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Gabby Anglin ([00:01:15](#)):

So welcome to Higher Ed Now, Jered Cooper.

Jered Cooper ([00:01:20](#)):

Hello. It's great to be with the both of you this afternoon.

Steve McGuire ([00:01:23](#)):

Great to meet you.

Jered Cooper ([00:01:27](#)):

I've been attending the University of Virginia for only one year. I actually transferred there from Northern Virginia Community College.

Steve McGuire ([00:01:35](#)):

Oh, is that right?

Jered Cooper ([00:01:38](#)):

Oh, yes. Yes, it's been an interesting trip. I've learned a great deal from both institutions, although it may surprise you to learn I'm a resident of Maryland.

Steve McGuire ([00:01:51](#)):

So how many years will you spend at UVA before you graduate then?

Jered Cooper ([00:01:55](#)):

I will spend two years in total, this year that just passed and the upcoming academic year.

Steve McGuire ([00:02:03](#)):

Okay, great. You're studying political science?

Jered Cooper ([00:02:06](#)):

Yes.

Steve McGuire ([00:02:07](#)):

Good.

Jered Cooper ([00:02:10](#)):

It's always been a passion of mine. When I was a child, I adored history, American history, American government. I had a little deck of presidential flashcards I'd carry around with me. Most kids had action figures. I had my flashcards, and that is a love that hasn't died. Now as I prepare to go into my senior year and I consider going to law school, it's really a full circle type of moment.

Gabby Anglin ([00:03:04](#)):

Yeah. So let's get started by talking about the UVA Oratory Competition. The UVA Oratory Competition seems like a really cool initiative or project. I wish that my undergrad institution had something like that. So can you tell us a little bit about what inspired you to compete in it and how you shaped your messaging in your winning speech?

Jered Cooper ([00:03:27](#)):

Yes. It was fall 2022, and I was walking to class one day. There was a poster, and I love to read all the things that we have on our campus. We always have posters and people tabling, trying to promote causes or events. I looked at the poster, and the prompt was, "Have a competition. It's in the rotunda, and you get to talk about why free speech is important at a public university and why." So that stuck with me as I went about my day, and I then decided to make the decision to compete in this competition.

[\(00:04:06\)](#):

I did a bit of a brain dump, if you will. The funny thing about that speech was a lot of it was inspired by a class I was taking that fall that was entitled Political Dialogue. It was a once a week seminar, and for about 15 weeks, we sat there and we talked about the issues of speech, who should speak, who shouldn't speak, what speech is too far. Every week, more or less, I would go to that class, and I would say things such as, "Everyone should be allowed to speak. We have norms and guardrails, laws and regulations to prevent the most outrageous of topics from coming forward." Every week, my 14 other classmates would look at me and go, "Oh, brother." So when I was crafting that speech originally, a great deal of it was inspired by that class, the viewpoints that I had, the idea that everyone should be able to come and speak without fear or hesitation.

[\(00:05:04\)](#):

Then throughout the process, I began thinking of it in more of a national sense. It went from my localized effort to then learning about the things that had occurred on grounds in the previous year. I believe it was 2021. Mike Pence came to the University of Virginia, and everyone was up in arms, very unhappy. Earlier, in the fall of 2022, Kellyanne Conway came to visit, and people were quite frankly up in arms, to put it in a diplomatic way. It didn't make any sense to me. Sure, you don't have to agree with everything that both of them have done, but don't they have a right to share their opinion?

[\(00:05:53\)](#):

As I began to write, that was the trend I took. I went from a 100-foot to a 3,000-foot level perspective, that to save America, in a way, we have to bring everyone together. It can't just be me and my group and the opinions and make me feel comfortable, because we're such a diverse nation of so many unique viewpoints that everyone needs to have a say. To begin that change, there's no better place to start than at the public universities of our country. It's where people such as myself and so many of my friends, we've come not only to learn, but to express our viewpoints, have them debated, have them sharpened by tremendous professors. A little bit of a University of Virginia plug. We have wonderful professors, in order to go out into the world and to take our education and use it for the greater good.

