

The monsters are many and strong, but so are we: Anti-genocide protests and the struggle against ideological capture at George Mason University

Timothy A. Gibson, Associate Professor, Department of Communication
Bethany L. Letiecq, Professor, College of Education and Human Development
James H. Finkelstein, Professor Emeritus, Schar School of Policy and Government
George Mason University

In 2024 and 2025, two long-term crises of hegemony in American higher education suddenly fused on the campus of George Mason University to produce two years of intense political struggle. This article examines this period of crisis at GMU through three interlinked stories. First, we detail how the ongoing neoliberalization of GMU—in short, the long-dominant project of running the university “like a business”—was suddenly overlaid with a state and federal campaign to impose on GMU more direct forms of ideological influence and control. The second story describes how, after the launch of Israel’s genocidal invasion of Gaza, a hitherto niche American Zionist movement—namely, the attempt to criminalize pro-Palestinian speech on college campuses—suddenly became central to the subordination of GMU under the Governor’s office and the federal Department of Justice. The final story describes how faculty activists at GMU sought to defend the integrity of GMU against those who would dismantle the university’s independence and its commitment to free speech and open inquiry. The article concludes with a call for all faculty and students to defend the values of academic independence and freedom by multiplying points of political resistance across the American higher education landscape.

Keywords: Academic freedom, Palestine, Faculty advocacy, Antisemitism, Campus protests

Writing from his prison cell, Antonio Gramsci knew better than most that the unravelling of a once-stable hegemonic order is a moment of both profound opportunity and great danger. In these moments, he wrote, “the old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born. Now is the time of monsters.”¹ As it

¹ An earlier English translation of the second part of this quote was “in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear,” *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence &

happens, American universities and colleges are living through such a moment, when once-strong sutures in the dominant ideological fabric have begun to unravel. And just as Gramsci predicted, the monsters in higher education are having a field day.

The current crisis of ideological hegemony in higher education is, of course, the surge of popular support among faculty and students for the human rights and sovereignty of the Palestinian people in response to the Israeli government's military campaign in Gaza—one that we and many other faculty and students consider to be genocide.² As students built “Free Palestine” solidarity encampments, university administrators worked closely with federal and local officials—including especially local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities—to violently repress these protests and punish (or deport) protest leaders. We have seen the fruits of this counterattack across the nation, from Columbia University to UCLA, in a series of coercive administrative decisions, including the suspensions of student leaders, the dismissal of outspoken faculty, the banning of student organizations, and/or simply calling in local police to violently clear protest encampments.

Often, campus officials have justified these coercive reprisals in the name of restoring order and protecting Jewish students and faculty from antisemitic harassment. We want to be clear about where we stand. We oppose antisemitic speech, harassment, and violence with as much fervor as we oppose other forms of discrimination, mistreatment, and harm on campus. We are also deeply troubled by numerous documented cases of antisemitic hate crimes, harassment, graffiti, and vandalism that have been reported both on and off American campuses over the past two years. Put simply, we refuse to treat justice as a zero-sum game. In our view, the challenge that American universities and colleges face today is not to choose between protecting Palestinian rights or fighting antisemitism, but to uphold both with equal urgency, and to ensure that our campuses remain spaces for compassion, open dialogue, free expression, and vigorous dissent.³

With this said, the systematic repression of anti-genocide and pro-Palestinian protests makes it clear that the surge of support among students for Palestinian sovereignty and equal rights has revealed the dramatic unraveling of a once-presumed, hegemonic pro-Zionist, pro-Israeli consensus, at least within the American liberal-left.⁴ The unraveling of this consensus has in turn provoked political actors, especially federal and state officials, to lurch suddenly from manufacturing consent through soft power, to applying

Wishart, 1971), p. 276. The “time of monsters” translation first appeared in Slavoj Žižek, “A Permanent Economic Emergency,” *New Left Review*, no. 64 (July/August 2010), p. 85-95.

² For example, in the past five years, scholars and higher education activists have accelerated their push-back on what a recent documentary has called The Palestine Exception to the protections of academic freedom and campus free speech. See <https://palestineexceptionfilm.com/> for details. For evidence of the emerging consensus that the Israeli government has engaged in genocide, see the September 2025 report of [UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#).

³ See AAUP's *Legislative Threats to Academic Freedom: Redefinitions of Antisemitism and Racism*. <https://www.aaup.org/report/legislative-threats-academic-freedom-redefinitions-antisemitism-and-racism>, report released in 2022.

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/10/16/democrats-split-israel-gaza-palestinians/>

coercive force as the dominant means of suppressing dissenting voices regarding Israeli state policies and the plight of the Palestinian people.⁵

This crisis in support for Israel and Zionism among college students, faculty, and staff has also become deeply intertwined with another, long-term crisis of hegemony in American higher education. We speak here of the sudden shift in university governance from a decades-long, mostly successful project to neoliberalize the university⁶—a project that, however damaging, nonetheless retained, even if in atrophied form, the familiar normative structures of academic freedom and shared governance—to a revanchist conservative war on the very idea of the university as an independent and relatively autonomous center of knowledge production.⁷ It is the articulation of a resurgent move to repress anti-Zionist speech on campus with this larger reactionary attack on the university itself that makes this moment especially perilous for anyone who still believes in the social and public value of a liberal university education.

