The Protesters and the President

0:03

from New York Times I'm Michael babbaro

0:05

this is the

0:10

[Music]

0:12

daily over the past week what had begun

0:15

as a smattering of pro Palestinian

0:17

protests on America's college campuses

0:21

exploded into a nationwide movement

0:24

people uned will never be defeated as

0:28

students at dozens of universities held

0:31

demonstrations set up encampments and at

0:35

times seized academic

0:37

[Music]

0:39

buildings in response administrators at

0:42

many of those colleges decided to crack

0:45

down do not throw things at our officers

0:48

we will use chemical Munitions to

0:50

include gas calling in local police to

0:54

carry out Mass detentions and arrests

0:57

from Arizona state in the name of the

1:00

Aron I deare this Gathering to be a

1:02

violation of to the University of

1:07

Georgia to City College of New

1:14

York as of Thursday police had arrested

1:17

2,000 students on more than 40 campuses

1:21

a situation so startling that President

1:24

Biden could no longer ignore it look

1:28

it's basically a matter of fairness

1:30

it's a matter of what's right there's

1:32

the right to protest but not the right

1:35

to cause chaos today my colleagues

1:39

Jonathan wolf and Peter Baker on a

1:42

history making week it's Friday May

1:47

[Music]

1:50

3rd Jonathan as this tumultuous week on

1:54

college campuses comes to an end it

1:56

feels like the most extraordinary scene

2:00

played out on the campus of the

2:02

University of California Los Angeles

2:05

where you have been reporting what is

2:07

the story of how that protest started

2:11

and ultimately became so explosive so

2:16

late last

2:17

week Pro Palestinian protesters set up

2:19

an encampment at the University of

2:21

California Los

2:26

Angeles it was right in front of Royce

2:28

Hall which I don't know if you

2:30

are familiar with UCLA but it's like a

2:32

very famous red brick building it's like

2:33

on all the brochures MH and there was

2:36

two things that like stood out about

2:37

this encampment and the first thing was

2:38

that they sort of barricaded the

2:40

encampment the encampment complete with

2:43

tents and barricades has been set up in

2:45

the middle of the Westwood campus the

2:47

protesters they have you know metal

2:49

grates they had wooden pallets and they

2:51

sort of separated themselves from the

2:53

campus this is kind of interesting they

2:55

are controlling access as we've been

2:57

talking about they are trying to control

2:59

who is allowed in

3:00

who is allowed they sort of policed the

3:02

area so they only would let people that

3:03

were like part of their Community they

3:05

said inside I'm a UCLA student I deserve

3:07

to go here we pay tuition this is our

3:10

school and they're not letting me walk

3:12

in well I can't take will you let me go

3:14

in we're not engaging then you can move

3:17

will you move and the second thing that

3:19

stood out about this Camp was that it

3:20

immediately attracted pro-israel counter

3:22

protesters and what did the leadership

3:24

of UCLA say about all of this the

3:28

encampment and these counter protesters

3:31

so the University of California's

3:32

approach was pretty unique they had a

3:34

really hands-off approach and they

3:35

allowed the pro Palestinian protesters

3:38

to set up an encampment uh they allowed

3:39

the counter protesters to happen I mean

3:41

this is a public university so anyone

3:43

who wants to can just enter the campus

3:45

so when did things start to escalate so

3:49

there were definitely fights and

3:51

scuffles through the weekend but a

3:53

turning point was really Sunday

3:55

[Music]

4:00

when this group called The Israeli

4:02

American Council they're a nonprofit

4:03

organization organized a rally on campus

4:06

the Israeli American Council has really

4:08

been against these Pro Palestinian

4:10

protests they say that they're

4:12

anti-semitic mhm so this nonprofit group

4:15

sets up a stage with a screen really

4:18

just a few yards from the prop

4:19

Palestinian encampment we are grateful

4:22

that this past Friday the University of

4:26

California stated that they will

4:28

continue to oppose any calls for boycott

4:32

and divestment from

4:34

Israel and they host speakers and they

4:37

held prayers Jewish students you're not

4:39

alone oh you're not alone we are right

4:42

here with you and we are right here with

4:44

you

4:45

[Music]

