

Michael Poliakoff ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to Higher Ed Now. This afternoon we have an extraordinary privilege of having as our guest Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Ayaan Hirsi Ali is probably well known to our higher ed audience. She has been a voice, a clarion voice to protect the interests of women all over the world, and has become one of the leading advocates for the free exchange of ideas, and indeed a clarion voice for the importance of Western civilization. In 2016, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni had the privilege of presenting to her and to her husband, historian Niall Ferguson, our Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. At that time, Ayaan delivered a speech called Preserving the Values of the West. I want to capture that moment, because it is so important right now.

([01:06](#)):

First, a little background about Ayaan. Escaping from the domination of fundamentalist Islam and from the threat of a forced marriage, she fled to The Netherlands where she got political asylum, and within 11 years was a member of the Dutch Parliament. There she worked with filmmaker Theo Van Gogh on a film to alert the world to the mistreatment of women in Islam. As our audience will know, Theo was assassinated by a Muslim terrorist, and Ayaan's life was threatened. That has not deterred her ever since for being an advocate for all the values of the West. There's where I'd like to begin, Ayaan, preserving the values of the West.

([01:59](#)):

On October 7, the utter barbarity of the Hamas terrorism rather reminds us that we are in a civilizational crisis, although on campuses in the United States, you wouldn't know that. There's been a real weakness of will in calling out the appalling behavior, and what's worse, we have to ask ourselves who so miseducated students that they would think that backing a terrorist group that has only hatred for the West would be an appropriate way to behave. With that, I turn it over to you. How did we get here?

Ayaan Hirsi Ali ([02:45](#)):

It's of course a long story, but the little bit of that story that I know is that we got here by design, that we, throughout Western civilization, as a course from high schools and universities, that we got ourselves into a controversy about our heritage and our legacy, that we adopted an attitude. I think that started out with critical thinking about the history and legacy of Western civilization and of the United States in particular.

([03:26](#)):

That opened the door to an agenda that is Marxist and what we now have come to call the Woke revolutionary movement. Their agenda is not to engage in critical thinking about the history of America and the history of the West. It's to promote an agenda that the history of the West is one of exploitation, of enslavement, of robbing other cultures and other territories of their precious goods and stones, and that the only way to correct this history of centuries of injustice is to strip everything of its Westernness, of its Judeo-Christian roots.

([04:21](#)):

The language that they use is to deconstruct. What they mean by that, what it boils down to, to deconstruct is to destroy. You should not be surprised that there are students who have been marinated in this ideology, who are coming out onto the campuses and saying that they're liberating Palestine from the colonizer, the oppressor that is Israel, and suddenly giving reality this twist that Jews and Jewish people are white oppressors who colonize. This is a program that is present in all our campuses and it's taught, and the individuals who were indoctrinated in this way are acting on the basis of those beliefs.

Michael Poliakoff ([05:20](#)):

I should tell our audience, last night we had the privilege of hosting a program at the Palm Beach Synagogue at which Ayaan spoke, and spoke eloquently. You had at that point suggested the necessity of rebuilding a core curriculum. I'd like to get more of your thoughts on that as a remedy for the sloppy thinking, the absence of critical thinking, the desire to silence rather than to engage.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali ([05:55](#)):

I think we are going to have to fight an uphill battle to bring back the classics. You teach the classics to bring back what they dismiss as dead old white men. The cultural giants of the past, be it in literature, in science, in the humanities, all of that I think has to be dusted off and it has to come back. If we don't do it, we're going to face and I think we're already facing the reality of a generation that has been miseducated, as you so appropriately put it, who have no clue where all this comes from, who have absolutely no clue the hard work and pain and tears and blood that went into achieving what these kids are taking for granted. It is up to us, I think, the grownups, to get together and define exactly what it is that is wrong, to audit these universities and high schools ... I don't think it's only universities, I think K-12 ... to see what has gone wrong and fix it.

Michael Poliakoff ([07:19](#)):

My mind goes back to something that Andre Malraux wrote in 1948, that Western civilization has begun to doubt its own credentials. Of course, now we're at a place where it's not doubt or question, it's, as you put it, the absolute deconstruction of the heritage that we have, a very dangerous place to be. It makes me, in fact, jumping from Malraux to Yevtushenko, think of a line from one of Yevtushenko's poem that, "Who never knew the price of happiness will not be happy," and how quickly what we're seeing on campus suggests that there's no sense of, as you put it, the toil, the pain, the sacrifice that went into building a free society. I'd like to move, if I may, to this phenomenon that we're seeing, the burgeoning of these DEI offices with, in some cases like Berkeley, tens of millions of dollars going into these bureaucracies. Not scholarship programs, but bureaucracies.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali ([08:33](#)):

Administrators.

