**Dr. Kevin Kruse Interview**Lessons learned from history rhythms and the role of higher education.

**AS** [00:00:00] But today's podcast, it's a privilege to have historian, scholar, and teacher Dr. Kevin Kruse. Kevin studies the political, social, and urban/suburban history of 20th century America focused on conflicts over race, rights, and religion. He has particular interest in segregation and the civil rights movement, the rise of religious nationalism and the making of modern conservatism. His first book, White Flight Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism, won prizes, including the Francis B. Simkins Award for the Southern Historical Association for the Best First Book on Southern History and the Best Book Award in Urban Politics from the American Political Science Association. His second book, One Nation Under God, How Corporate America Invented Christian America. examine the rise of American religious nationalism in the mid 20th century and its legacies in American political and religious life. Kevin recently published Fault Lines: A History of of America since 1974, a trade/textbook with coauthor Julian Zelizer, a history of the past four decades of American history. The book chronicles the origins of the divided states of America, a nation increasingly riven by stark political partisanship and deep social divisions along the lines of race, class, gender and sexuality. Now, many of you might be wondering what's this Princeton guy doing on a podcast focused on community college and open access universities? Well, I'll tell you, you'll see why in a moment. So, Kevin, welcome to the Student Success podcast.

**Kevin Kruse** [00:01:26] So good to be here, and thanks for having me.

**AS** [00:01:28] So, a little bit of context. I grew up in New York City, and I decided right out of high school that I just wanted to do something different. I wanted to serve. So I gave my mom a heart attack and I decided to enlist in the Marine Corps, and I did a couple of tours overseas. And when I was done with that, the last one was in Somalia, which had a significant impact on me. It was an operation to basically, our mission was to help people from starvation. And we actually did a pretty good job. We cleared the way for the food to get in, but it didn't have a very good ending, unfortunately. But still, it had a significant impact on me and we actually helped to rebuild an orphanage and kind of got a taste for education, if you will, because it was also a school. And so when I left, I decided to go back to school and I went to a community college and I had faculty that put me under their wing and were really supportive and mentored me and helped me through it. And they said, Hey, Al, you're originally from New York because I stayed in California, I was stationed in California. You should, you should apply to some colleges in New York. And they said, like, well, like Cornell, I said, me get into that place? No way. That is just not me. That's just not for people like me growing up and very low income situation. But I did. I got in a double majored in government and history. It was great. I had just a great time, learned a bunch. But fast forward two decades later, and I'm wondering what's going on with some of my old professors. So I was looking for about a year ago, one of them, my advisor, Richard Polenberg, I saw that, in one of his students, was doing great work and he's written these books. And then I look at Kevin and I look at the picture. That was my TA! So I reached out to you, said, Hi, how you doing? And gosh, you've done such great work since earning your Ph.D. from Cornell. So I just wanted to give everybody a little bit of background. It's really, really good to see you. Although the podcast is all audio, we aren't. we're seeing each other here.

**Kevin Kruse** [00:03:41] Let's make sure everyone listening that we're both incredibly handsome and still look like we did back in the 90s? OK, how about that?

**AS** [00:03:49] No, it's better. We look better, man.

**Kevin Kruse** [00:03:51] Oh, better. Yeah, OK, fine, fine. I'll take that. I'll take that.

**AS** [00:03:55] So I'd like to start the podcast by asking guests, if you would mind sharing a hobby or talent, a special superpower that you wouldn't mind sharing?

**Kevin Kruse** [00:04:07] I don't have any exciting superpowers, but a hobbyist, I've always been really into music. I was a DJ in college and I have way too many CDs and I don't think I have a CD player anymore, but I kind of always have lost myself in music. And so that's that's some place I go. I don't put a hobby or it's certainly not a skill, but it's a place I get lost in music. So I'll say that

**AS** [00:04:31] All genres or any particular ones, you're interested?

**Kevin Kruse** [00:04:33] Yeah. So that was the thing that I went to the University in North Carolina and the radio station there was a free form station, which meant not just different kinds of programs, but every DJ was encouraged to play everything from, you know, blues, jazz and country to hip hop and kind of alternative rock and everything in between. So and I soaked it all up. I love everything. And so I love, you know, corny old 1930s country and 50s blues and oldies and current stuff. I'm an omnivore when it comes to music, right?

