

Hundreds arrested in American campus protests

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Shut down: Police detained pro-Palestinian protesters at a university in the state of Georgia.

Is this how the “thought police” take over? Police in the USA have arrested anti-war protesters at universities. Some fear free speech is under attack.

What’s happening?

An elderly woman is dragged down the street by a policeman. Her crime? Attending a **protest**.

Last week, Noëlle McAfee, a teacher at a university in **Georgia**, was **arrested**. She had been taking part in a student-led protest against the war in **Gaza**.

As well as Professor McAfee, many students have been arrested across the **USA**.

Find out more

The USA is a key supporter of **Israel**. The protesters do not agree with the USA’s support for Israel’s war on Gaza, which began after **7 October** and has killed more than 34,000 **Palestinians**.

On 17 April, students at **New York’s** Columbia University set up a protest camp. The next day, police arrested over 100 people.

The right to protest and freedom of speech are key parts of any **democratic** society. However, many worry that US police are preventing criticism of America’s actions abroad.

According to Bassam Khawaja, a law professor at Columbia, the university staff “are really furious... even among people who don’t support the protests”.

However, critics argue that the protests are disrupting teaching and **intimidating** Jewish students. In his **Passover** message, US president Joe Biden appeared to agree, saying: “This **blatant anti-semitism**... has absolutely no place on college campuses.”

Is this how the “thought police” take over?

Some say

Some people say

“To sin by silence, when we should protest, makes cowards out of men.”

**Ella Wheeler Wilcox, (1815 – 1919),
American author and poet**

What do you think?

Yes! Shutting down protests is an attack on freedom of speech. Nobody is made safer by inviting the police onto a university **campus** with weapons and riot gear.

Others think

No! The protests are taking place on private land and intimidating Jewish students. Universities must protect all students and make sure that teaching can go ahead.

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Have you ever seen a protest taking place? Or have you taken part in one?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: What do most students at these universities think?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain about this story and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - Imagine you are the leader of a US university where protests are taking place. Would you ask the police to step in?

5. Express

What do others believe? - In groups, come up with a list of all the rights and freedoms that you think should exist in a democratic society.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Imagine that you lived in a society where criticising leaders was against the law. Describe what it would be like to use social media or even talk to friends.

Glossary

Protest - Around 500,000 people attended the Women’s March on Washington on January 21st. Similar marches took place in cities around the world; it is thought that around 5m people took part.

Georgia - A state in the southern USA. Also a country at the intersection of Europe and Asia.

Arrested - Stopped by the police and taken to a police station.

Gaza - The smaller of two Palestinian territories, home to two million people. It is located on the Mediterranean coast, surrounded by Israel and Egypt.

USA - The United States of America is a country in North America. It has a population of 329 million.

Israel - A country in the Middle East, and the only Jewish nation in the modern period. It is seen by Jews, Christians and Muslims as the Holy Land.

7 October - On 7 October 2023, the Palestinian group Hamas, which controls Gaza, carried out a series of surprise attacks on Israel, killing more than 1,000 people and taking more than one hundred hostages.

Palestinians - People from Palestine, an area located in the Southern Levant region of Western Asia.

New York - A city in the USA. It is in a state also called New York.

Democratic - A democratic election is one where all eligible citizens are free to vote, where votes are counted fairly and all political parties have fair and free access to communicate with voters.

Intimidating - Causing someone to feel fearful or threatened.

Passover - A major Jewish holiday celebrated in spring.

Blatant - Undisguised, obvious and unashamed.

anti-semitism - Showing hatred or prejudice towards Jewish people.

Campus - The buildings and grounds of a university or school.