In this article, we describe how these two crises became intertwined on the campus of George Mason University (in Northern Virginia) to produce a year of intense struggle over the future of the university and how it should be governed. In doing so, we tell three interlinked stories. The first story details how the near-complete monetization and neoliberalization of GMU was suddenly overlaid with a more overt attempt to subordinate the university to political authorities, thereby imposing a more intrusive model of governance focused on coercion and ideological control. The second story shows how a more-or-less niche movement among supporters of Israel – the zealous defense of Zionism and the delegitimation of Palestinian viewpoints, particularly on college campuses – suddenly became central to this larger project

⁵ https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/AAUP_Campus_Protests.pdf

⁶ There are many definitions of neoliberalism and neoliberalization (Ganti 2014). Elsewhere, we have argued that, overall, "it is useful to think about neoliberalism as a concept woven from three distinct but intertwined threads—the economic, the political, and the discursive" (Gibson and Letiecq, 2024, p. 118). The economic thread defines neoliberalism as a now-dominant regime of capitalist accumulation that sought to restore conditions for capitalist economic growth after the crisis of postwar Fordism, principally by attacking forms of worker solidarity and state regulation that resist maximum rates of labor exploitation" (p. 118). The political thread draws on regime theory and explores the distinctive features of the neoliberal "mode of regulation," which principally involves using public policy to promote capitalist logics—including individualism, competition, and the equation of accumulation with the social good—throughout the government but also penetrating deep into civil society and everyday life as well (p. 119). Finally, the cultural thread looks not to Marx but Foucault for inspiration, with the goal of understanding the distinctive forms of subjectivity and identity that have emerged in the post-Fordist, neoliberal era, including but not limited to the relentless drive to self-commodify and increase one's stock of "human capital" (p. 119, see also Ouellette and Hay 2008). The term "neoliberalization" (or its verb form "to neoliberalize") is meant to signify that developing and implementing neoliberal economic, political, or cultural policies and practices is a dynamic historical process that remains incomplete (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore, 2010). The "neoliberal state," for example, is *still being neoliberalized* as residual policies and agencies associated with older Fordist or Keynesian modes of regulation are discovered, targeted, and stripped for parts. Applied in the higher education context, the concept of neoliberalism focuses our attention on the fifty-year project to undermine the university's public mission in favor of treating the university as a capitalist firm, with consumers rather than students, "flexible" employees rather than professors, and assets rather than legacies. Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, and Nik Theodore. "Variegated neoliberalization: geographies, modalities, pathways." *Global networks* 10, no. 2 (2010): 182-222. Tejaswini Ganti, "Neoliberalism," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2014): 89-104; Timothy Gibson and Bethany Letiecq, "Fighting for justice in the neoliberal university: The promise of reflexive and flexible solidarity," *Fast Capitalism*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2024): p. 116-133; Laurie Ouellette and James Hay. "Better living through reality TV: Television and post-welfare citizenship." *Journal of Communication* 59 (2009): 189-203. See also, Peter Fleming, *Dark Academia: How Universities Die* (London: Pluto Press, 2021).

⁷ See for example Florida's "Stop Woke Act" as described by Ryan Quinn, "[Florida Argues It Could Stop Professors From Criticizing Governor](#)," *Inside Higher Education*, June 21, 2024.

of political subordination that aimed to bring the independence of public universities to an end in favor of a more direct form of state control. As we will see, at GMU, both of these stories were intertwined in the appointment of a single member to our governing board.

The final story is a small story of resistance. It is our story. Woven throughout this article, It is a story of how the faculty of George Mason University, especially those active in the local advocacy chapter of the American Association of University Professors (GMU-AAUP), sought to defend the independence and integrity of the university from a coordinated assault that wove together the struggles over Zionism and Palestinian rights with the larger drive to bring GMU, along with other Virginia public universities, under the command and control of the state authorities, especially the governor. Like many such tales, ours has its share of unexpected victories and crushing defeats. Still, in the end, the experience of organizing and building solidarity with faculty and students in this fight has given us hope at a time when the future prospects of public universities seem dubious at best.

Story 1 - From Koch University to #MAGA State

At George Mason University, a comprehensive public university located in the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C., we have learned that there is a big difference between working at the neoliberal university as compared to working and teaching under the authority and surveillance of the #MAGA federal state. Story 1 offers a view into how this shift in governance was experienced by Mason faculty and contested by the local AAUP chapter.⁸ This story also shows how the move from neoliberal to proto-authoritarian modes of university governance set the stage for both Mason's subsequent struggles over the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) definition of antisemitism and the strategic use of this definition as a cudgel to crush dissent and impose federal and state control over Mason's governance.

We begin, therefore, with the neoliberalization of GMU over its short history. Given its status as the largest public university in the Commonwealth and especially its proximity to the nation's capital, GMU has long been viewed as a blank canvas upon which conservative billionaires could realize their most retrograde academic dreams.⁹ For decades, Mason has been by far the largest recipient of funding from the Charles Koch Foundation and the Kochian “dark money” donor network, with the bulk of these millions flowing to the law school, dominated by the Federalist Society and named after Antonin Scalia, the economics department, (in)famous for its affiliations with the Mercatus Center and the Institute for Humane Studies,

⁸ Full disclosure: the authors are leaders in GMU-AAUP.

⁹ In 2015, for example, conservative billionaire donors gave millions of dollars to GMU's law school (well-known for its libertarian, anti-Civil Rights, and anti-regulatory fervor) on the condition that the school change its name to the Antonin Scalia Law School. See: Benjamin Freed, “[The Donation That Renamed George Mason's Law School After Scalia Sure Has Some Weird Rules Attached.](#)” *Washingtonian Magazine*, May 2016.

two right-wing libertarian think tanks dedicated to the dismantling of all things public, including public schools, public parks, public assistance, and all related health, safety, and environmental protections.¹⁰

In a real way, these Koch-funded units function like libertarian viruses injected into the body of an otherwise healthy university. Sustained on the resources of their host, the law school and economics department then use the resources of GMU—its reputation, its perceived independence, and its material infrastructure—to spew a relentless stream of libertarian pathogens into the American public sphere. Slowly, over time, and aided, of course, by the demolition of campaign spending limits and the norm-breaking capture of two Supreme Court seats, the Koch network’s radical deregulatory policies and anti-democratic arguments have become hegemonic within the Republican party, and, increasingly, within the American power structure as a whole.¹¹

Needless to say, George Mason University faculty who teach outside the law school and economics department, especially those of us active in the Mason chapter of the American Association of University Professors (GMU-AAUP), have viewed this hijacking of our public university with alarm and disdain. But, importantly, the resistance we have marshalled against the Koch network’s agenda at GMU has never focused on the ideological or political ideas produced and circulated by the law school and economics department. These scholars have academic freedom, just as we do. Instead, we have resisted privatization and undue donor influence because we care about the independence and integrity of GMU. We resist because we fundamentally reject the notion that external private (or, as we will see, government) actors should be able to shape the future of academic departments, the hiring or firing of faculty, or the content of academic programs and university policies.¹²

For this reason, GMU-AAUP’s campaigns from 2017 through 2024 primarily focused on the goal of slowing down, and, where possible, reversing the neoliberalization of GMU. For example, the year before COVID hit, we launched a campaign contesting the privatization of the search process for hiring a new university president. When, in the late spring of 2019, then-President Angel Cabrera resigned, the Board of Visitors immediately announced that the search for his replacement would be led by a private head-hunting firm and would follow a secretive process, with no public campus visits from finalists—this despite language in GMU’s Faculty Handbook that explicitly *required* campus visits and opportunities for the faculty to question presidential search finalists. In response, GMU-AAUP quickly organized faculty and students to execute a months-long campaign calling for an open and public search. While we did not

¹⁰Nancy McLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018); Jane Meyer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017). See also Bethany Letiecq, “[George Mason University’s donor problem and the fight for transparency: The public stakes of private donor influence](#),” *Academe Magazine*, Spring 2019.