4:47

Israel and then lots of other people

4:50

start showing up and the proximity

4:52

between protesters and counter

4:53

protesters and even some agitators makes

4:56

it really clear that something was about

4:58

to happen

4:59

and what was that what ended up

5:01

happening on Monday night a group of

5:03

about 60 counterparts tried to breach

5:05

the encampment there and the campus

5:07

police had to break it up and things

5:09

escalated again on

5:11

Tuesday they storm the barricades and

5:14

it's a complete

5:19

Riot I went to report on what happened

5:22

just a few hours after it ended hello hi

5:26

and I spoke to a lot of protesters and I

5:28

met one demonstrator Marie yeah my first

5:31

name is Marie m a r i e last name Salem

5:34

and Marie described what happened so can

5:37

you just tell me a little bit about what

5:40

happened last

5:41

night last night we were approached by

5:45

you know over a 100 counter protesters

5:48

who were very mobilized and ready to

5:51

break into Camp they proceeded to try to

5:55

breach our barricades extremely

5:57

violently Marie said it started getting

5:59

out of hand when counter protesters

6:00

started setting off fireworks towards

6:02

the camp they had bear spray they had

6:04

mace they were throwing wood kind like

6:07

Spears throwing water bottles continuing

6:10

fireworks so she said that they were

6:12

terrified it was just all hands on deck

6:14

everyone was guarding the barricades

6:16

every time someone was experienced the

6:19

be spray or mace or was hit and bleeding

6:22

we had some medics in the front line and

6:24

then really had people and they said

6:26

that they were just trying to take care

6:27

of people who are injured I mean any

6:30

given moment there is you know five to

6:33

10 people being treated so what she

6:35

described to me sounded more like a

6:36

battlefield than a college campus and it

6:38

was just a complete Terror and complete

6:43

abandonment of the University as we also

6:46

watched private security watched this

6:49

the entire time on the stairs and some

6:51

LAPD were stationed about a football

6:54

field length back from these counter

6:58

protesters and and did not make a single

7:01

arrest did not attempt to stop any

7:04

violence did not attempt to get in

7:07

between the two groups no

7:10

attempt I should say I spoke to State

7:13

authorities and eyewitnesses and they

7:15

confirmed Marie's account about what

7:16

happened that night both in terms of the

7:18

violence that took place at the

7:19

encampment and how law enforcement

7:21

responded so in the end people ended up

7:24

fighting for hours before the police

7:25

intervened

7:31

so in her mind UCLA's hands-off approach

7:35

which seemed to have prevailed

7:36

throughout this entire period ends up

7:38

being way too hands off in a moment when

7:42

students were in Jeopardy that's right

7:45

and so at this point the protesters in

7:47

the encampment started preparing for

7:48

sort of two possibilities one was that

7:50

this group of counter protesters would

7:52

return and attack them and the second

7:54

one was that the police would come and

7:56

try to break up this encampment so they

7:57

start building up the barricades they

7:59

start reinforcing them with wood and

8:01

during the day hundreds of people came

8:02

and brought them supplies they brought

8:05

food they brought helmets goggles

8:08

earplugs Salan solution all sort of

8:10

things these people could use to defend

8:11

themselves and so they're really getting

8:13

ready to burrow in and in the end it was

8:16

the police who

8:17

[Music]