Steve McGuire ([00:08:39](#)):

I'm just going to pick up on that. So Jered, you hinted at some of the reactions that you received when you were defending free speech, free expression in your class from your peers, it sounded like. Then you made this public speech defending free speech and won this event. I'm wondering, what was the reaction of your peers to what you said in your speech?

Jered Cooper ([00:09:08](#)):

That's a wonderful question. Going up there, I was a little nervous, naturally. I was in the rotunda room at the university. It's one of the oldest parts of our grounds. When I sat back down to hear the other people, I didn't immediately get a public reaction other than applause that I thought was just courtesy. I'm like, "Oh, well, they're applauding to be polite." It wasn't until an interlude during the judging in which people, they would come up to me, and they would say, "Oh, you spoke to what I felt in my heart to be true" or "You hit the nail on the head." I was a bit surprised. I was not expecting to have that reaction.

([00:09:54](#)):

In terms of peers, they didn't hear about this until a few days later. Even then, they would text me, and they'd say, "I saw that speech" or "I heard it" or "I read the transcript, and you're right" or "My mother agrees with you" or "My father agrees with you" or "All three of us, we agree with you." That was a really moving experience for me to know that there are people out there. For as many critics, there are just as many advocates.

Steve McGuire ([00:10:25](#)):

That's great.

Gabby Anglin ([00:10:28](#)):

I really love how you opened your speech with that quote, "America has suffered from a fever of words." How are you seeing this fever of words on campus? How are you seeing that spread? Are there any standout examples you can think about during your time as a student?

Jered Cooper ([00:13:49](#)):

[inaudible 00:13:47]. Sorry. You asked about the words, the words student of history. I enjoy political speech writing. I took a course in it, and the words that Richard Nixon spoke on the steps of the Capitol that day in 1969 resonate so much with America today, which is concerning, but also fascinating to think about. We see this trend not only in America, but I've experienced it at community college, as well as at the University of Virginia. I remember once I was in a class at community college. It was a political science course, and the professor made ... He liked to have slideshows with jokes on them to lighten the mood. We were staring at computer screens for 90 minutes. You need something to keep the mind active. It was a George W. Bush ... one of his Bushisms. The class chuckled.

([00:14:49](#)):

But this one person, he took offense. He was angry. He went into a Zoom chat rant. It was not a pretty moment. When you read the text of what he was saying, it felt hollow. It was loud words, but there didn't seem to be any heart within them. That's a trend that I have really seen since coming to the university, where people will get fired up about quite a few things, and they have every right to be fired up. But when it comes to the substance of their critiques, it rings a bit hollow. The words are there, but the complaints just don't appear to hold any water, especially if you take the time to sit down with them.

([00:15:39](#)):

I'm a big believer in talking to people to reason with them, not to try to convert them or anything, but to sit down and discuss.

Steve McGuire ([00:17:04](#)):

Yeah, that's really interesting. Another part of the speech that I really liked was where you talked about how we need to have a forum where ideas or opinions can be exchanged without a threat of violence. You think about politics. Obviously, people become very impassioned about politics, and fairly so, because whether you decide on policy X or policy Y, that could have profound implications for people and their lives. So these are important things. Sometimes people even view them as existentially important to them.

([00:17:43](#)):

Yet I think you're onto something when you said in your speech that even still, we need to have places where we can come together and talk. I was wondering if you could maybe elaborate on that and explain why you think even when it comes to things that we deeply disagree about or things that we are very worked up about because we find them to be so important that we should still be able to set aside some place, some time where we can talk and maybe set certainly the violence aside, but maybe even the need to win politically in that moment, if you agree with that.