¹¹Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018). See also Lisa Graves, *Without Precedent How Chief Justice Roberts and His Accomplices Rewrote the Constitution and Dismantled Our Rights* (New York: Hachette Books, 2025).

¹²<https://www.aaup.org/article/george-mason-university%E2%80%99s-donor-problem-and-fight-transparency>

achieve all our goals, we successfully tripled our membership during this campaign, and we also opened the search process to more meaningful faculty input.¹³

Post-COVID, our campaigns have focused on improving the material working conditions of faculty. These include a campaign to reduce teaching workloads for composition faculty and a push to open up access to tenure for full-time, teaching-intensive faculty on limited-term contracts. What united these campaigns was a desire to counter and hopefully reverse the neoliberal policies of successive university presidents, including the relentless monetization of curriculum and their use of austerity budgets to discipline and exploit academic labor.

During this time, interestingly, the crux of our struggles with the administration and board were focused on expanding the resources we as faculty need to fulfill the norms and aspirations of our profession, including the restoration of the faculty as the primary authority in general university governance and preeminent in all academic affairs. We fought to expand access to true academic freedom by restoring tenure for all faculty, including especially our current full-time contingent faculty. We fought to restore reasonable workloads so our faculty could ease off the never-ending neoliberal hamster wheel of “doing more with less.” In this way, the underlying norms and aspirations of higher education were not as much at stake, mostly because administrators and board members were content with eroding faculty power through a grinding, long-term withdrawal of material and institutional support—death by a thousand cuts, if you will.

Beginning in 2021, this détente between GMU faculty and our governing board on the basic values of the university quickly began to unravel. This was the year that conservative financier and political newcomer Glenn Youngkin, with his everyday chinos and fleece vest, wooed the electorate to become Virginia’s Governor. Declaring himself as a moderate, Youngkin’s campaign promise to “put parents back in charge” of K-12 curriculum gained enough purchase among white suburban voters in Northern Virginia to give him a narrow victory over former Governor and twice-warmed-over Clintonite, Terry McAuliffe. Yet a closer look at Youngkin’s messaging revealed he was anything but moderate, with MAGA-esque broadsides on “woke” ideology in public schools and digital and television advertisements full of racist, homophobic, and transphobic imagery and discourse.¹⁴

Indeed, mere seconds into office, and taking his cues from Christopher Rufo’s scripted attacks on “critical race theory,” Youngkin began his attack on public K-12 education in Virginia, but he played a longer game with Virginia’s colleges and universities.¹⁵ At George Mason, this long game took the form of a gradual

¹³ During the COVID shutdown, we also successfully exposed the troubling inadequacies of GMU’s first testing regimen—organized by a private contractor in a no-bid contract process. This campaign ultimately forced the administration to develop a new, Mason-run testing program widely perceived as comprehensive and efficient. See Gibson, Letiecq, and Finkelstein (2023) for more details.

¹⁴ Human Rights Campaign, [“Press Release: Human Rights Campaign Vows To Fight Against Youngkin’s Regressive Agenda.”](#) (November 3, 2021).

¹⁵ <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/governor-of-virginia/pdf/co/EO-1-Ending-the-Use-of-Inherently-Divisive-Concepts.pdf>

roll-out of increasingly alarming appointments to the Board of Visitors (Virginia’s equivalent to most universities’ Boards of Trustees). To be sure, Virginia has had multiple Republican Governors since 1997, and these governors have always appointed conservatives to Mason’s board. But, as is the case elsewhere, these appointments have largely been garden variety capitalists and retired Republican politicians whose main ideological commitments are focused on neoliberalizing the university, not destroying its very foundations.

This is decidedly not the case with Youngkin’s appointments, who have been pulled from the ranks of arch-conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, as well as conservative legal firms like Cooper & Kirk.¹⁶ These appointments were not run-of-the-mill neoliberal capitalists. They were deeply ideological “organic intellectuals” in the Gramscian sense. For example, since assuming office Governor Youngkin has appointed Board members whose day job is undermining the political and ideological foundations of public K-12 education, an advocate who argues that university trustees—principally “business leaders”—should exert control over curriculum and academic affairs, and a prominent Republican lawyer famous for arguing, in defense of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis’ noxious “Stop Woke Act,” that university faculty have no academic freedom rights under the law.

Leading them all is our current Board Rector, Charles “Cully” Stimson, also from the Heritage Foundation, whose worldview and connection to reality is perhaps best summed up by his recently published book, *Rogue Prosecutors: How Radical Soros Lawyers are Destroying America’s Communities*. According to the book description, Stimson and his co-author “explore how a radical movement funded and conceived by George Soros—and ostensibly designed to ‘reverse engineer’ the criminal justice system as we know it—has succeeded in replacing law and order with pro-criminal, anti-victim zealots.”¹⁷

In this radically changed political environment, we at GMU-AAUP were forced to quickly pivot from a strategy of slowing neoliberalization and improving faculty access to resources to adopting a purely defensive strategy of feverishly trying to protect and preserve the fundamental values of the university, including the university’s integrity and independence from the control of the Governor.