8:19

came so Wednesday at 700 p.m. they made

8:22

an announcement on top of voice Hall

8:24

which overlooks the encampment

8:26

administrative criminal actions up to

8:29

putting arrest please leave the area

8:32

immediately and they told people in the

8:34

encampment that they needed to leave or

8:35

face

8:38

arrest and so as nightfalls they put on

8:40

all this gear that they've been

8:41

collecting the goles the masks and the

8:43

earplugs and they wait for the

8:46

police and so the police arrive and sort

8:49

of station themselves right in front of

8:51

the encampment and then at a certain

8:53

point they stormed The Back Stairs Of

8:54

The

8:56

encampment and this is the stairs that

8:58

the protesters having using to enter and

9:00

exit the camp and they set up a line and

9:03

the protesters do this really surprising

9:07

thing they open up umbrellas they have

9:09

these sort of strobe lights and they're

9:11

flashing them at the police who sort of

9:13

just like slowly back out of the

9:22

camp and so at this point they're

9:24

feeling really great you know they're

9:25

like we did it we we push them out of

9:27

the camp and when the cops Tred to push

9:30

again on those same set of

9:34

stairs hold your ground the protesters

9:37

organize themselves with all these

9:38

shields that they had built earlier and

9:40

they go and confront them and so there's

9:42

this moment where the police are trying

9:44

to push up the stairs and the protesters

9:46

are literally pushing them

9:49

back stand back p stand back and at a

9:54

certain point dozens of the police

9:55

officers who were there basically just

9:56

turn around and leave so how does this

9:59

eventually come to an end so at a

10:03

certain point the police push in again

10:05

most of the conflict is centered at the

10:07

front of these barricades and the police

10:09

just start tearing them

10:14

apart they remove the front barricade

10:16

and in his place is this group of

10:18

protesters who have linked arms and

10:20

they're hanging on to each other and the

10:21

police are trying to pull protesters one

10:24

by one away from this group

10:29

but they're having a really hard time

10:30

because there's so many protesters and

10:32

they're all just hanging on to each

10:37

other so at a certain point one of the

10:40

police officers started firing something

10:41

into the crowd we don't exactly know

10:43

what it was but it really spooked the

10:45

protesters stop shooting

10:47

[Music]

10:51

that they started falling back everyone

10:54

was really scared the protesters were

10:55

yelling don't shoot us and at that point

10:58

the police just sort of storm the

11:05

camp and so after about 4 hours of this

11:07

the police pushed the protesters out of

11:09

the encampment they had arrested about

11:11

200 protesters and this was finally over

11:14

and I'm just curious Jonathan because

11:16

you're standing right there you are

11:19

bearing witness to this all what your

11:22

thinking what your impressions of this

11:23

were I mean I was stunned um these are

11:26

mostly teenagers uh this is a college

11:29

campus an institution of Higher Learning

11:31

and what I saw in front of me looked

11:32

like a war

11:33

[Music]

11:35

zone the massive barricade the police

11:38

coming in with riot gear and all this

11:40

violence was happening in front of these

11:42

red brick buildings that are famous for

11:44

symbolizing really open college campus

11:46

and everything about it was just totally

11:49

[Music]

11:57

surreal well Jonathan thank you very

11:59

much we appreciate it thanks

12:05

[Music]

