Yet the point of setting up a task force was not [00:51:00] so Professor Fuchs would recognize anti Semitism when she comes across it, but to empower thousands of people to act on the basis of a clear and generalized understanding of anti Semitism. Because it neither mentions nor discusses anti Semitism, the report of the task force sidesteps the first of the three broad initiatives preceding the minutiae.

is guidelines.

Ever since May 26, 2016, when 31 member states of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, the IHRA, of which the United States is a member, adopted a non legally binding working definition of anti Semitism, equating anti Semitism with criticism of the State of Israel, the debate among their countries.

both among Jews and non Jews, is focused on a key issue, is a defense of the state of Israel [00:52:00] integral to the practice of Judaism. That the task force did not feel it necessary to open a discussion on the definition as the first order of business, suggests that it considered this a settled issue from the time it convened.

If it was wedded to the IHRA definition of antisemitism, equating Jews with Israelis and antisemitism anti Zionism from the outset, the task force was not willing to face it.

Having set aside what was meant to be its primary focus, to engage in a serious and honest assessment of the sources and extent of the discomfort that many Jewish members of the Columbia community feel, the task force set its eyes on the second objective,

This was to focus on rules on demonstrations, a review of university policies, rules, and practices, which it was asked to undertake in consultation with the university senate and other governing bodies. There's no indication in its report that this was done in [00:53:00] consultation with the university senate or any other governing body.

Health Minister talked about it in detail. Careful reading of this report suggests otherwise. The Task Force felt free to ignore the terms of its own appointment and instead set its own rules of engagement. Instead of giving a political analysis of the situation on campus, the Task Force set about prescribing a set of rules, bringing prohibitions to imposed bans, The task force's recommendations reveal its true nature as a law and order force.

It seeks to limit not only what we may say, but also where, when, and how we may say it. It imposes regulations on everything, from specifying demonstration areas to restrictions of sound enhancement and hanging banners. [00:54:00] Excuse me. Is what it terms the speaker's corner approach. To centralize all protests to a few areas and thus to vanish in all other consequences is to turn most of the campus into a public speech journal.

It is not always clear from this report whether the university is best regarded as a community of citizens, with citizen rights, or as a temporary prison. Each of the law and order approach is to put in place multiple restrictions, where there were none before, and to do so in the name of protecting vulnerable groups.

Why are some groups considered protected, but not others? Why are not all students considered a protected group? Every new restriction is heralded as a measure to protect freedom of speech. As we have emphasized, The report claims on page 17, time, place, and manner of descriptions are there to protect speech, not to [00:55:00] suppress it.

In his classical The Totalitarian Power, 1984, George Orwell terms as double speak a language which claims to be enhancing freedom, but in reality empties it of its presence. At other points, as on page 17, The Totalitarian The report wants every Columbia official to take on a police function. Quote, although Columbia officials are supposed to file a report when they witness a good violation, many are not willing.

In this great new world, every Columbia affiliate is asked to behave as an instrument and an enforcer of power. In other words, as an informer. In the words of the task force report on page 13, and I quote, every Columbia official is Unfortunately, some faculty and students have failed to convey this message.

When they speak at unauthorized demonstrations, or when they help sheath the identity of students who are not violating the [00:56:00] university's, who are violating the university's rules, their apparent endorsement of unauthorized protests sends a confusing signal to students. Doublespeak also marked a statement earlier signed individually by students.

Columbia's 18 Dean's on December 20.

These 18 deans began by defending academic freedom as a bedrock principle. The men went on to recommend the defending phrases like from the sea and banished from public discussion in the interest of creating a shared language and preventing the hurt to those who disagree. The task force concluded support with the advice of the university aimed at If the task force

refuses to define anti Semitism, how can affiliates and officials be expected to do so? In his April 1 opinion essay [00:57:00] in the New York Times, Peter Breiner remarked, quote, If you call for equal citizenship in the U. S., you are telling the liberal. But if you call for equal citizenship Israel and Palestine, you are denounced as anti Semitic.

He went on to cite the Senate Majority Leader, Chuck Schumer, who said in his Senate speech on March 14th, that he can, quote, understand the idealism that inspires so many young people in particular to support a one state solution. Surely, it could not have escaped the Senator that it demands for a one state.

Solution is a demand for a country stretching from the river to the sea. And that that country would not be a Jewish state. To conclude, I have two recommendations. One, the task force represents only one tendency, which is why the task force has failed to acknowledge and discuss the complexity of the present political climate.