The first sign that we were no longer on offense came with the appointment to Mason’s Board Of Visitors of Lindsey Burke, the Director of the Heritage Foundation’s Center for Educational Policy, a co-author of Project 2025, and an avowed enemy of public education, to chair the Board’s academic affairs committee.¹⁸ Immediately after her appointment, Burke led a Youngkin-inspired push to stop the implementation of Mason’s new “Just Societies” (JS) core requirement. This tepid and inoffensive addition to the Mason Core simply asked all undergraduates to choose, from among all the courses in our

¹⁶ <https://bov.gmu.edu/board-membership/>

¹⁷ Zack Smith and Charles Stimson, *Rogue Prosecutors: How Radical Soros Lawyers are Destroying America’s Communities* (Brentwood, TN: Bombardier Books, 2023).

¹⁸ Burke has since stepped down from the Board, leaving in late Spring 2025.

general education program, *two courses* that engage in some way with the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Along with other Youngkin appointees, Burke viewed this requirement as the thin edge of a “woke” curriculum takeover, orchestrated by a radical Marxist faculty cabal.¹⁹ As a result, from her position as Chair of the BOV’s academic affairs committee, she managed to delay implementation of the JS requirement until Governor Youngkin had appointed a majority of GMU’s Board members, at which point the Board successfully pressed the administration to “pause” the requirement, effectively killing it for the foreseeable future (over the loud objections of faculty and students) in Spring 2024.²⁰ During this same period, the Youngkin administration was also effective at cancelling diversity-themed coursework at Virginia Commonwealth University, revealing the “unusual intervention” inspired by Youngkin and carried out by his board-appointed political operatives.

Outraged by this intrusion into the bedrock AAUP principles of shared governance and faculty control of the curriculum, we began to rethink our customary strategies and tactics. We had come to understand that Governor Youngkin’s Board of Visitors was not fundamentally motivated by the neoliberal project of privatization and labor exploitation. Instead, they were playing a different game—one where the manufacture of revanchist outrage would be used to fuel fundamental changes in how universities would be governed under Youngkin’s (and eventually a resurgent Trump’s) watch. And honestly, we were tired. We needed to lick our wounds and get ready for the next phase of struggle. And this time we knew we needed help. We needed allies. So, we spent the Summer of 2024 plotting how to get back on the offensive, by exposing this board as bad faith actors working from the inside to harm our institution.

Story 2 - The Strategic Uses of Anti-Antisemitism on Campus

While we were focused on the BOV’s intrusion into Mason’s core curriculum, we were also keeping track of our university president’s evolving responses to student activists protesting Israel’s devastating bombing of Gaza.

Readers will likely know this story well. The aftermath of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks, followed by Israel’s immediate and indiscriminate carpet-bombing of Gazan civilians, sparked large and passionate anti-genocide protests on college and university campuses across the United States. These protests were met in many cases with aggressive and violent repression, often following the demands of pro-Zionist politicians from both sides of the aisle.

George Mason University was no exception to this ferment over free speech and political protests on campus. Although Mason students never constructed a campus encampment, student activists from GMU’s chapter of the Students for Justice in Palestine (GMU-SJP) did engage in multiple peaceful protests throughout 2023 and 2024. For the first half of 2024, the administration pursued a policy of what you might call “soft repression,” allowing pro-Palestinian protests while using a variety of administrative

¹⁹<https://gmufourthestate.com/2024/05/02/report-board-of-visitors-contest-to-dei-and-just-societies-initiative/>

²⁰www.insidehighered.com/news/diversity/2024/05/13/vcu-gmu-wont-require-dei-classes-after-youngkins-review

measures to apply friction and pressure on student groups. For example, administrators would periodically withhold or delay issuing permits, and they once cited GMU-SJP leaders for violating the small print of university rules regarding the use of campus spaces. However, the administration's relatively light touch on regulating pro-Palestinian speech was about to change.²¹

A key moment in this debate over the meaning and regulation of pro-Palestinian speech at GMU came in the summer of 2024, with the appointment of the Honorable Kenneth Marcus to Mason's Board of Visitors. The Chairman and Founder of the Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, a nonprofit legal advocacy center dedicated to protecting the civil rights of the American Jewish community, Marcus has gained particular renown for his dogged fight against what he considers to be a rising tide of antisemitism on college and university campuses.²² Yet even a cursory review of the Brandeis Center's press releases and white papers reveals that, while Marcus's concerns about antisemitism are no doubt sincere, his Center's work focuses with particular intensity on stamping out criticisms of Israel and the Israeli occupation of Palestine, especially on college campuses.²³

In short, in Marcus's view and in the work of the Brandeis Center, there is no distinction between criticisms of Israel and antisemitism. To be anti-Zionist is to be antisemitic, full stop.

Given this background, it is perhaps not surprising that Marcus has placed the definition and examples of antisemitism advanced by the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA definition) at the very center of his legal advocacy work. Drafted during the IHRA's 2015 Budapest Plenary, the IHRA definition emerged in response to what participants viewed as a new, modern, and more insidious form of antisemitic rhetoric, where criticisms of Israel and the Zionist project functioned ideologically as merely a shiny new bottle that contained the same old brew of toxic antisemitic tropes and anti-Jewish conspiracy theories.²⁴ In this way, the equation of antisemitism with anti-Zionism is not incidental to the IHRA definition. It is fundamental. It is the reason the definition exists.²⁵

²¹ This became immediately clear when campus police joined with the FBI to raid the shared home of two student leaders of GMU's Students for Justice in Palestine. Reportedly over 20 officers invaded their home. The search warrant was based on allegations of the leaders' involvement in two incidents of graffiti on campus. No arrests were made, and, nine months later (at the time of writing this piece) no charges have been filed. Instead, police sources—and Mason's president—leaked to the press that officers had found items, including flags and magazines, that, these sources alleged, contained pro-Hamas and antisemitic slogans. No supporting evidence of these allegations has been shared with the public. For more details on this police search and police allegations, see <https://theintercept.com/2024/12/03/george-mason-fbi-gaza-palestine-israel/> and <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2024/12/08/george-mason-university-pro-palestinian-activists/> for details.