Michael Poliakoff ([08:35](#)):

Yes. Administrative bloat of the worst sort. I wanted to get some of your thoughts on the role that DEI is playing now in what appears to be a spiral downward, and maybe I'm being a little unfair about that, but I'd love to get your thoughts.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali ([08:58](#)):

I think once you understand the ideology and the ideological agenda ... so this postmodernist, deconstructionist, post-Marxist cultural conquest of our institutions ... the next point on that agenda is the how point. How do we access and take over control of these institutions? You do that through the administrative state, and the way they're doing it is through what they shroud in something that sounds good, like inclusivity and diversity and equality. They actually don't say equality, they say equity, which is about outcomes and not opportunities.

([09:50](#)):

What this DEI, diversity, equity and inclusion entails is that they get to appoint the people in positions of power, and especially in the positions of enforcers. Once they get to that, then you understand that personnel is policy. These people who come in through the DEI pipeline are the ones who are going to enforce the priorities of the Woke agenda. That's what DEI is about. The demand to have DEI officers and teachers and educators and indoctrinators in the school systems in universities and corporations, in the government, the United States government on different levels, that's what it is about.

[\(10:42\)](#):

It is about acquiring power and about control. It is in many ways also about evicting those individuals, those employees, that are seen to be an obstacle or seen to be preserving the old order, the order that they want to overthrow. That's what DEI is about. I think once you strip it of its nice-sounding surface, you get to the bottom of it. It is a way of acquiring power to turn these institutions into institutions of indoctrination, so that they own the hearts and minds of our kids.

Michael Poliakoff [\(11:24\)](#):

Of course, one of their major tools now is this idea of intersectionality. I'd love to get your thoughts on how this is being, I think it's fair to say, weaponized.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali [\(11:39\)](#):

Kimberle Crenshaw, who is one of the thinkers in this Critical Race Theory and in Woke ecology, is the one who coined intersectionality. It started with you had ... this is now using their language ... the oppressor, the white man, oppressing the Black man or Black people. She started to refine it more and to say if you're a Black woman, for instance, you are a victim times two. You are a victim of the system as it is with the white oppressor, but you're also, as a female, oppressed by males. You can take this intersectionality matrix and divide it, as they have done, into these little pieces, where our society is divided into groups with identities that no one can do anything about like skin color and gender.

[\(12:44\)](#):

I know that they're inventing these gender fluid identities, but in any case, the LGBT people, and in that intersectionality matrix, they all stand in relation to one another of the degree to which they are a victim of the oppressive system with the white heterosexual man on the top. That's the guy you have to topple. Then with I suppose an individual who is LGBT, female, blind or in some other way disabled, probably overweight, at the very bottom. That is how they divide our society. I use the word divide with intent, because their agenda is one of dividing and it's divisive, and it's intended that way.

Michael Poliakoff [\(13:45\)](#):

This takes us in a rather painful way to the antisemitism problem. Of course, according to the Nazis, Jews were not white. For the Aryan supremacists, they're in fact not white people, but for the intersectionalists, they're super white. In a way, they seem to have made themselves the ultimate targets of the radical left. That's a very dangerous place to be, on a college campus in particular.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali [\(14:30\)](#):

Absolutely, because in that game of who is more of a victim, Jewish people are on all the wrong squares of the matrix. Yes, they're regarded as white, but not only that, they're high achievers, and achievement and merit is supposedly a white supremacist trick that was invented to oppress all the others on that matrix. The Jews care a great deal and put a great deal of attention into family, the nuclear family,

monogamy, husband, wife, children, and children raised within marriage, that marriage. For the intersectionality crowd, that is another white supremacist attitude.

[\(15:25\)](#):

I think ultimately what is seen as the Jewish sin is that, after the Holocaust and after the survival of that terrible history, the Jews didn't come out and present themselves as victims. They came out and they flourished and they built. They had a dream to have a home of their own, the State of Israel. They built that, and that state, in an environment surrounded by mortal enemies, the State of Israel started to thrive and to flourish. They cannot explain any of that. That's an obstacle to the dream that they have of stripping American society and other Western societies, stripping them down, destroying them, so that they can redistribute or have the power. They think that they can redistribute wealth to all the other victims. Jews are not presenting themselves as victims.