Jered Cooper ([00:18:27](#)):

Oh, I truly do for that part. That's where the student of history within me came out. So often, if you look at recorded history, people who feel as if their ideas aren't mainstream or accepted, they go underground, and it's fine when it's just ... For example, I'm going to use a very lightweight example here, Joe Johnson and his coalition of people who believe that all public buildings should have water fountains that dispense soda as well. That's their belief. They get shouted down by the majority. So they go underground, because they don't feel safe. My big fear is that when people do that, because when the majority decides that, "Hey, this is not an accepted idea," and they refuse to open the doors of the public forum to the example, they go underground. They get angry. They get frustrated, and eventually they decide to take action.

([00:19:32](#)):

I'm not talking about a nice petition or a peaceful protest. They take certain drastic measures that at the end of the day we all suffer from. Then you have on the evening news the talking heads and the pundits, and they go, "Well, how did this happen?" In my experience, you can always draw that line from how did we get to a chaotic event? Well, all these years ago or decades ago or generations ago, you didn't give them a chance, this opposition team. You didn't give them a chance to enter, to speak in good faith, and to share their thoughts. It doesn't mean you have to believe them.

Steve McGuire ([00:20:55](#)):

That's great. Yeah, that was a really powerful part of the speech for me.

Gabby Anglin ([00:21:01](#)):

I don't know if you are familiar with some of the student surveys that are showing students are routinely censoring themselves in the classroom and even just on campus in general with their friends. These numbers are incredibly alarming. I just wondered if that is something that you've experienced or you know your peers experienced. You told us about the class that you go in, and 14 people don't agree with you. It seems that maybe you aren't self-censoring. But are there situations where you do or you know your friends might be scared to speak up?

Jered Cooper ([00:21:34](#)):

Oh, certainly. Again, this is one of those. How much time do you have? I have friends who ... Typically, it is my conservative-leaning friends. Higher education, let's acknowledge it. It is a primarily liberal area, not small L liberal, big L liberal. It's where they go, and they learn. That's fine. That's great. It's beautiful. We should all be seeking to better ourselves through education. But the flip side of that coin is that conservatives and libertarians and people on the more right-leaning spectrum, well, they don't feel safe to express anything that isn't in the particular quadrant of the political compass.

[\(00:22:20\)](#):

I'm a unique self-censorer. Sometimes I will stand, and I enjoy playing devil's advocate. It makes the conversation more fun. If we have 15 people agree on one topic, well, then that's no fun for anyone. Sometimes I like to poke the bear a little bit, but that's usually when it comes to classical discussions, your political theory in a broad context, your historical examples. But when it comes to matters of today, I sit there silent, and I have so many friends who do the same. We don't dare interject our voice, because on paper, it seems to be a one against the world type of scenario.

[\(00:23:02\)](#):

But as you pointed out, with these surveys of self-censorship, at my university, it reminds me of I had a luncheon with a member of the College Republicans Club, and they were telling me, "We have more members than the University Democrats. There are people who share our views." I said, "Well, that points to you." That also somewhat proves how I feel, that there are people there. But the self-censorship puts them in the shadows, because they just don't want to deal with the retribution. I understand that. There are certain opinions that I hold that I wouldn't dare express in certain classes, because why would I want to over-complicate my life in this classroom with a professor who holds the key to my academic future? Why would I dare? To do so would be a suicide mission, almost.

Steve McGuire [\(00:23:54\)](#):

That's really interesting that you bring that up at the end, because these surveys that Gabby's referring to, the question will ask, "How often do you self-censor?" or "Do you self-censor?" It's usually something along the lines of out of fear that it will be unwelcome or because of how students or faculty or administrators will respond. One of the questions that people ask about these data is, "Well, why are students self-censoring?" There may well be circumstances in life in which people naturally self-censor, just because it's polite in those circumstances or a courteous thing to do. But when you're in a classroom, say, a political science classroom, talking about political issues or current events, you'd think that that would be one of these forums where people would be at liberty to share for the sake of advancing the conversation, learning from one another, that sort of thing.