²² <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/24/us/politics/kenneth-marcus-college-antisemitism-complaints.html>

²³ <https://brandeiscenter.com/white-papers/>; <https://brandeiscenter.com/press-releases/>

²⁴ See Dr. David Hirsh's blog post <https://fathomjournal.org/it-was-the-new-phenomenon-of-israel-focused-antisemitism-that-required-the-new-definition-of-antisemitism-david-hirsh-responds-to-a-recent-call-to-reject-the-ihra/>

²⁵ For an account of the prehistory of the IHRA definition and examples of antisemitism, see Sean Malloy, "[How the creation of the 'New Antisemitism' was used to shield Israel and attack the Left](#)," *Mondoweiss*, April 28, 2025.

In the years since the IHRA adopted its Zionism-centered definition of antisemitism, Marcus's Brandeis Center labored tirelessly to enshrine this definition in federal and state civil rights law, and within the anti-discrimination policies of all American colleges and universities. This campaign has essentially sidelined Congress in favor of constructing a matrix of interlocking executive orders, Department of Education "dear colleague" letters, and state resolutions to pressure universities and colleges to embed the IHRA definition in their campus anti-discrimination policies.²⁶ And when this matrix fails to secure compliance, the Brandeis Center stands ready to file lawsuits, the settlements of which almost invariably include embedding the IHRA definition of antisemitism in campus anti-discrimination policies.

And, indeed, Kenneth Marcus and the Brandeis Center have been extremely litigious. Since the Center's founding in 2011, its lawyers have filed lawsuits or federal civil rights complaints against 25 colleges and universities in the United States, typically alleging that campus leaders have tolerated a hostile climate of antisemitic discrimination, harassment, and exclusion targeted at Jewish students, especially students identifying as Zionists. Our review of these complaints and lawsuits revealed that 80% of the total could be traced back, at least in part, to anti-Zionist speech and campus protests in support of Palestinian rights. Moreover, the pace of the Center's advocacy has accelerated markedly in the two years since Hamas' October 7 attacks, with Center lawyers filing, by our count, at least 16 complaints or lawsuits against colleges and universities that have not sufficiently repressed pro-Palestinian and/or anti-Zionist protests and speech on campus.²⁷ The IHRA definition, of course, is prominently referenced in all of the post-attack complaints, offering an international imprimatur for the Center's goal of intertwining anti-Zionism with antisemitism until they become indistinguishable from one another.²⁸

It was at this point, on June 28, 2024, that Governor Youngkin appointed Kenneth Marcus to GMU's Board of Visitors. Hitting the ground running, Marcus immediately got to work.

²⁶ <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/colleague-202405-shared-ancestrypdf-35100.pdf>;
<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-anti-semitism/>

²⁷ The list of universities and colleges targeted by the Brandeis Center include Harvard University, North Carolina State University, Chapman University, Brooklyn College, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Southern California, Stanford University, the University of Vermont, SUNY New Paltz, UCLA, Columbia University, and Cal Poly Humboldt, among many others. The Brandeis Center also sued the American Studies Association for its academic boycott of Israel in 2017.

²⁸ Indeed, most of the complaints filed by the Center contain boilerplate language cementing the equation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism. For example, the Occidental College complaint to OCR states, "[a]s OCR recognizes, Jews share more than a common faith; they are a people with a shared history and heritage deeply rooted in the land of Israel. Indeed, according to a Pew Research Center survey, eight in ten Jews say that caring about Israel is an essential or important part of what being Jewish means to them. It is not a mere viewpoint or political opinion. For most Jews, Zionism represents their Jewish ancestry – the historic reality that the Jews as a people originated in ancient Israel. For most Jews, therefore, the ancestral connection to Israel (i.e., Zionism) represents an integral component of their Jewish identity." Later in the complaint, the Center grounds this articulation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism in the IHRA definition and Trump's Executive Order 13899. "According to Executive Order 13899 (the 'Executive Order'), which has been incorporated into OCR's current policy guidance, Title VI must be enforced 'against prohibited forms of discrimination rooted in antisemitism as vigorously as against all other forms of discrimination prohibited by Title VI.' The Executive Order incorporates the IHRA Definition, which states that "the denial to Jews of opportunities or services available to others" is 'antisemitic discrimination.' As the IHRA Definition states, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country is not antisemitism. *But demonizing the Jewish State, calling for its destruction, blaming Jewish students for the actions of the Israeli government, denying the Jewish people the right to self-determination, and/or subjecting Israel to double standards are classic earmarks of antisemitism [emphasis added]."*

Just two months later, on August 27, the GMU administration secretly and unilaterally rewrote our campus anti-discrimination policy to include the IHRA definition and examples.²⁹ They did this without consulting faculty or students, and without a single mention of the IHRA definition recorded in the two BOV meetings Marcus attended over the summer. When the installation of the IHRA definition was finally made public in mid-September, it was presented as a *fait accompli*. It only took Marcus 39 working days to achieve his goal.³⁰

Story 3 – Resistance is Not Futile

At GMU-AAUP, as noted above, we were regrouping over the summer and had no idea what Marcus was up to in his first 39 working days on the Board. Instead, we were focused on responding to the Board's decision to block the implementation of our Just Societies requirement. Developed in collaboration with students, our strategy focused on exposing the partisan and political nature of Youngkin appointees, including their connections to the Heritage Foundation and Project 2025, a document that was getting more and more attention in the 2024 presidential campaign. We thought this was an effective message. However, at the same time, our inability to stop the Board from “pausing” the Just Societies requirement taught us that we could not fight the Board alone. We needed help.

In our experience, Mason administrators and board members usually ignore faculty and students when they demand changes to university policies, but they will respond immediately to unfavorable news coverage and phone calls from angry state legislators. We decided to mobilize both of these countervailing forces at once by publishing a commentary on August 5, 2024 in *Inside Higher Education*, a leading online news source on campus politics and policy across the United States. With this commentary, we hoped to alert the public, and especially potential allies in the state legislature, to the deeply politicized backgrounds and actions of Youngkin's board appointees, including Marcus (though somewhat in passing), while focusing particular attention on Burke's unprecedented intrusion into our core curriculum.³¹ In doing so, we hoped to capitalize on the growing attention and public rebuke of Project 2025 and the fact that Lindsey Burke, author of Project 2025's chapter on education, was sitting on our BOV like a fox in the proverbial hen house.