Which is why [00:58:00] the task force will end up aggravating the situation in the country. Rather than creating the basis for a peaceful and productive, the task force should be reconstituted to be representative, not only of Jews who support Israel, but also of Jews who criticize Israel, and similarly of supporters and critics of Israel in the broader Columbia community.

Secondly, the task force should clarify its central mandate, the current antisemitism, so that at the end of the day,

Thank you all for your wonderful work. Um, two questions left. I'm coming back, that's all. Yeah. Um, you can't not just come up with rules and subjects, setting subjects and public record restrictions. You can't be divorced from its virtualized history. There's no misstatement that you

were rightly extended after the 2020 market. As far as you're concerned, Justice. [00:59:00] This is more concerning. So far, a picture of a completely different black person If the task force is seemingly created a feelings focused policy

approach that is actively at the expense of genuine safety for black and brown students, what are we to do about how the community is sending to an incredibly harmful and fascistic approach to campus policy?

So your question answers itself. They are taking us in a, in a very

weird direction with this task force, which is just a reflection of Um, and I think that [01:00:00] you pointed out one of the most noxious elements of this, the profiling on a racial or an ethnic basis, people wearing hijab, people who are dark skinned, people Also probably people wearing kippahs, people who are otherwise the same as religious Jews.

Um, is, is going to be exacerbated by these reports, divisive, and I think, exactly as you say, overwhelming, um, um, focus. So, uh, I, I think they're creating problems and exac exacerbating serious problems that already exist. I don't know if anybody else wants to add anything. If you both could stand up, that would be great.

Yeah.

Yeah, it's okay. Um, so you mentioned that, uh, they contacted you, uh, to invite you, [01:01:00] uh, to talk to them, the task force, before publishing the matriculant. It didn't reach your mail. I wonder, what about all the other people that did? Yes, a meeting did happen.

I wasn't there because they emailed me. Um, I can't speak for people who were there. Okay. I heard from some of them that it was very unsatisfactory meeting, but I, I wasn't there, and I can't comment on it. All I can say is that when I repeatedly reached out to them to try and meet with them, uh, I was unable to do so.

Not to any point in my career. Beyond that, I can't speak. I was invited. Uh, we have a network called Q Fact. Uh, it is the network of Columbia faculty. On that network, there was a conversation. The co chair, the

co chair did not, [01:02:00] uh, write on the network what the

substance of this conversation was. I would say, okay, you are a task force in anti Semitism. What is anti Semitism? And there was no answer coming.

The faculty member in question is very respectful of James Chambers. Um, and then, well he said, I'm not coming because I'm not living in town anyway. And I

took my own independent judgment. I said, no, it's not. They're not going to tell us what they're about.

Um, in response to Kathleen's fantastic comments, um, David Kramer wrote a beautiful essay and then a pretty good book about bullshit jobs. And, of which many people at this university hold. I'm an alum of AFAM and GS and, but in many respects I also hold one of those jobs. I'm wondering if it would be useful for, uh, faculty, staff, and students to organize [01:03:00] against this administrative creep.

Um, perhaps targeted at Shafiq and this new COO.

Yeah, I guess the question is, what does that organizing look like? And I think there's, between now and, uh, April 18th? 17th. No, but that's the day after. And that, and that is what happens. And I think between now and the 17th, we will be in a state of siege. I think that they are building facts to show that they can then produce at this hearing That they are effectively and aggressively and meaningfully, um, prosecuting students, um, for every possible whiff of something that they decide is anti Semitism.

Or just violations of the rules. Uh, the new COO is not really talking in the language of anti Semitism, he's talking in the language of order. He said the students are out of order. Why not? Right? I mean, if there's anything we try to teach you. And, um, and so they're going to want to show order. And, um, not [01:04:00] the disorder that many of us have.

I think the most interesting thinking happens in the midst of disorder. Um, that we see that's our job. So, um, uh, it's after that point, I think, that we, we regroup. If we still have Shafiq as our president, we're in one place. There's a, I'd say, 50 50 chance we won't. And David Schusser becomes our internal president.

That's, I mean, I'm not being metabolic here. And then we're in a different world. So, you know, I don't know what that looks like. But we, we are great people to sit down and think that stuff through together. Yes? Um, I was, uh, really curious about, um, what some of you guys had said about there not being an an equivalent task force on Islamophobia on campus.