[\(00:24:57\)](#):

But I guess my question is from your perspective, when students do self-censor in these circumstances where you'd people to feel like they could speak up, whether that's in the classroom or in the dining hall, where you're talking about current events, say, with some friends or some peers or something like that, why are students self-censoring? Are they doing it more because they're worried about how their peers will react, and they don't want to be social outcasts? Are they doing it along the lines of what you were just mentioning, that, "Well, I'm not going to disagree with my professor or what I think my professor thinks in the classroom or in a paper, because I don't want that to hurt my grade"? Are they worried that administrators or, say, res life staff might write them up if they say something that people complain about? Is it all of the above? What would you say the driving concerns are for students in your experience when they do self-censor?

Jered Cooper ([00:25:59](#)):

Well, speaking to what has occurred in my own life, it is D, all of the above. My first semester of college, before I was at the University of Virginia, I took a history course, and the professor actually used the 1619 Project as a resource. I was just taken aback. I was not a happy camper, to put it in a polite term. I wrote a whole paper, which in a way refuted the findings in that project. It was somewhat of an opinion-based paper, and I pushed back on it. My grade did suffer for it. It was not as high as my peers, who had kept the status quo, in a way. So you have that one prong of the wheel. The professor with the magic pen can make or break you. I'm fortunate now. At UVA, I've had so many wonderful professors, professors of all various political stripes, and to my best knowledge, they do not penalize people for their viewpoints, which then takes us to the next prong on that great wheel, peers.

([00:27:10](#)):

As the old saying goes, kids can be cruel, and especially when you're at a university. These are people you spend a great deal of your time with. Even in a student body of, oh, 18,000 undergrads, it's not as big as you would think. Your concern then if you're sitting in that classroom is, "If I say this, will it get out of this room?" The advent of the cell phone and social media means whatever you say will eventually get disseminated among the masses, and then you enter that mode of self-preservation. "Will this come back to get me and my friend group?" or "My 'friends,' will they turn their backs on me?" I don't think a true friend would turn a back on someone for saying something that they don't personally agree with, but that's neither here nor there.

([00:28:07](#)):

But with my whole social standing, because human beings, we are social creatures, would our circles then turn their backs on us because we expressed a viewpoint? Rather than sit in your mind and go through this mental checklist of, "Well, if I do X, then will this happen?," it's simply much simpler. Rather than having to go through the parade of terribles and horribles and worst-case scenarios, it's simply easier to put on a happy face, adhere to the professors. If you appear to have a professor who believes a certain thing and is very vehement in their beliefs, well, then it's just simple to swallow hard, take it. If you're in a classroom with your peers and the professor or your classmates are saying things you don't agree with, it's much easier to grin and bear, to just bite your tongue, smile and nod, and get to the next chapter, because it can be a dangerous game.

Gabby Anglin ([00:29:16](#)):

ACTA works on a lot of resources with advice for faculty on how to foster intellectual diversity and free expression in their classrooms. We have a campus freedom toolkit, and we have a whole report about how to build a culture of free expression in the online classroom, which was incredibly important during the pandemic. I was a student during the pandemic. We had situations where my classmates began to self-censor because they realized that people could record the Zoom class. What was happening was snippets of class where we were supposed to be able to speak freely were getting recorded and then tweeted out, and students felt like they were being retaliated against by their peer groups.

([00:30:04](#)):

So ACTA tries to provide a lot of guidance for faculty, and it's clear that you have a lot of great professors that you seem to hold in very high regard. So I'd be interested to know what it's been like as a student in a classroom every single day, seeing how your professors are handling civil dialogue, viewpoint diversity, intellectual diversity in the classroom. What do you think they're doing well? What do you think they maybe aren't handling so well? Maybe some advice you have for them.

Jered Cooper ([00:30:42](#)):

Oh, that's a great question. For the most part, I do have to hold my professors in high esteem. I can think of three instances of professors that I've had who all take slightly different approaches to the matter, but still come out on top, in a way. My political dialogue professor, her game plan was she never revealed her cards. We sat there for an entire semester, and we would try to figure out. We'd go, "Where does she fall on the spectrum?" We could not figure it out to save our lives. Her role in classroom discussion was more of a facilitator, to keep people on time, to make sure that the conversation didn't get too far off into the weeds. If the conversation took a turn, her job was to just gently guide it back into place. That was a productive model, because you don't come across as biased. You can't figure out the side. Well, then you become the impartial third party.

