

## NEW HAVEN

Free speech and college campuses  
topic of Tuesday debate

By Ed Stannard

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**NEW HAVEN** » The atmosphere on campuses nationwide has become charged with accusations, on one side, that “micro-aggressions” are hurtful to women and people of color, and countercharges that universities are censoring speakers.

On Tuesday, the issue will land in the spotlight at the Yale Repertory Theatre as four debaters argue for or against the statement, “Free speech is threatened on campus.”

“I don’t think there’s any question that free speech is threatened on campus. I think the question is whether free speech should be threatened on campus,” said Wendy Kaminer, who is one of the debaters in the Intelligence Squared U.S. debate, sponsored by the Adam Smith Society, an organization composed of business school students and alumni.

Kaminer, a lawyer and freelance writer based in Boston, will take the position that free speech is threatened. She will be joined on her side of the stage by John McWhorter, professor of linguistics at Columbia University.

On the other side are

Shaun Harper, executive director of the Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education at the University of Pennsylvania, and Jason Stanley, a philosophy professor at Yale University.

Harper said his center has done studies of the climate on campuses.

“There’s been no evidence from the climate work that we have done that students are not allowed to freely express themselves,” he said. “People say all kinds of things to them all the time that are racist, that are hurtful or harmful.”

Harper was unwilling to reveal too much of his argument to the other side. “I just don’t want to show my hand,” he said. But he did say he has a “bombshell” that will make his case conclusively.

In addition, “I plan to ask our opponents to give me evidence of a policy, an institutional policy, that says one cannot freely express himself,” Harper said.

Kaminer said “40 percent of millennials support limiting speech offensive to minorities” and cited incidents like one at the University of South Carolina, where students displayed posters of examples of censored speech and were “interrogated.” Two students have filed suit against the school on First Amendment grounds. In another example, at Modesto Junior College, students “were not allowed to distribute copies of the Constitution on Constitution Day” because they did not get permission, Kaminer said.

Such cases are “typical,” Kaminer said. “These are not anomalous cases. These are not [just] horror stories.”

At Yale, Silliman College Associate Master Erika Chris-

takis “sent an email suggesting that students should learn to deal with offensive Halloween costumes” and was criticized by students, as was her husband, Silliman Master Nicholas Christakis. The incident led to a massive rally on Yale’s campus. “The irony is that a lot of these protest movements are aimed at curbing someone else’s free speech,” Kaminer said.

“The loss for the students is they’re not learning how to argue” by labeling speech “racist, homophobic, misogynistic and then not arguing with it.”

“If you don’t like what someone’s saying, instead of disputing it you say, ‘That’s racist, that’s sexist.’ That’s just ranking someone out.”

Harper said his opponents are “picking out a handful of isolated incidents” to demonstrate censorship. “I have at least 1,000 others that clearly show that that’s not the case,” he said.

As for “micro-aggression,” Kaminer said it is a term “used to describe the sort of mini-offenses and insults of daily life.”

Harper, on the other hand, said of such incidents, “That’s like death by a million paper cuts. Eventually they become injurious to you. It’s the accumulation of them that will have you bleed to death.” Imagine, he said, “if someone disrespected you every single day. It happens so routinely and so recurrently.”

Kaminer said the only limit to free speech should be “incitements to violence” defined as “intended to cause imminent unlawful action and is likely to do so.”

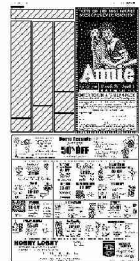
But she said “the devil is in the detail of how you define



Wendy Kaminer



Shaun Harper



‘threat.’”

Harper said of Tuesday’s debate, “I think that my goal for the evening is to model for people in the audience what a robust conversation that includes people with opposing views should look like on a university campus. I want it to be a spirited, nuanced conversation. That’s what should happen.”

The debate will take place from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the Yale Rep, 1120 Chapel St. The moderator will be John Donvan, an author and contributing correspondent for ABC News.

Tickets, which cost \$20 but are free to any student and to Yale alumni, are available at <http://intelligencesquaredus.org>.