Um, because I was recently at the Barnard Anti Semitism Task Force, um, you know, listening session where they're listening to [01:05:00] students, and Professor Fuchs, uh, said that the reason that there wasn't, uh, an equivalent task

force on Islamophobia is because, uh, professors were asked that they were turned down.

And later remarked to, um, a different student, not me, after the listening session had ended that they were too busy, uh, smoking and drinking red wine, uh, to, uh, to, to do, you know, meaningful work like that. I'm, I'm paraphrasing, um, the, the comments that were made to a different student. But I was wondering, is any of that true?

I was asked to I was asked by, uh, students at Sigma, That's me. Who wrote to me to say, Would you be willing to be on a task force for Islamophobia? And I said yes. Yeah. Um, and just to comment on that, So I was that student. I was, um, the, one of [01:06:00] the vice presidents, uh, Uh, of student affairs. Uh, he reached out to me, Confirming that the university is considering and, um, a task force on Islamophobia, and to send him suggestions of the names of, uh, of such a task force.

And he reached out to me as a representative of Palestinian students on campus. I reached out to a few, um, uh, faculty members. I sent him, I sent him a list of six people, and I kept following up on that. And then, just like, It's like the fact that they want to create one. We requested a task force on anti Palestinian hate, not Islamophobia because what we are facing is in not in any way is Islamophobia.

A lot of us are Christians. A lot of us are actually, uh, just like atheists. Even if we're Muslims, like it's not about that. Jewish as well. So, uh, the fact [01:07:00] that they are trying to paint it as, uh, Um, and we try to convey that, but under no way, they, they are willing to, to say that, yeah, it is anti Palestinianism rather than Islamophobia.

I mean, being anti Israeli is anti Semitic as to being anti Palestinian is homophobic.

The other thing is to the best of my knowledge, uh, I don't recall any official statement I'm talking about Palestine and Palestinians. They mention Gaza in one, I think, or two. Um, there's a lot of mention of Israel and Israelis. The task force is full of Israelis and Israelis. As, as, as, as I think your talk is showing that, they move Israelis in, but that doesn't mean the subject of concern.

Um, but Palestinians and Palestinians. Now talk about Islamophobia, that's easy. But they won't do anything about it.

And that's not the core problem. Though some people have been attacked because they wore hijabs or whatever. [01:08:00] Or because of their dark skin or whatever. Because they were perceived to be. But that's not the problem. There were a lot of things in the report that I noticed that, like, raised my blood pressure.

Like, I remember one part was, like, about sound amplification. Application. And I was like, what does sound application have to do with incident? So like, even if you're just saying that the protestor incident, what like, does that have to do with it? And then another thing was like them wanting to identify mass protesters when they know that people are wearing masks.

Because there are people that actually one who's on their task force, um, is reporting and doxing people and that leads to death threats. So that was annoying. Anyway, my question is, one of, one of the details though was like, do you remember the part where they said. I just saw a lot of, like, criticism of the Israeli military, um, leads to, like, bias against Israelis because service is mandatory and that means anti semitism.

I just thought that that was, like, a [01:09:00] big stretch and I was wondering what your takes on that were. That was about me? Yeah. That was about me. I was on, I went on Democracy Now! after the Skunk Thing and I described how, um, It's a challenge for people coming out of military service in Israel when they are taught to, that Palestinians are the enemy and want to kill them.

To then come to our campus right away and be in the company of people who are either Palestinian or standing up for Palestinians. And that transition can be rough for some people. And, and we have a history of that on this campus. Since I've been here 25, 20 years, we've had a number of incidents where Palestinians For, for Israeli students who have just come out of IDF service, don't make that transition easily.

It's kind of predictable. And it's not to say all Israelis are terrible people, or all people who serve in the military are. But there is a indoctrination that is part of serving in the military that is hard to just shed. And that has turned [01:10:00] into, um, saying that all Israelis are terrible because they're in the military and I want to ban all Israelis.

Say something about this sound. And a paragraph about how nasty it is that students who are demonstrating are using megaphones. Well, I, you know, if I were the kind of snowflake in this lot, I would be furious at the sound amplification of the guides of the Columbia University tours who disturb my

classroom tranquility and my personal tranquility in my office by hollering about what happens to undergraduates when they go to college.

I mean, seriously, really, this is an infringement on people's ability to study. To have a protest a block away or a half a block away, I'm fine. I mean, the sirens don't bother me. I do a lot of interviews. And the sound engineers are wincing at the number of sirens on Amsterdam. My office is on Amsterdam.