[\(16:30\)](#):

The narrative of decolonization is applied so that Israel is now the colonizer and the Palestinian people are the victims. Logically, the liberation activism is to decolonize, to rescue the Palestinians and do what the Palestinians are demanding, which is from the river to the sea, Israel shall be free. In other words, Israel shall be destroyed. In identity politics, in the logic of the intersectional neo-Marxist pseudosciences, the position of the Jew is one of elimination. It's not really very different from the Stalinist view of the Jew or even Hitler's view of the Jew. It's all intertwined. Then you put on a splash of Islamist religious theological underpinnings and you have a resurgence of antisemitism.

Michael Poliakoff [\(17:39\)](#):

I'd like to move us from the really, really disquieting diagnosis that honest people have to have of where we are to the things that might give you hope. Your life has been a story of triumph over adversity personally, and you are now the leader of a foundation, the Ayaan Hirsi Ali Foundation, and I'd like to encourage you to talk about what your vision is for things that you and the foundation can do to, as we would say in Cabalistic language, heal a broken world.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali [\(18:33\)](#):

Yeah. I think I like it that you say what gives us hope, what are the positive things that we see, even though we face these amazing challenges from inside and of course our external adversaries, the Communist Party of China, Iran, political Islam. We have all of these issues that we have to grapple with. Where is the hope? I think when you look at all of these narratives, we have the best story. The Judeo-Christian story is a story of life, of dignity, of freedom, of pluralism, of tolerance. We just really need to act. We know from our own Judeo-Christian history that every time we act, we recognize evil and we act against it, we do have to endure a great sacrifice, but we always win, so we have to act.

[\(19:34\)](#):

As far as my foundation is concerned, for me, it embodies my activism. It's a platform from where I can tell my story. I established it in 2007. What was on my mind back then was Muslim women who were subjected to female genital mutilation and honor killings and honor violence, and no one was talking about what they were going through and their suffering. That was what the foundation started to do initially. There was freedom of speech challenges, and that is what the foundation was doing. I started to write about and fight, using that platform, the Islamist-driven antisemitism that we are seeing now.

[\(20:19\)](#):

I want to continue and say right now, I want to use that foundation also as a platform to recapture our educational institutions from K-12 and beyond. The programming then is to continue what we were doing, and in addition, to add outreach to parents, to teachers who actually care, to students, and stand up for what we believe in, which is to retrieve these Judeo-Christian moral principles and demand that these things be taught at school to our kids and expose that.

[\(21:00\)](#):

I'm not going to go and engage in the whole exercise of banning things and getting things banned. I don't believe in that. I think when you ban things, they just go underground. You can compete with it by saying, "This is the stuff that I want us to be teaching our kids." That's what I want to devote my foundation to, fighting for these Judeo-Christian model principles and institutions that I believe in that have given me so much.

Michael Poliakoff [\(21:29\)](#):

I know many people last night at the Palm Beach Synagogue, where you gave such a wonderful presentation, were not aware of the force of dawa, as you described it. I think it would be good for us to hear a little bit more about the way we have got to counter a very, very well developed propaganda machine.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali [\(21:57\)](#):

Yeah. I think every time you hear jihad, you should also think dawa. Jihad is the violent terrorist aspect of radical Islam. We understand it, and organizations like Al-Qaeda have emerged. We destroyed Al-Qaeda, at least the organization, not the ideology. We understand, when Hamas attacks and they shout Allah and they declare jihad, we understand that that is a violent jihad. What we don't understand is the concept of dawa, which precedes jihad. That is the concept that explains Islamist outreach.

[\(22:44\)](#):

The call to Islam, first of all of Muslims who are seen as lapsed, who are not practicing Islam, who are not engaged in political Islam. Dawa is used to call them and bring them back into the fold. Dawa is used as a fundraising activity, to raise money to spread political Islam. It's to build Islamic centers, madrasas, mosques, from where all of these messages of Islamists can be propagated. It's to train a whole cadre of people that go out and convert African Americans, Hispanic Americans. They target very vulnerable communities, and say they're calling them to the religion of peace. Only later on will jihad actually come into play, but at first it's all about converting, winning hearts and minds for their cause.

[\(23:42\)](#):

They're active on campuses. They're active in schools. They're active in the government. They're active everywhere, and so fast, we need to understand dawa and its intended effect, and then to mount a counter-dawa with our message being a message for life, for liberty, for pluralism, for real equality between men and women and all people of different ethnicities, and to fight against antisemitism. With the dawa that the Islamists engage in, the dawa of the Islamist is a message of death. It's a message of inequality. It's a message of misogyny. It's a message of antisemitism. I think it's very, very important that we mount that counter-dawa.