12:11

Michael we'll be right

12:18

back Peter around 10:00 a.m. on Thursday

12:21

morning as the smoke is literally still

12:24

clearing at the University of California

12:27

Los Angeles you get wor word that

12:29

President Biden is going to speak right

12:33

exactly it wasn't on his public schedule

12:35

he was about to head to Andrew's Air

12:36

Force Base in order to take a trip and

12:38

then suddenly we got the notice that he

12:40

was going to be addressing the cameras

12:42

in the Roosevelt room they didn't tell

12:43

us what he was going to talk about but

12:44

it was pretty clear I think everybody

12:46

understood that it was going to be about

12:47

these campus protests about the growing

12:49

violence and the clashes with police and

12:51

the arrest that the entire country been

12:53

watching on TV every night for the past

12:56

week and I think that we watching just

12:57

that morning with uh you CLA and it

12:59

reached the point where he just had to

13:01

say something and why in his estimation

13:03

and those of his advisers was this the

13:05

moment that Biden had to say something

13:09

well it kind of reached a boiling point

13:10

it kind of reached the impression of a

13:12

national crisis and you expect to hear

13:13

your president address it in this kind

13:16

of a moment particularly because it's

13:17

about his own policy his policy toward

13:19

Israel is at the heart of these protests

13:22

and he was getting a lot of grief he was

13:23

getting a lot of grief from Republicans

13:24

who are chiding him for not speaking out

13:26

personally he hasn't said anything about

13:28

10 days he's got a lot of pressure from

13:29

Democrats too who wanted him to come out

13:31

and be more forceful it wasn't enough in

13:33

their view to leave it to his

13:34

spokespeople to say something moderate

13:37

Democrats felt he needed to come out and

13:40

take some leadership on this and so at

13:42

the appointed moment Peter what does

13:44

Biden actually say in the Roosevelt room

13:48

of the White House good

13:50

morning before I head to North Carolina

13:52

I wanted to speak a few moments about

13:54

what's going on on our college campuses

13:57

here well he comes into the and he talks

13:59

to the camer he talks about the two

14:02

clashing imperatives of American

14:04

principle the first is the right to free

14:07

speech and for people to peacefully

14:10

assemble and make their voices heard the

14:12

second is the rule of law both must be

14:16

upheld one is freedom of speech the

14:19

other is the rule of law in fact

14:21

peaceful protest is in the best

14:22

tradition of how Americans respond to

14:25

consequential issues but but neither are

14:29

we a lawless country in other words what

14:31

he's saying is yes I support the right

14:34

of these protesters to come out and

14:36

object to even my own policy in effect

14:39

is what he's saying but it shouldn't

14:40

Trail into violence destroying property

14:44

is not a peaceful protest it's against

14:47

the law vandalism trespassing breaking

14:51

Windows shutting down campuses they

14:53

shouldn't Trail into taking over

14:55

buildings and obstructing students from

14:59

going to class or canceling their

15:01

graduations threatening people

15:03

intimidating people instilling fear in

15:05

people is not peaceful protest it's

15:08

against the law and he leans very

15:11

heavily into this idea that what he's

15:12

seeing these days goes beyond the line I

15:16

understand people have strong feelings

15:17

and deep convictions in America we

15:20

respect the right and protect the right

15:23

for them to express that but it doesn't

15:25

mean anything goes it is crossed into

15:29

harassment and expressions of hate in a

15:32

way that go against the national

15:33

character as president I will always

15:35

defend free speech and I will always be

15:38

just as strong in standing up for the

15:39

rule of law that's my responsibility to

15:42

you the American people my obligation to

15:45

the

15:46

Constitution thank you very much right

15:49

as I watched the speech I heard his

15:50

overriding message to basically be I the

15:53

president United States I'm drawing a

15:54

line these protests and counter-protests

15:57

you the seizing and defacing of campus

15:59

buildings class disruption all of it

16:01

name calling it's getting out of hand

16:03

that there's a right way to do this and

16:05

what I'm seeing is the wrong way to do

16:07

it and it has to stop that's exactly

16:09

right and as he's wrapping up reporters

16:12

of course ask questions and the first

16:14

question is Mr President have the

16:16

protests forced you to reconsider any of

16:19

the policies with regard to the region

16:21

will this change your policy toward the

16:24

war in Gaza which of course is exactly

16:26

what the protesters want that's the

16:27

point right and he basically says no no

16:32

just one word no right and that felt

16:34

kind of important as brief and fleeting

16:36

as it was because at the end of the

16:39

day what he's saying to these protesters

16:43

is I'm not going to do what you want and

16:47

basically your protests are never going

16:49

to work I'm not going to change the US's

16:51

involvement in this war yeah that's

16:54

exactly right he is saying you know I'm

16:55

not going to be swayed by angry people

16:58

in the streets I'm going to do what I

17:00

think is right when it comes to foreign

17:02

policy now what he thinks is that

17:04

they're not giving him enough credit for

17:07

trying to achieve what they want which

17:09

is an end of the war he has been

17:10

pressuring Israel and Hamas to come to a

17:13

deal for a ceasefire that hopefully in

17:16

his view would then lead to a more

17:17

enduring end of hostilities but of

17:20

course this deal hasn't gone anywhere

17:22

Hamas in particular seems to be

17:24

resisting it and so the president's left

17:26

with a policy of arming Israel without

17:28

having found a way yet to stop the

17:31

war right I wonder though Peter if we're

17:34

being honest don't these protests

17:37

despite what Biden is saying there

17:39

inevitably exert a kind of power over

17:43

him you know becoming one of many

17:45

pressures but a pressure

17:47

nonetheless that does influence how he

17:50