Tough luck, folks. [01:11:00] People make noise in a front. Thank you. It is, it is, it is symptomatic of the kind of profound flaws in this report. That they would even deign to mention something like that. Frankly, it's imbecile. Yeah. Um, do you feel like the, um, role of the university or the perception of the role of the university has changed?

I feel like when I was hearing criticisms of, or thoughts from the, um, Um, they were like, oh, universities don't owe anything to their students. Um, it's, you know, an institution, um, at the end of the day. But, do you, is that the threat then? That like, we as students are too powerful, we're challenging the status quo too much and that's what they're scared of?

Or do you think it is the role of the university to police, kind I have long held the view that Columbia University is a real [01:12:00] estate holding company that teaches classes in the side hustle. And that is, yes, and that is not how I felt when I was an undergrad or when I first came here. It is, it has changed, and I think this is not unique to Columbia.

Large universities are businesses, and it's not a surprise that the COO is a guy who ran Columbia. You know, as an oper uh, uh, executive of businesses and, and ran part of New York City's government. You run big things, this is, this is the same here. Those skills translate. And, um, we haven't, all of us, adequately resisted that.

And it's not for lack of effort for many of us. But I think having somebody who has a very World Bank mentality as our new president is, It's just the continuation of that, um, and the power of our board of trustees, who are hedge fund guys and real [01:13:00] estate magnates, um, and see this as a place in which they invest, not a place that invested in them when they were students, is, um, I think just part of that larger problem.

I want to just say something, um, in a conversation with a This is a senior administrator. A contentious conversation, with a senior administrator a couple of months ago. This person said to me that they were under enormous pressure

and mentioned not just trustees and donors, but also parents, uh, families in the rules of students and alumni.

And my advice to any of you who feel strongly about this is to talk to your parents and your students and let them raise hell with the administration. Because I think we have actually a much larger part of the student body Sympathetic to rights to Palestinians than otherwise. And if all your parents, I don't know if you agree with your parents, but if they do, or if they feel that your safety and your [01:14:00] rights are being infringed by the actions of the university, you should have them raise a plus.

I'm sure parents on the other side, that's right. We are raising a plus. Similarly, if you have elder siblings, if yourself are alumni, you should tell them, I'm an alumnus, and I feel X, Y, and Z. Uh, whatever else you say to the business offices. But, they are clearly getting a lot of money, not just from the hedge fund owners and the, and the, and the real estate magnates who are on the board of trustees or who are big donors to, for example, the, uh, the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Eurostar.

Big donors behind that, who are generally the board of trustees. For now. Well, actually it's frozen. For reasons we can talk about later. The point is, there are means of, there are means of pressure. Like the parents, like alumni. Um, who, and, and, this is a campus which voted for divestment years ago.

Everybody who voted in favor by an overwhelming majority of Barnard and Columbia is now an [01:15:00] alumnus or an alumni. They should raise their voices and tell the university exactly what they think. Um, as should, in my view. Um,

I just first want to for this panel, and thank you for reminding me that I work with some brilliant, committed people. Thank you. Because I'm speaking to you today. In line with the way the questions have been going, I'm wondering if you could just say more explicitly how this report is indicative of these restructuring efforts within the university.

And so, um, I'm going to be talking about the expansion of the university, right? The expansion of the administration and the contraction of the instructional units. So Mahmoudi worked in MESAS, I work in CSER. These are not popular spaces for administrators and I take some pride in that. But it also means there are resource issues, there are concerns for students, all of these things.

So can you talk about the kinds of language and, and kind of, um, [01:16:00] intellectual sabotage that's being enacted? By this task force that then is meeting this contraction in the framework of right, diverse thought for the university. How much time do you have? I'd like to, uh, say one thing. And, and, and, and to redirect the conversation from the university administration to the task force.

Because the task force goes It transgresses the terms set out for it by the university administration. The terms are much better. The task force is a problem. Is a, is a, is a, is a real problem. And, and I think we, we, we need to point out that this, this is a task force which doesn't understand the university as a [01:17:00] university.

It understands this as a place which contains inhabitants who are mostly students and who are out of order. The name to be brought back into order. This task force is not appropriate at all for this university. This task force has an ideological agenda in a context in which there is a growing ideological and political struggle about this world, about Israel, about Judaism.