Michael Poliakoff [\(24:33\)](#):

Of course, you saw this from the very inside, from your childhood on, before escaping from it. Can you give a few details for our audience to understand what you witnessed, and why you're bringing such passion to protecting the West from what you see as a genuine civilizational threat?

Ayaan Hirsi Ali ([25:00](#)):

What I witnessed was I was a teenager. I lived in Nairobi, Kenya, with my mother and grandmother and my siblings. I went to school. We were poor. We had a challenged childhood, but we didn't hate anyone. The Islamists, the Muslim Brotherhood, came and established themselves in our schools and neighborhoods, and they told us we were not true Muslims, and that they understood and were there to teach us true Islam.

([25:36](#)):

They taught us to read the Quran and translate it into our languages, and the hadith, which is the message of the Prophet Muhammad, and they gave us a manual of action. That action was to hate. It was first of all to call the infidels to become Muslim. If the infidels refused to do that, to cut ties with them. They told us about Israel and Jews, and they asked us to pray for the destruction of Jews, to collect money, charity and send so that the Jews could be killed eventually, for those lucky enough to be in a place to kill Jews, to kill Jews.

([26:13](#)):

Now, I want to make our listeners understand that this Islamist message of Jew hatred does not make a distinction between different types of Jews. They don't care whether you are orthodox or liberal, whether you believe or you don't. They don't care if you're a child or a Holocaust survivor. It's a grandmother. They don't care whether you're male or female. They don't care what you vote. To them, you are a Jew, and you're wicked and you're spreading hatred, and you're a monster and you have horns on your head, and there's only one thing to be done with you and that's to be killed. They want to destroy the state of Israel. That's what I learned as a 14-year-old, 15-year-old, 16-year-old. I internalized it.

([27:00](#)):

Unfortunately, I came to believe it too, and the first time I ever saw Jews, it was in Antwerp. It was in 1993. I was in an asylum seeker center, and we were taken on a day out. When the guide said, "We're in a Jewish neighborhood," I said, "Oh, really? Where? Where are the Jews?" He pointed to people walking on the sidewalk, and I thought, "But that can't be." I was actually slightly disappointed, because the whole sensational being that I was expecting with the horns and the nose and the big ears, that didn't materialize. It was just normal people. I said, "But those are normal people." The guide said, "What did you expect?" When I explained what I expected, I was laughed at.

Michael Poliakoff ([27:49](#)):

A painful story, and again, a real warning that we've got to be very careful of romanticizing and projecting our own thoughts. Well, Ayaan, this is, as always, a wonderful conversation. Is there anything that you particularly would like to cover and share with our higher ed audience?

Ayaan Hirsi Ali ([28:13](#)):

Well, for the higher ed audience, I would say you have the key to solving this problem, which is higher ed, which is education in general, to educate. To enlighten and to educate, to bring awareness to the history and the values and the things that we have that we are being asked to give up. I think the activism has to come from there. It is on the platforms of education and information and knowledge that we have to fight these people, so stand up and act.

Michael Poliakoff ([28:50](#)):

Well, I should say that on ACTA, we'll be privileged to work with the Ayaan Hirsi Ali Foundation in doing the outreach that brings vibrant debate, dialogue, and understanding and knowledge, and the cherishing of the values that have formed this society. We have a tendency, I think, in the West to be our own critics, which is in and of itself a good thing. That's a virtue, but once it slips into a kind of self-hatred, it's a very dangerous thing.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali ([29:30](#)):

Yeah. Likewise, I would like to work with ACTA. I would like to work with anyone who wants to help fight this monster. It's the evil of our time, and we've got to fight. You can't hold onto liberal democracy and you can't hold onto what we've inherited, which is a great deal of wealth, without it being challenged. It's now our time to fight for it, and let's fight.

Michael Poliakoff ([30:00](#)):

Well, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, God bless you for all that you're doing, your courage, your vision, your unwillingness to bend, despite everything from threats to ongoing criticism in the press. You have been an incredible stalwart who inspires all of us. Thank you for last night for the great presentation that you gave, and for taking the time to be on Higher Ed Now.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali ([30:28](#)):

Thank you. Thank you very much, Michael. Thank you for all the work that you do and that ACTA does. Thank you so much. Thank you for bringing me here.

Michael Poliakoff ([30:39](#)):

It was thrilling to get some time together.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali ([30:41](#)):

Yes.