([00:31:46](#)):

The second approach was in my constitutional theory class. Now, here, my professor did have a political leaning. She leaned towards the more blue side of the spectrum, but she never once let that cloud her judgment. She would often use great dissents written by conservative justices and liberal justices, times when a liberal court maybe got the decision wrong, times when the conservative court maybe got the decision wrong. So that was helpful, that even though we knew where she fell or we had a pretty good inclination, it never got in the way of classroom questions.

([00:32:29](#)):

The third approach I have is somewhat the flip side of it, a professor in one course who leaned more conservative, but again took every instance to give us examples of, "Here's the way a politician on the left it. Here's the way a politician on the right did that action. Here's the way it works. Here's how it's going down. Here's a pro, a con." While, again, we knew where she stood, she went to great lengths to talk the other side and to speak to them as people, not as failed or frightening or the worst thing ever, but to talk to them as equals, which again helped her credibility with us. We loved her, and she was truly wonderful.

Gabby Anglin ([00:33:21](#)):

What it sounds like to me is that it's really important professors take an active, rather than passive approach to promoting civil dialogue in the classroom.

Jered Cooper ([00:34:05](#)):

100%. There has to be a captain of the ship. It can't just be a bunch of 20-year-olds. As a 20-year-old, I like to think I know a thing or two, but you can't just have a room full of us driving the conversation, because it will go everywhere and nowhere.

Steve McGuire ([00:35:17](#)):

Jered, I wonder from a student perspective, how do you detect whether a professor will be open to free expression or not? I would imagine in some cases, when I was a professor, I used to try to do this myself, right? I was teaching seminar-style classes, so they were dialogue-based classes, and I would communicate from the beginning that this was a free and open discussion and that they didn't have to agree with things that I said. They didn't have to agree with things that we read in the text, that the goal was to think and to enter into dialogue and hear one another and learn from the text, but also question it, that sort of thing. But I imagine sometimes, too, maybe you don't even need to hear that. You can maybe somehow tell if a professor is going to be open or not. Have you had professors who have

communicated that directly to you versus you just pick it up as you go along that this person's going to be open?

Jered Cooper ([00:36:16](#)):

There are ways. To sound like a professor, the syllabus is your greatest resource. So often, they will put what the objectives are. As someone who takes a great deal of political-related coursework, we are going to get political, and they will put that at the top, or they will say this in person on the first day. They'll say something along the lines of, "I'm going to say things you're not going to agree with. I'm going to say things that you will agree with. I want you to push back." I love when that happens.

Steve McGuire ([00:39:09](#)):

You're right, though. Class can get pretty boring if you don't have somebody or a few people in there who want to ask some questions or offer some competing opinions. Certainly that was my experience running seminars. Yeah, if you're in a room with 16 students who all essentially agree or don't want to talk when they disagree, that does not make for a very good seminar. The best seminars were usually the ones where there was a good mix of students in the room already from the beginning who wanted to talk, right? We used to say once you're paying attention to how to get the conversation going, things have already gone off the rails a little bit. There's lots of pedagogical techniques you can use to get back on. But ideally, right from the start, you've got a mix of people who want to be involved in the conversation and speak up.

Jered Cooper ([00:40:06](#)):

That's a beautiful thing. There are some times when I would have a seminar, and we would all be on the same page. It was supposed to take up 90 minutes. We finished up the main point in 10, and it was just a circle of people going, "I agree. That was a great point." Sometimes you have to sit there and go, "I push back on this." Then all of a sudden, the room comes alive. People who were five minutes ago nodding their heads and shaking their hands in agreement with each other were ready to defend their positions to the end. At the conclusion of class, people's minds weren't changed. At the end of the class period, we all held to our individual beliefs. But an effective seminar, an effective dialogue means that you walk away at least considering some of the points, not to convert people.