Jewish members of the Jewish community. of this university are deeply involved. What is a task force with a single minded pursuit of a single agenda? What is it doing? Why is it there? We should ask, there should be a vote of no confidence in the task force. There should be a call for dismantling the task force and reconstituting the task force, [01:18:00] not by appointments from above, but by votes.

recognizing different constituencies, each of which puts a representative on the task force, and then let this task force convene public discussion.

Can't hear you. Sorry. You spoke, um, now, um, over this wall. We

had, I had many, many students who were accepted who were asking me if they will be safe, if they're propelled, and what to do. They were asking me, how are the DOCS students, what happens, like, do I have job prospects, like, things like this. Um, I obviously, Hillary Clinton was nearby, and the Dean was nearby.

They asked me about the Dean and her background, her resume, and how that influences our safety on campus. I am a student who was harassed and followed last [01:19:00] semester, and it was very difficult. Um, and my colleagues at C5 Missions have been doxed, and we're telling students, uh, this is a great place if you don't stand up for yourself, just move on.

Just keep your head down, and I really just couldn't do that either. Uh, but we were all trying to be as honest as possible without, uh, sabotaging our jobs for grocery purposes. Um, but I, I focused more on the fact that we have you as faculty, that Edward Sainz is one's faculty, that we have the Center for Palestinian Studies and things like that.

How, uh, some of them actually did ask about this. The report and um, said, uh, is there something we're missing about what they mean by antisemitism? Because I'm not antisemitic, but I'm just worried. Um, and is there something that, going forward, I said I would have a better answer later. Um, for something, [01:20:00] is there something that I could or should say to new incoming students who are afraid already and.

We're happy to know that Edward Zay used to teach here, and so that means that they're not inherently, uh, you know, hypocritical by, by going here, by choosing this school. If he went here and he had to deal with these two, how, how should, how could I navigate, how can me and my colleagues navigate that conversation without feeling like silence?

Are there any other questions? Gosh, uh. I actually, uh, my, my sense of humor.

I've been teaching at the School of Public Health for the last three years, and I'm noticing a radical shift among the student cohort. Um, I do this exercise with students every year where we talk about Martin Luther King Jr. 's letter from a Birmingham City jail, non violent direct action, and then we also discuss Frantz Fanon's concerning violence and his [01:21:00] argument that, um, violence is in some ways a precursor to decolonizing.

And when I ask students to identify with these particular ideas, increasingly I'm seeing a shift far more toward Frenonian principles of engaging in violence, rather than notions of non violence as strictly applied by MLK. And I suspect this is symptomatic of a shift that's happening, um, at Columbia and Montgomery.

Students, as Catherine has noted in her wonderful Nation article, have been at the center of actually shaping, uh, the intellectual architecture of the space. So I would encourage more of those students, in fact, to enter the spaces, because just your presence here alone is a signal, is a symbol, is meaningful, um, to helping to reshape the understanding of architecture.

But I recognize this as a, as a particularly difficult, [01:22:00] um, equation. And, and I, I get the same sort of e mails and I have to reach out to students who

I join in my own school of public health. And, you know, I can't say to them, actually I will not be teaching here for much longer because I'm being, um, I'm being prevented from teaching my classes.

Uh, and so I want to encourage the students to come this, you know, irrespective of whether I'm here or not. I don't think that's. I think students are going to be playing a fundamental role in reshaping the space. And so we want to encourage more students who think the way that many of you do to come to this space.

I'd like to add something. Um, in the 60s, during the mobilization against the war in Vietnam, there was an institution which developed and became durable. The

teaching for any number of people.

Suddenly, the focus of education shifted from within the classroom to outside the classroom. And it was shaped by the [01:23:00] participants themselves. Who defined what was important to them. And it brought in faculty members, it brought in others from the community. There was a lively exchange of views. Something to learn there.

It was, it's, it's very important. Maybe after April 17th, when Lisa is off this place, kind of, or at least it's managed out. Um, but, because I realize now that it's not easy to, I mean, how many attempts did we have to make to get this room? Couldn't get a room. Um, and, and, and we kept on asking, Who is it? I said, a faculty committee.

They said, what is it about? I said, it's a discussion about the anti Semitism. Task Force.

Good. You know, important scholars here. Believe me, [01:24:00] you're gonna face the same kind of issues every morning. This is a generational issue that is not going to be resolved soon. You want to go to SAIS, you want to go to what used to be called the Woodrow Wilson School, you want to go to the Kennedy School, you're going to face the same issues.