²⁹ This is the section of UP 1201 that was changed: “*Protected Characteristics*: the various identities protected by University Policy 1201, including state and federal laws and regulations, including race, color, religion, ethnic or national origin (including shared ancestry and/or ethnic characteristics), sex, disability, military status (including veteran status), sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, pregnancy status, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by law. The ACC office will consider the IHRA definition of antisemitism and examples (as set forth in U.S. Executive Order 13899 and Chapter 471 of the 2023 Virginia Acts of Assembly) to the extent that they might be useful as evidence of discriminatory intent, without diminishing or infringing any right protected under the Constitution and laws of the United States and the Commonwealth of Virginia.
<https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/non-discrimination-policy/>

³⁰ <https://www.dailywire.com/news/dems-block-jewish-leader-from-george-mason-board-after-student-arrested-for-anti-israel-terrorism>

³¹ <https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/views/2024/08/05/alarmed-politicization-governing-board-opinion>

To our delight, our *IHE* op-ed coincided with³² actions taken by Don Scott, the Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates, who, two days later, publicly called for Lindsey Burke’s ouster, insisting that as a political extremist and leading opponent of public education, Burke was unfit to serve on the Board of a public university in Virginia.³³

Thrilled with Delegate Scott’s rebuke of Burke, we immediately followed up with a letter that thanked him for speaking out while providing more details on the Governor’s latest roster of extremist board appointees, including, you guessed it, Kenneth Marcus.

Remember that at this point, in August 2024, we still had no idea Marcus had already quietly pressured Mason administrators to change our anti-discrimination policy. We only knew that **he** was trouble. We knew about his general hostility to pro-Palestinian campus speech, his documented lack of concern for other forms of discrimination based on race and gender, and his Center’s history of using the courts to intimidate and coerce university administrators. And this was essentially what we said about Marcus in our *IHE* commentary and letter to Speaker Scott.

Subsequent events would also suggest that Marcus is no stranger to political hardball. For example, on August 21, 2024, just two weeks after our commentary appeared in the *IHE*, an organization called Parents Defending Education (PDE) published an “incident report” about George Mason University on their website. This report included the syllabi for three courses taught in GMU’s College of Education and Human Development, including a syllabus on Critical Praxis in Education developed by Bethany Leticq, a co-author of the *IHE* commentary (as well as this current piece).³⁴

According to SourceWatch, PDE “is a conservative 501(c)(3) non-profit organization,” and its founder, Nicole Neily, enjoys close ties with the Koch donor network, having worked for both the Franklin News Foundation and the Cato Institute. Neily has also worked for FreedomWorks and the Competitive Enterprise Institute and has served on the board of Young Americans for Liberty. The PDE’s list of funders reads like a “who’s who” of the conservative donor class, including Donors Trust (a prominent node in the Koch donor network), the Bradley Foundation, and the Searle Freedom Trust.³⁵

³² We like to think our op-ed inspired him, but of course we cannot be sure.

³³ <https://insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2024/08/07/va-dem-seeks-removal-project-2025-co-author-gmu-board>

³⁴ <https://defendinged.org/incidents/george-mason-university-corrupted/>

³⁵ https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Parents_Defending_Education. These organizations are funded by billionaire families who share a deep animosity toward public institutions and redistributive justice. Given their role in funding conservative intellectuals, politicians, and “astroturf” activism, foundations like Donors Trust represent a primary means through which concentrated wealth secures the compliance of the media and the state. See Nancy McLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking, 2017); Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Doubleday, 2016).

And who, you might ask, has served on the board of Parents Defending Education? None other than Mr. Kenneth Marcus. In fact, on their most recent IRS 990 form, Marcus is listed as the organization's treasurer. In short, just two weeks after our op-ed appeared, PDE suddenly published an "incident report" on its website that included both a copy of Letiecq's syllabus and her contact information.³⁶ This obvious attempt to doxx Dr. Letiecq and expose her to weeks of online vitriol (and potentially much worse) was particularly troubling since Letiecq had been the subject of previous threats instigated by Turning Point USA's *Professor Watchlist* and conservative, alt-right hate groups, including a threat so serious that GMU's Chief of Police issued an arrest warrant, a "no trespass" order, and arranged to have officers nearby to protect her both on-campus and off.

In our view, it seems unlikely to be a coincidence that an organization with which Mr. Marcus enjoys close ties would just happen to doxx Dr. Letiecq only days after her co-authored commentary, a commentary that included criticisms of Mr. Marcus, appeared in *IHE*. Of course, we have no direct knowledge that Marcus was involved, but this sequence of events nonetheless raised concerns about Marcus's connections to an organization so clearly devoted to character assassination and online harassment. As a result, in late August, we again contacted several lawmakers and shared our growing concerns not only about his service on the board, but also his ties to PDE—an organization labeled by the Southern Poverty Law Center as an "extremist" hate group.³⁷

Back at GMU for the Fall 2024 semester, we finally realized what Kenneth Marcus had been up to during his brief tenure on the Board – pressuring the administrators to install the IHRA definition and examples of antisemitism into Mason's anti-discrimination policy. We were shocked at how quickly and quietly it all happened, exactly when faculty vigilance was at its annual summer low point.

This unhappy revelation kicked off a series of efforts in GMU's Faculty Senate to push back against the IHRA installation into policy. Unfortunately, our efforts yielded little Senate action besides a botched and tepid investigation into the administrative process. The most important questions remained unanswered: Who knew about this move to install the IHRA definition? Why weren't faculty leaders notified or involved? And what were the academic freedom implications of the now-enshrined IHRA definition and examples, especially for faculty who teach the history and politics of the region? We won't bore you with this part of the story but suffice to say that if the future of American democracy relies on the strength and bravery of Faculty Senators, we are all in big trouble.

For their part, when asked about why the IHRA definition was adopted in haste with zero input from faculty or students, administrators offered only a string of dubious claims and an ever-changing menu of evasions and rationalizations. Essentially, the argument of administrators boiled down to legal necessity: federal and state law mandated including the IHRA definition and examples. At least this is what GMU's

³⁶ <https://defendinged.org/incidents/george-mason-university-corrupted/>

³⁷ Carey, Maya Henson, "[Returning to the schoolhouse steps, extremists' groups reactionary anti-student inclusion efforts](#)," In *Report: Dismantling White Supremacy* (Southern Poverty Law Center, June 2023).

university counsel Anne Gentry, yet another Youngkin administration appointee with ties to the Koch donor network, had told them.³⁸ We had to do it, administrators said. End of story.