([00:41:04](#)):

That is a big thing I learned in my political dialogue class, is that we should not try to convert people every time we speak to them, but to at least leave them with some overarching thoughts that they can take home with them and meditate on. Maybe if in time the individual comes to that conclusion that, "Hey, what if what that person was telling me that day, what if they were correct?" Maybe they go on a path of realization. That's great. That's wonderful. But me trying to beat this into you with my words and refusing to yield and silencing all other opposing views, well, that's not good for anyone.

Steve McGuire ([00:41:48](#)):

Yeah, that's great.

Gabby Anglin ([00:44:15](#)):

Yeah, I love that. So these what are being called shout-downs are happening on campus literally across the country, because you've got Ann Coulter at Cornell clear to Judge Kyle Duncan at Stanford. What's happening is these speakers, who are most of the time being approved by the administration coming to

speak on campus, and you have students who are upset about it. They're showing up and literally preventing the speaker from going on by sometimes making farting noises. It's so trivial. You've talked about Kellyanne Conway coming to your campus, and I know that there was some frustration and some student protest in relation to that. I know that sometimes these students say, "Well, this speaker can't come because their words are dangerous." I was wondering if you thought that maybe there's an even deeper danger in not allowing this person to speak at all.

Jered Cooper ([00:45:24](#)):

Absolutely. There is a deeper danger in silencing the loyal opposition. Now, I want to make it clear I have no problem with a peaceful protest. Peaceful protests are one of the bedrock principles of our society, a respectful protest, not one with lewd noises or random acts of violence, and a silent protest in the way of not even showing up. A lot of these speaking series and events, they're not mandatory. You do not have to go. Your lack of presence can be just as powerful as embarrassing yourself and your school community.

Jered Cooper ([00:46:56](#)):

Thank you. Thank you. But the heckler's veto. That's not right. So often it's a fringe group who claims to take the banner of the majority. They're not really the majority. They're just the ones screaming at the top of their lungs. The heckler's veto is dangerous. It can't be allowed to pervade our universities and our institutions. It just does a disservice to everyone. I know I did not come to college, I did not pay the money and take the tests and make the sacrifices so I could sit and be swaddled in the warm embrace of ideas that make me feel good, because there's a world out there, and it's filled with a million ideas from millions upon millions of people with their own life experiences and perspectives.

([00:47:52](#)):

So much of what I'd like to do when I get older is to enter the policymaking arena. I have to understand where people come from. I have to understand Joe from California so that I can help him. I have to be able to listen to Mary from Tennessee to give her assistance. When you have colleges take the first step and you have an administration that cowers to the fear of the mob, the mob mentality of, "Oh, well, this person, they're upsetting the student body" ... They may not really be upsetting the student body. You just happen to be hearing the loudest wheel. The squeaky wheel gets the oil, as they say. You're doing everyone else a disservice. You're robbing them of their educational experience. Refunds should be issued. I believe if a school cancels a speaker, if they bend to the pressure of the mob, they ought to give refunds out to their students, because the intellectual diversity that they paid a great deal of money for is not being provided.

Steve McGuire ([00:48:56](#)):

That's great. We'd certainly at ACTA like to see some kind of consequences instituted for students who shut down speakers and prevent the university from carrying out its function as it's supposed to do. In fact, our president, Michael Poliakoff, sometimes draws a parallel between shouting down a speaker and an act of academic dishonesty, like plagiarism, in the sense that both strike at the very nature of the university and prevent it from carrying out its purpose.

([00:49:32](#)):

Gabby was asking you about the shutdown of contemporary speakers, people who are still alive and can visit your campus and come talk to students. We also see and have for some time pushes to remove the names of, say, historical speakers from campus or to take down monuments, often because they either

held moral views that many now find to be noxious or they engage in activities that we find to be morally wrong. I know at UVA, there are students who would like to remove Thomas Jefferson's name from any association with the university because he was a slave owner. I'm wondering what you think about efforts such as those, especially because you have expressed, I think, some appreciation for the American founders and the political system and the political tradition that they created.