And you probably will have a very large number of students just like you who have the same concerns. And there is strength in numbers. And the second thing is, um, the fact that, that this university is in the middle of Uh, it's something that probably would seriously concern an undergraduate who's here for four years or an MA student here for two years.

Um, but this is going to go on for a while. This is not going to change. I mean, if you, if you understand the relationship between what happens in Palestine and the United States over generations, [01:25:00] what happens here, it's fun to not hear being United States. And we're all in this for the long haul.

Whichever, however you see it. So it's not going to go away, wherever you see it. You should use that. It ain't going to go away. And it's not going to be better at Harvard or Penn or anywhere else. But, and there's strength in numbers. Yeah. I'd like to know your assessment about how this report is alluding to the introduction of the IHRA report.

Definition of antisemitism, which effectively equates Judaism with Zionism. Is this something that could happen? Well, I mean, look, they, they don't mention the IHRA definition, but they use it. All they know about it. And, you know, the IHRA definition does say that, [01:26:00] that it is not a legal definition. It cannot be used to criminalize unless particular acts are defined as crimes under existing law.

So, there's that distance between it and, and, and what could be much worse. But yes, we should assume that that's what they want. The questions. First question, and still start with a question that is nice.

And it bothers me because your answers was that actually there are many incidents throughout the years. And I wasn't aware of them. So I wonder if this is something that you can share. That people who served in the Army came to campus and had problems here. Because I also teach some students that also went to the U.

S. Army and come here after they served. I'm sure they had a hard time, so I would like to know if there were incidents before, if there are any examples that you can give us, I'll appreciate that. [01:27:00] So this was my first question. Should I ask the second one or the first one? The second question that they have is, I wonder where all of you see this going on.

I hear all the questions, I hear everything that you have to say, and I feel a lot of pain. for everyone. And what I don't see on campus, and this is coming back to my first question, asking you if they approached you, if they wanted to talk to you, right? I see a lot of things going on in one side, and other things going on in the other side, and maybe there are things that everyone feels the same, but because it's going that way, I don't see communication.

And we're an academic institution. And I would have loved to see a sequel to this course here, especially when there are so many students here. And as faculty, I feel like we should be role models for the [01:28:00] students. And we cannot tell them, like, you should have, like, uncomfortable conversation. This is, like, bystanders from a faculty point of view.

And I just don't see it at the faculty level, and it pains me. Can I answer the second part? I think that there should be a distinction. There is a distinction. And I've tried to mention it in my talk. Between what we as faculty do in the classroom. And with our students as advisors. Where I agree with you there should be civility and dialogue and collegiality.

And an understanding of, you know, different viewpoints. And what we do as political actors in the public space. I am not constrained by the fact that I am a faculty member at Columbia University. And because some of my students may be sensitive, they hear me say in the public space, or say on television, or write in an article, that what's happening in Palestine is genocide.

Just because I'm a faculty member, and I will sit down and listen to, and talk to, and appreciate the views of a student, [01:29:00] whatever their point of view is, in the classroom, or as an, as an advisor in my office hours. I am absolutely not obliged to muzzle myself, and Fail to object to what I see as a moral issue.

And I wouldn't expect any faculty member to do that. I mean, we are human beings and citizens at the same time as we are faculty members that have a Baal and a pedagogical duty. So, and I think the conflation of those two things is illeg, I'm sorry. And that they try and do that. They try and do that in this report, and the university has tried to do it again and again.

Nobody that I know has been uncivil, unco or whatever. In the classroom. Maybe some people have, but I've not been able to. When I start my course on common Middle East history, I tell students I hope you expect to hear uncomfortable ideas about religion, Islam, about genocide, I'm actually talking about the Armenian Genocide, and about Palestine and Israel.

And if you really expect to leave here with these [01:30:00] so called facts and whatever beliefs you came here tell hazarati instead of wasting money on new ones and go out the same way you came You should be challenged. In fact, the university's rules tell us that we're supposed to be challenging students.

Obviously in a civil, in a collegial, and in a pastoral, if you want, manner. But our job here is to try and expand the boundaries of how people understand

things. And we are supposed to be experts in our fields. So if somebody tells me, well I know that X, that the sun is black and the moon is green. I'm terribly sorry, I'm an astronomer, the sun is not black and the moon is not green.

And I'm here to tell you as an astronomer that that's not the case. You can go away with that view if you want, and I'm not going to insult you because you hold a view, which is in this case unscientific, but it's our job to do our job. I'm a professor of Middle East history. Half of the stuff that some students believe may be wrong.