Of course, this claim was immediately belied by the fact that out of all Virginia's public colleges and universities only two, GMU and Virginia Commonwealth University, had explicitly adopted the IHRA's definition and examples as policy. Administrators had no response when this was pointed out, and not once was the obvious role played by Kenneth Marcus's behind the scenes advocacy or Anne Gentry's, shall we say, motivated interpretation of state and federal statutes acknowledged.

Although we continued to write legislators about the intrusive and politicized nature of our BOV, as a group we were uneasy and went into winter break fearing this might be the end of the story.

However, to our delight, Democrats in the state legislature—who enjoyed a slim majority in both houses—had other plans. In Virginia, appointments to college governing boards are made in June or July, but these appointments are temporary until approved by the legislature during the following legislative session that begins in January of the following year. And, as it happens, on January 24, 2025, Democrats in the Virginia Senate quietly struck out the names of nine Youngkin appointments, including three BOV members appointed to Mason's governing board back in June. Among these nine rejected appointees, we were amazed to learn, was none other than Kenneth Marcus.³⁹

We immediately got to work, sending Senate Democrats a thank you letter and then shifting our focus to the House of Delegates. Although the Senate had crossed Marcus's name off the list of approved nominations to our Board, the House could put his name right back on. To prevent this, GMU-AAUP quickly initiated a letter-writing campaign targeting Democrats in the House. In the space of three weeks, GMU-AAUP members and allies sent over 7,000 letters to the House Democratic Caucus. We also quickly penned a new op-ed, this one published in the *Richmond Times-Gazette*, the legislature's hometown paper, calling on House Democrats to hold the line and exclude extremist political operatives from university governing boards.⁴⁰

When Marcus saw that his nomination to the Board was imperiled, he and his allies worked feverishly in the Virginia House hoping to peel off at least two Democrats to support Marcus and Youngkin's other activist appointees. The right-wing mediasphere cranked immediately into gear, with earned media pieces placed in local, regional, and national news. These missives, including a story on Fox News, focused

³⁸<https://www.highereddive.com/news/virginia-ag-elevates-wife-of-gop-donor-to-george-masons-interim-top-legal/617977/>

³⁹https://www.fairfaxtimes.com/articles/virginia-senate-rejects-university-and-state-board-members/article_cd8431a4-df39-11ef-b280-0b5e8f8c86e2.html

⁴⁰ https://richmond.com/opinion/column/article_1b8c1f86-dd93-11ef-9461-6b96fea75870.html. Throughout this period, we were in touch with other Virginia universities through the AAUP's statewide Virginia Conference, but that was the extent of our cross-campus organizing. Building coalitions both regionally and nationally has been a key focus of our chapter's work this past year.

specifically on Marcus’s endangered nomination and condemned Virginia Democrats for rejecting “the man who helped redefine campus antisemitism.”⁴¹

These right-wing news accounts occasionally dipped into Islamophobic rhetoric as well, with multiple stories attempting to paint a picture of antisemitism out of control on Mason’s campus, especially by linking Marcus’s imperiled nomination to the suspension of Mason’s SJP chapter based on accusations that its leaders were responsible for anti-genocide graffiti on campus and the arrest and deportation of a first-year GMU student from Egypt whom the FBI accused of plotting an attack on the Israeli consulate in New York City.⁴² Never shy about ginning up anti-Muslim sentiment, right-wing media workers sought to paint Marcus as just the man to clean up a campus apparently rife with Muslim antisemites.⁴³

Finally, Marcus himself recorded a video addressed to Virginia House Democrats, pleading, with no visible shame, “there’s no reason why we need to make this political. Let’s all join together and say we need to make sure that every student receives the same, equal educational opportunities as everybody else.”⁴⁴

In the end, however, the House Democrats held firm and voted to exclude Kenneth Marcus and two other Youngkin appointees from the Board of Visitors.⁴⁵ By the first of March, Marcus was gone.

Epilogue

We would love to end the story here, with this unexpected victory that kept a leading opponent of Palestinian free speech and civil rights off our Board. But that’s not how the struggle for hegemony works. No victories are total, just as no defeats are permanent.

After all, Kenneth Marcus did manage to embed the IHRA definition and examples into Mason’s anti-discrimination policy. So now faculty and students must face the prospect that any speech or research that criticizes Israel or the Israeli occupation could be investigated as harassment or discrimination based on shared ancestry.

Moreover, our experience at GMU since these debates over the IHRA definition and Kenneth Marcus’s appointment have only deepened our concern that the Trump administration has decided to, as David

⁴¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/va-dems-reject-youngkins-antisemitism-expert-pick-from-george-mason-univ-board-amid-troubling-incidents>

⁴² <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/20/us/terror-plot-george-mason-israeli-consulate.html>

⁴³ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/va-dems-reject-youngkins-anti-semitism-expert-pick-from-george-mason-univ-board-amid-troubling-incidents>

⁴⁴ <https://youtu.be/T6E6ZtiZ9Lg?si=yrHIXWbhf9YDMgaC>

⁴⁵ These included Nina Rees, a leading advocate for private charter schools, and Mark Short, a one-time foot soldier in the Koch donor network and a man who got his start in politics by trying to win a U.S. Senate seat for Oliver North. For details, see: <https://www.baconsrebellion.com/dems-delete-six-youngkin-appointees/>

Myers, a distinguished professor of Jewish History, has argued, weaponize antisemitism for political gain. As Myers told *The Guardian* in March 2025, “I think ultimately [the administration] is interested in something larger than defending Jewish students; it’s really interested in bringing the university to its knees.”⁴⁶ Myers’ words were prophetic. Only a month after Marcus’s removal, the federal Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights hit GMU and 59 other universities with an investigation of the GMU administrators’ alleged tolerance of antisemitic speech during campus anti-genocide, pro-Palestinian protests.⁴⁷ Just four months later, in July 2025, this antisemitism investigation was used as one rationale for the Department of Justice’s shocking ouster of University of Virginia President James Ryan.⁴⁸ And now GMU President Gregory Washington is under fire from the DOJ as well.⁴⁹ Kenneth Marcus may be gone from GMU’s governing board, but his legacy of using anti-discrimination policies to achieve conservative political goals continues to echo at GMU and across American higher education.