Jered Cooper ([00:50:38](#)):

Those acts, such as removing a statue or removing a name or trying to disassociate oneself from a historical figure, those actions truly make my blood boil. I get there's a level of deep frustration and indignation I feel, because now I'll level with opponents and critics. The Founding Fathers were not perfect men. They were flawed. We're all flawed, but they had brilliant ideas. They expressed viewpoints that are fundamental to who we are. Were they a bundle of contradictions at times? Yes. But so many of them deeply believed in these Enlightenment principles of equality and equal justice under law.

([00:51:31](#)):

When you come back today through our modern lens and you've scrutinized the founders and so many of the great, gallant men of American history and you put them under the microscope and people start picking apart, the first big red flag is there's no ending point. I believe it was in 2020 when everyone wanted to take down the statues of Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis, and some people went as far as to take down statues of Ulysses S. Grant. Then they moved further, and they removed a statue of Thomas Jefferson from the City Hall in New York.

([00:52:10](#)):

Every historical figure, even us today, one day, we will be judged by generations yet unborn. There are things that we've done that aren't perfect, but the hindsight and the advancement of human history means that, yes, this will happen. There are accepted beliefs we have today that in 50 years will be questioned by our children in that, and that's okay. There is no shame in questioning. There is no shame in saying, "Yes, Thomas Jefferson owned slaves." There is no shame in admitting that. The issue comes when you want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Yes, Thomas Jefferson owned slaves, but he was also a proponent of religious freedom. It was his brilliant mind that penned the words, "All men are created equal," that they are endowed with those inalienable rights, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Yes, George Washington owned slaves, but his courage and conviction to lead the Revolutionary Army through those bitter winters at Valley Forge and to an eventual success at Yorktown and to the Constitutional Convention, where, in my opinion, the world's greatest document was created.

([00:53:24](#)):

When we have people today, many of them my peers of my age, who were adamant that Lee Davis, Grant, Washington, Jefferson, Madison, the whole lot ... Especially for the University of Virginia, we have three presidents of the United States that were intimately involved in our founding, Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe. All three of them owned slaves, and I'm not going to say they were perfect. None of us are. But the ideals which they fought and they dedicated their lives towards, free and open inquiry, accessibility of thought to the masses, and ardent belief in the Enlightenment principles, that you don't always have to believe what you've been told from a higher authority. Go out and seek the truth yourself, which on paper, I believe if I just told someone in that sentence and I didn't put in the qualifiers and people, they would agree with that. We are a society that seeks those Enlightenment principles.

([00:54:30](#)):

But when we get so wrapped up in the individual minor flaws, when we get so compelled and we become afraid of the past, I think the past starts to scare people. They have an unhealthy fear of it. That fear is a frightening prospect, and it is not right. It will never be right, and I will defend these men and even the women, men and women, these people of the past with all of my might.

Steve McGuire ([00:55:06](#)):

That's fantastic. Looking at it from the perspective of your peers who either may be like Gabby's peers as well, who didn't want to hear what this other student had to say in the classroom or they don't want to give Kellyanne Conway a space to speak on campus or they don't want to see Thomas Jefferson's name or a statue of him, I just have two questions. What do you think is motivating them? Why are they having that reaction? Two, do you think that there's somewhere where they're getting these ideas? Where are they learning that a response to a person who you disagree with or to hearing something that you don't like or that you find offensive or even hurtful, that the response is to try to either shout that person down or exclude them, prevent them from speaking?

Jered Cooper ([00:56:12](#)):

Well, I think the first instinct is I think we learn from those who go before us. We learn from our elders. If we first look at it through the national lens, whenever you turn on your TV and you see the hosts and the politicians engaging in shouting matches and even on the floor of the House of Representatives and in the 50 state capitols, you see the yelling, the hostility, the shouting down of people who have opposing viewpoints, and you see that and you take that with you. It's also posted on the internet. It's on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, whatever your platform of choice is. You see them do that, and it's accelerating a recent trend. From my studies of the past, it's more of a 21st century trend. It's accelerating this fear of words.