And I would just tell them what I think I'll give them a variety of views, tell them what I think is the best sense of how to understand and [01:31:00] analyze and criticize a bunch of ideas. But that's the limit of my responsibility. It's not to cater to false consciousness. If that's what is expected of us, then, you know, we're operating in the, in the, in the animal farm, 1984 world.

Sorry, I went on too long. There's another question. Yeah, there are many incidents of spectators reported on them. They're, you just Google, Columbia, um, IDF, uh, attack, students. They're there. I sent a letter to the, to Haaretz. There was a press that ran an article that did this framing of me saying I hate Israelis and they should be on our campus, which I did not say.

I cited all of those. When they were beginning to explore this joint degree program between, um, General Studies and the Tel Aviv University, the Palestinian and Arab students here put together a spreadsheet of the number of times that there have been incidences on campus of, um, attacks against our students from people who just come out of [01:32:00] the IEF.

And we gave that to President Bollinger and said, Look, this is just something to think about in terms of that transition. I'm not, I don't want to say the transition out of other military services is also difficult, but in this moment, I think it's particularly difficult, and if it was, and if we cared about our students, we would anticipate that this would be something that we would have as part of that transition for those students coming onto our campus.

Um, for the sake of the Israeli students as much as for the sake of all of us. So, there are many documented incidents, and I don't, uh, and then with respect to what's going on in the classroom, I don't, you say you don't see it, I don't know who you are, I don't know what you see, but this semester I took on a new course for which I'm getting no credit.

Um, other than, you know, spiritual credit. A reading group on modern history, modern Palestine, and there are Zionist students in there, there are radical Palestinian solidarity students, It is a community of us just [01:33:00] reading Rashid's work, other people's work, and reading together. Precisely because it's so, things are so high polarized elsewhere.

And it's, I don't know, some of them are here. I think it's working pretty well. There's a hand in the back. I just have a question. I know we've had a lot of fun. I was hoping one of the sound application people would probably criminalize our tour guides here. Um, Um, but of course there are some limits, uh, and I wonder how you would frame that, I mean the issue of, you know, demonstrations in front of Planned Parenthood clinics, clinics from all the way to the Supreme Court, it's, it's something we've wrestled with a lot in terms of, you know, how do we not constrain free speech, not, uh, limit things to like a speaker's quarter like you said, um, but still recognize that people have discomfort confronting difficult issues in public and that ultimately, I mean, it's sort of like this three strikes rule in California, people said it was unconstitutional, it's wrong, it probably was, um, but then what about a hundred strikes?

You know, is it a certain decibel level, uh, beyond which, uh, it's crazy, and below which your freedom of speech is constrained? How [01:34:00] would you structure, uh, the rules that would govern a free but civil discourse? I think that may have violated the sound.

It's really disruptive. I mean, there are existing rules. There are rules already in place. There are rules. I mean, Disruption of the educational space, entering into a classroom, I would argue, would certainly be a limit that should not be breached. And we've justified discipline. But what discipline? I mean, go back to what Catherine said.

About decades and decades of practice under established rules in this university. People got a slap on the wrist. People got some kind of discipline. But nothing like the kind of incredibly rigorous discipline. punishment that students are being threatened with for, uh, the disciplinary infractions. In some cases, rules that they're making up on the spot.

Um, students at Barnard told me that they were told they couldn't hold a demonstration the [01:35:00] following day because of the rules. They were then asking, what are the rules? They were then sent their Google document. That Google document they found out As it, as they read it, was being edited as they read it.

You could see them typing it. You could literally see the cursors moving and them writing out new sentences. So, we are, you are violating rules which, in which, whereby we are trying to prevent you from doing anything we don't want you to do. Those aren't rules. That's not a rule. A rule is an extortion.

And so that's the kind of thing I'm talking about. I would imagine taking a megaphone and going up to the window of a classroom and disrupting it would, would fit within a violation of existing rules. And would be subject to dismissal. But somebody out in the middle of the campus, uh, talking about a free Palestine or Hamas terrorist or whatever they may be talking about, I do not understand how that can be seen as interfering with a person's ability to study.

It may be irritating, but there are a lot of other things that are, sound wise, a lot more irritating than being able to decide. So I don't think, I don't think this is actually that [01:36:00] hard of a thing to have to There were student leaders in terms of language for hosting events relating to Palestine. Um, because there's been a lot of hurdles and obviously safety concerns from like, you know, executive club members, so I was wondering if you had any, you know, advice on that because not only are we being, like, censored in what we speak about and talk about in the classrooms, it's also the outside events too, like, so.