In addition, back at Mason's Board of Visitors, the remaining Youngkin appointees were by no means idle in the months since Marcus’s removal. In late February 2025, the Board passed an “antisemitism resolution” originally authored by Marcus that, in its final form, required the development of HR and student training modules on the IHRA definition of antisemitism and banned the University from sponsoring or officially endorsing speakers, organizations, or events “whose planned or announced position is antisemitic,” again, as determined by applying the IHRA definition and examples. This resolution clearly puts anti-Zionists and those who support Palestinian human rights on notice: your organizations will not be funded, your speakers will be vetted, and your events will be monitored closely and subject to discrimination complaints if criticisms of Israel or Zionism cross a vague line that will only become clear during an administrative hearing.⁵⁰

But even this antisemitism resolution, as bad as it is, should be viewed as a small victory of sorts. Earlier drafts, for instance, explicitly treated Zionists as essentially a protected class by defining speech and conduct critical of Zionism and Zionists as potentially, even presumptively, antisemitic and thus discriminatory.⁵¹ Pressure from students and faculty, along with a few welcome dissenters on the BOV itself, managed to delete this more coercive and incendiary language from the Board’s final resolution.

⁴⁶ Anna Betts, “[Pro-Israel group says it has ‘deportation list’ and has sent ‘thousands’ of names to Trump officials](#),” *The Guardian*, March 14, 2025.

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of Education, “[Press release: U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights Sends Letters to 60 Universities Under Investigation for Antisemitic Discrimination and Harassment](#)” (March 10, 2025).

⁴⁸ Nathaniel Cline, “UVA President Jim Ryan resigns amid federal ultimatum,” *Virginia Mercury*, June 27, 2025. <https://viriniamercury.com/2025/06/27/uva-president-jim-ryan-resigns-amid-federal-ultimatum/>

⁴⁹ Katharine Mangan, “[George Mason is the latest university under fire from Trump. Its President fears an ‘orchestrated’ campaign](#),” *ProPublica*, July 11, 2025.

⁵⁰ <https://www.ffxnow.com/2025/03/13/george-mason-university-approves-antisemitism-resolution-but-sparks-free-speech-debate/#:~:text=It%20states%20that%20Jewish%20and,%2C%20or%20the%20similar.%E2%80%9D>

⁵¹ <https://gmufourthestate.com/2025/02/25/anti-semitism-resolution-proposed-at-committee-meeting/>

Resistance is never futile. Faculty advocates and believers in academic freedom are very much in a defensive posture right now. In Gramscian terms, we are playing a war of position, not a war of maneuver.⁵² Our goal is to put sand in the gears, to slow things down until political conditions in the state and the nation shift enough to provide more options and openings for progress, or at least to recapture ground lost during the current crisis. Every act of resistance helps. Every stubborn refusal to capitulate adds friction and forces the enemies of public education to work harder, to expend more energy and more capital than they had planned. Resistance also upsets the opposition. It makes them angry, and angry people often make embarrassing mistakes. This is what we've learned at Mason. No refusal is too small. It all matters.

Conclusion

The struggles unfolding at George Mason University, including the repression of political speech and the attempt to exert ideological control over university curricula, are not isolated and disconnected skirmishes. These struggles instead mark the frontline of a broader, decades-long campaign to reshape higher education in the image of political and ideological orthodoxy. What we are witnessing is not merely a clash over curriculum or governance, or even an acceleration of the long-term project of neoliberalization; we are instead witnessing a calculated, proto-authoritarian effort to dismantle the university as a space of critical inquiry, academic freedom, and democratic engagement. The convergence of donor influence, state power, and ideological zealotry—embodied in figures like Lindsey Burke and Kenneth Marcus as well as institutions like the Heritage Foundation and the Brandeis Center—has created a formidable apparatus aimed at silencing dissent and subordinating public education to partisan agendas.

Yet we believe that resistance matters. Faculty, students, and allies have pushed back—sometimes successfully—against these incursions. The removal of Marcus from the Board of Visitors, the public rebuke of Project 2025, and the mobilization of thousands of voices in defense of academic freedom all demonstrate that organized, collective action can disrupt even the most entrenched power structures. To this end, the presence of a local chapter of the AAUP has been crucial. Existing outside the formal structures of university governance, like faculty senates, which are more vulnerable to intimidation and political paralysis, GMU-AAUP has served as a place for faculty to gather, share information, and plan collective actions that protect the basic independence and integrity of the university against those who would either sell it off or chain it to state and federal authorities.

We must recognize that the threats we face today are the result of a slow erosion—an accumulation of small cuts, strategic appointments, and ideological campaigns that have been decades in the making. The libertarian right—#MAGA's financial engine and the center of gravity for the conservative intellectual movement—has built a deeply interconnected network spanning think tanks⁵³ To meet this challenge, we

⁵² Antonio Gramsci, "War of position and war of manoeuvre" in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgacs (NYU Press, 2000), 223-225.

⁵³ McLean, *Democracy in Chains* (New York: Viking, 2017); Mayer, *Dark Money* (New York: Doubleday, 2016), Ralph Wilson and Issac Kamola, *Free Speech and Koch Money: Manufacturing a Campus Culture War* (London: Pluto Press, 2021).

must build our own networks of solidarity, strategy, and resistance—both within our own campuses and across the whole of American higher education.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), founded in 1915 and tested through eras of repression from McCarthyism to the present, offers a vital link to a national movement committed to defending the university as a public good. As chapter leaders, we have a soft spot for AAUP, but there are multiple organizational alternatives, including the amazing people at United Campus Workers (CWA) and the intrepid UAW organizers working with faculty and teaching assistants across the nation. The choice of organization matters much less than the simple commitment to act.

Now, more than ever, we must organize across campuses, reclaim our institutions, and resist the creeping authoritarianism that threatens not only higher education but the very foundations of democracy. The monsters are many and strong. But so are we.