([00:57:20](#)):

We have a fear of words and a fear of ideas, and both of them are irrational. We're not afraid of regular words or regular ideas. We're afraid that if one person believes this, the whole deck of cards will fall down. If just one person expresses a sympathetic viewpoint to a "fringe minority opinion," which, spoiler, isn't really fringe and it really isn't minority, you've just made other people afraid to share, that the whole ecosystem will be destroyed.

([00:57:58](#)):

So with that double-pronged approach, we emulate what we see in our elected leaders, and the advent of technology disseminates this information, these pictures. I don't know if it's just me, but there have been an awful lot of protests in the past few years. I don't know if it's just me not paying attention to the world or if we've had a surge in them, but it seems every five minutes, someone's protesting something, some act, some person, some idea. These protests aren't always peaceful on the streets. They're escalating. They're harassing members of Congress. They're interrupting legislative proceedings. They're robbing us all. In a way, just as the speaker who isn't allowed to share their thoughts on a college campus robs the students of intellectual diversity, if you shout down an opposing view in the legislature, you're robbing the people.

([00:58:59](#)):

This type of theft, it has to stop. Unfortunately, I don't quite know how. The public universities are a good place to start, but as we've already discussed, they're emulating the actions that they see from adults and established figures. So it's this loop. To stop one, we have to stop the other, but we can't stop

the hecklers on the floor of the House without stopping the silencing of speakers on the campuses. It's a double-pronged approach that I wish I could solve. That's why I'm in college.

You don't have to go to college to be successful, and our country is a testament to so many great and wonderful people that have taken the road less traveled and reached the stars. But in any case, universities are the ways that ... because they draw together people from all walks of life. You don't get that experience in high school.

[\(01:01:30\)](#):

I come from Maryland. I go to school in Virginia, and some of my closest friends are from California, Illinois, Texas, and New York. In no other circumstance would I ever meet these people, but I did at college. The exposure is the big word here.

[\(01:02:32\)](#):

I think people are afraid of that. It's scary to have something that you hold dear challenged, but you can't cling to ideas for dear life. An idea is just that, an idea. Sometimes ideas can be turned into facts. The theory of gravity, that was an idea. The sun being the center of the universe, that was an idea, an idea that people didn't like, an idea that people were penalized for expressing, only for the same powers that be to eventually admit, "Okay, yes, the sun is the center of the universe. I was wrong."

[\(01:03:14\)](#):

So step one to preventing this poison in the greenhouse is you have to open the doors. It's almost as if you're ripping off a bandaid. Some people are going to cry, metaphorically or literally. But it's going to be a little uncomfortable. But once you expose yourself to opposing viewpoints, take in the words. You don't have to agree with them. If you don't want to hear them, you don't have to be there. To somewhat go back to the previous question, if you don't like Thomas Jefferson, you don't have to go to his university. Virginia has so many excellent institutions. You don't have to go or you don't have to see or you don't have to do. We are a society of choice.

[\(01:03:59\)](#):

But for those who are remaining, those who want to take the challenge, to hear the thoughts, to hear the words, to think about them, add them into their toolkit of perspectives, then eventually we can return to the way that we used to be, where you could speak and a word and a phrase and an idea wouldn't cause you to cower in the corner and decide to scream and shout and disrupt everything. So at my fundamental route, I am a bit of an idealist. I know that idea's a little pie in the sky, but it's a hope.

Steve McGuire [\(01:04:43\)](#):

Well, we could probably use a little bit of idealism right now, given how polarized things have become. That's probably a great place to stop. So thanks very much for joining us, Jered. It's been a delightful conversation, and I know I for one am looking forward to seeing what you do to help our country, going forward.

Jered Cooper [\(01:05:07\)](#):

Thank you. It has been such a privilege to speak with you this afternoon. ACTA is doing a lot of wonderful work, and I am so proud to be affiliated with you.

Gabby Anglin [\(01:05:19\)](#):

Thank you for being a guest on Higher Ed Now.