There's a pre April 17th answer and a post April 17th answer, I think. I mean, I, I kind of doesn't, I think it almost doesn't matter what language you use. That's sort of besides the point now. Um, I, if I could offer any unsolicited advice for free, which never usually is good advice, but it's just cool it between now and April 17th.

Um, in terms of doing things that directly violate the [01:37:00] rules. You know, having events that you don't go through the events process, um, that sort of thing. Where it's just easy picking for them to, to hit you with rules violations or whatever this stuff is that they're making up on the spot. And I, I don't, I mean it pains me to, to, to give that advice, but they're, they are going to be brutal.

There are students that are going to be expelled in the next week or so. for sure. They need to have some scouts. They have a congressional committee. They have a ravening press out there. I mean type in a few keywords and you're going to see a half dozen online and print organs are howling for you. They have a lawsuit.

I mean, there's a lawsuit on the other side too, Wait a minute, I'm involved in that one. And they have trustees telling them, we will not fund the renovation of

this building unless you do something. And something, the scouts, they want proof [01:38:00] that they're cracking down on whatever it is that these people are bothering.

Certainly, student activity is at the core of what they're bothering. These are very powerful forces. I'm not, I'm entirely unsympathetic to the entire administration, but they are under colossal pressures from a multiplicity of forces, political, media, uh, big, big money, and their own trustees. I mean, the people who ultimately determine whether they keep their jobs or not.

So whether you sympathize with them or not, that's the political situation that we're all operating through. That's reality. The commanding heights of the economy of this country, the commanding heights of our political The commanding heights of the media, the commanding heights of private institutions like private universities, are controlled by rich old people who have very set views about this topic.

And they are putting enormous pressure on not just this university, every private and every public university, uh, in the country, to crack down on Palestine campaigns. Uh, if you talk to the people at Palestine Legal, [01:39:00] the number of cases they've dealt with is quadrupled. They dealt with a couple hundred a year, they're dealing with about a thousand every couple months.

Well that's all over the country. So it's the same pressures, coming from the same multiple directions. And that's the situation we're in, and, and, and, Catherine is completely right. What is going to happen between now and Virginia Fox's next dance, at the expense of the university, American, woke, American DEI universities, which of course is her real agenda, and Stefanik and the other Republicans on that committee, between now and the 17th, is really important.

I'm not saying don't do or do anything. I'm just telling you. That's the environment in which we're all living. I'm also aware of the time, so I'd like to say one thing. Please. Because this is a I don't think we want to end on a very despairing note. Good luck with that. No, no. The other thing I want to say is that there is another side to the picture.

Yes. And the other side to the Because all these powers you described have existed [01:40:00] since This is, this is infinite time, okay, so far as we can remember, but the other side of the picture are those who have not organized these powers, who come and alter the picture. Once the anti war movement during Vietnam was one such period.

My sense is that this could be another such period. This, look, what is happening here was not born here. It came from outside. Events. They didn't happen inside Columbia campus. They happened outside the campus responded. Not one campus, but many campuses responded to it. So, I have said, keep your hands, don't lose your initiative, Sure, use judgment, as you said, right?

April 16th, 17th, whatever is, is an important day. And keep in mind that we may end up with Shafiq resigning and somebody worse coming in her [01:41:00] place. It is possible because if you read this report, her terms are better than the terms devised by this task force for itself. This is an outright Zionist task force.

Hers is law and order, kind of, you know. But that's what, what I would like to say. I want to echo the sentiment I, I, I feel very inspired by faculty and staff and students who have stood up despite all of the pressure on them, uh, to remain silent. And I think it is the continuation of these protests, of demonstrations, of speaking out is going to ultimately shift the direction of this campus.

And so I want to encourage you to think about doing this and continue doing this. And of course the solidarity that you've created with other [01:42:00] campuses across New York and across the U. S. and across the world has been absolutely inspirational. I talk to people in Gaza, former students of mine, on a regular basis who are now working in hospitals in Gaza.

Medical, former medical students who are now working. And when they hear about what is happening at Columbia, when they see pictures and images of you wearing caprias, standing and protesting, they feel inspired to continue. So you're not only shifting discourse at this institution, you're also serving as an inspiration to those who are at the coalface of this genocidal Israeli campaign.

Thank you all for coming. Thank you so much.