thinks about these moments I mean here

17:52

he is at the White House devoting an

17:55

entire conversation to the nation to the

17:59

campus protests well he look he knows

18:01

this feeds into the political

18:04

environment in which he's running for

18:05

reelection in which he basically has

18:07

people who otherwise might be his

18:09

supporters on the left disenchanted with

18:12

him and he knows that there's a cost to

18:13

be paid and it certainly obviously is in

18:15

his head as he's thinking about what to

18:17

do but I think his view of the war is

18:19

changing by the day for all sorts of

18:21

reasons and and most of them having to

18:22

do with realities on the ground he has

18:26

decided that Israel has gone far enough

18:28

if not too far in the way it has

18:31

conducted this operation in Gaza he is

18:34

upset about the humanitarian crisis

18:36

there and he's looking for a way to wrap

18:39

all this up into kind of a move that

18:41

would move to peacemaking like beginning

18:43

to get the region to a different stage

18:46

maybe have a deal with the Saudis to

18:49

normalize relations with Israel and

18:51

exchange for some sort of a two-state

18:53

solution that would eventually resolve

18:56

the Palestinian issue at it core so I

19:00

think it's probably fair to say that the

19:03

protest won't move him in an immediate

19:05

kind of sense but they obviously play

19:07

into the larger Zeitgeist of the moment

19:10

and I also think it's important to know

19:11

who Joe Biden is at heart explain that

19:15

he's not drawn to activism he was around

19:17

in 1968 the last time we saw this major

19:20

confguration at Columbia University for

19:22

instance at the time Joe Biden was a law

19:24

student in Syracuse about 250 miles away

19:28

and he was an institutionalist even then

19:30

he was just focused on his studies he

19:32

was about to graduate he was thinking

19:33

about the law career and he didn't

19:35

really have much of an affinity I think

19:37

for his fellow students of that era for

19:41

their activist uh way of looking at

19:43

things he tells a story in his Memoir

19:45

about walking down the street in

19:47

Syracuse one day to go to the pizza shop

19:49

with some friends and they walk by the

19:50

administration building and they see

19:51

people hanging out of the windows

19:53

they're hanging SDS banners that's the

19:56

students for a Democratic Society which

19:58

was one of the big activist groups of

19:59

the era and he says they were taking

20:02

over the building and we looked up and

20:04

said look at those [ \_\_ ] that's how

20:07

far apart from the anti-war movement I

20:09

was that's him writing in his Memoir so

20:12

to a young Joe Biden those who devote

20:15

their time and their energy to

20:17

protesting the war are I don't need to

20:20

repeat the word twice but they're losers

20:22

they're not worth this time well I think

20:24

it's the tactics they're they're using

20:26

more than the goals that he disagree

20:28

with he would tell you he disagreed with

20:29

the Vietnam War he was for civil rights

20:32

but that he thought that taking over a

20:33

building was performative was all about

20:36

getting attention and that there was a

20:37

better way in his view to do it he was

20:40

somebody who wants to work inside the

20:42

system he said in an interview quite a

20:44

few years back he says look I was

20:46

wearing sports coats in that era he saw

20:48

himself becoming part of the system not

20:50

somebody trying to tear it down and so

20:53

how should we think about that Joe Biden

20:57

when we think about this Joe Biden I

20:59

mean the Joe Biden Who as a Young Man

21:02

looked upon anti-war protesters with

21:05

disdain and the one who is now president

21:08

and his very own policies have inspired

21:11

such ferocious campus protests yeah you

21:15

know that Joe Biden the 1968 Joe Biden

21:18

he could just throw on his sports coat

21:20

go to the pizza shop with his friends

21:22

make fun of the activists and call them

21:23

names and then that's it they didn't

21:25

have to affect his life but that's not

21:28

what 2024 Joe Biden can

21:31

[Music]

21:35

do now wherever he goes he's Dogg by

21:40

this he goes to speeches and people are

21:43

shouting at him genocide Joe genocide

21:45

Joe he is the target of the same kind of

21:48

a movement that he disdained in

21:51

1968 and so as much as he would like to

21:54

ignore it or move on or focus on other

21:57

things I think this has become a

21:59

defining image of his year and one of

22:02

the defining images perhaps of his

22:05

presidency and 2024 Joe Biden can't

22:09

simply ignore

22:11

[Music]

22:14

it well Peter thank you very much we

22:17

appreciate it thank

22:23

you we'll be right back

22:35

[Music]

22:41

here's what else you need to know today

22:44

during testimony on Thursday in Donald

22:46

Trump's hush money trial jurors heard a

22:49

recording secretly made by Trump's

22:51

former fixer Michael Cohen in which

22:54

Trump discusses a deal to buy a woman's

22:57

silence in the recording Trump asks

23:00

Cohen about how one payment made by

23:03

Trump to a woman named Karen McDougall

23:06

would be financed the recording could

23:09

complicate efforts by Trump's lawyers to

23:11

distance him from the hush money deals

23:14

at the center of the

23:18

trial a final thing to know tomorrow

23:21

morning we'll be sending you the latest

23:23

episode from our colleagues over at the

23:26

interview this week David Mur casy talks

23:29

with comedy star Marlon W about his new

23:32

standup special it's a high that you get

23:35

when you don't know if this joke that

23:36

I'm about to say is going to offend

23:38

everybody are they going to walk out are

23:40

they going to boo me are they going to

23:41

hate this and you tell it and everybody

23:44

cracks up and you're

23:51

like today's episode was produced by

23:54

Diana Win Luke Vander pluk Alexandra Lee

23:57

Young Nina Feldman and Carlos Prieto it

24:01

was edited by Lisa chow and Michael

24:03

benois contains original music by Dan

24:07

Powell and Maran Lozano and was

24:10

engineered by Chris Wood our theme music

24:13

is by Jim brunberg and Ben lansburg of

24:17

wonderly that's it for the daily I'm

24:20

Michael Babar see you on Monday