**AS** [00:05:08] Would you consider doing some DJ'ing again or are you just too busy?

**Kevin Kruse** [00:05:12] I would love to, but I am way too busy. I mean that it takes up a lot of time, not just the time you're on the air, but what I didn't realize when I started that job was, you know, you got to go there like an hour or two ahead of time to pick out all the stuff. You're going to play right to think it through and to kind of pull stuff out of the library, which is fun. But I could do it when I was 18. I don't think I could do it at forty nine. So yeah, yeah, I think my days are long gone. I DJ for my kids in the car. They love it. Yeah. I was just going to

**AS** [00:05:42] I was just about to ask you about your kids or just show up to class one day with the whole DJ gear and that's what you do for the class.

**Kevin Kruse** [00:05:47] I mean, I do. Still, I play song. I play a song before and after lecture. So I've kind of, I've worked it in. So, you know, I just lectured on the civil rights movement yesterday, and I played a song from the Freedom Singers at the start, and then I closed out with Sam Cooke's Change is Going to Come. My TAs always say, you intro these like a DJ. I'm like, yeah, no, this is my one outlet. Let me have it.

**AS** [00:06:09] There you go. There you go. I want to set the stage for the for my first question. Yeah, so bear with me here. I was quite blown away by the historical knowledge I gained at both the community college and at Cornell, in particular, what I learned from Walter LaFeber in American Foreign Policy Seminars and Richard Polenberg's two course modern American history sequence. You know, I learned that America wasn't that exceptional, after all, but to me, as a former marine and continuous improvement guy, I saw that as an opportunity to understand really the ugly. So we can work toward progress. And it's part of the reason I dedicated myself to career in education. But as you know, Kevin, some people unfortunately take offense at the notion that teaching that America was never that great to begin with, right? But it's true, and it bears out in so much data critical measures, from racial justice data to the ridiculous wealth gap that we have. However, I was kind of struck by something this past year, Kevin. I didn't learn until recently about Black Wall Street and for the audience, for those of you who are not familiar with Black Wall Street. In 1921, Tulsa, Oklahoma's Greenwood District, known as Black Wall Street, was one of the most prosperous African-American communities in the country. But on May 31st of that year, a white mob descended into the town for two days and just unprecedented racial violence. Thirty five city blocks went up in flames, 300 people died and 800 were injured. There are other examples like this. I'm not. I'm not necessarily upset at the professors for not covering this event and similar ones like it. But I feel that given recent history specifically since 2016 and that higher ed should revisit some of its curriculum. And so for me, because all of the institutions I work with serve disproportionately impacted student populations. For example, former foster youth, formerly incarcerated, LGBTQ students, veterans with visible and invisible disabilities, poor whites, and students of color who have experienced racism throughout their lives, it's important for them to have a deep understanding of what led them to be disproportionately impacted to begin with. Research in higher ed and also in K-12 now demonstrates that when students develop what's now known as critical consciousness, this awareness of oppressive elements in society, they're actually more than likely to succeed in college. We actually have a tremendous dropout rate at community college and open access universities. Life just happens to so many of these students, but the research shows that when they feel a deeper sense of purpose, a glue, if you will, that allows them to stick to their college education until the finish line so they can actually go back to their communities to make them better. So with that as the backdrop, Kevin, given your deep historical scholarship, teaching experience and passion, what's been key missing information from most political, social and economic studies? How can we infuse this knowledge in the student experience, especially given what's unfolded in the last five years?

**Kevin Kruse** [00:09:29] Yeah, that's a big question, but it's a good one, and I'd say, look, your starting point about that we've got to teach the ugly parts of the American past as well. It's obvious. I mean, we have to do that, right? If you want a history that is purely celebratory--it just tells you the great things the country has done and that tells you the country has done no wrong--that's not history. That's propaganda, right? And it's not just there. That's not history. It's not useful. The real draw of history. I think what I've always found it come from where I come from and my own experiences, and I don't have any of those, those kind of hardships or hurdles you just rattled off, which are considerable. But even from my own perspective, as a, you know, middle class white guy from the South, I always turn to history to try to figure out where my world came from, right, and try to understand what I had done. So that first book, White Flight, I did was basically me saying, the civil rights movement sounds really fascinating, but I don't recognize the white people in this. They're either bloodthirsty, racist or there are a handful of crusading, crusading do gooders. Most white people weren't really like that. One of the other right there, somewhere in the middle between that black and white in that gray, I wanted to learn about them what they want to learn about people like me. And so that was what led me to my first book, and that's the real utility in history. You know, history doesn't necessarily repeat perfectly, but it rhymes a lot and it explains a lot of where we got to. And so I think these people who hold up history is having to be perfect in the past where everyone was a hero and everyone did good and there was no wrong, if there was a wrong, it was obvious and it was quickly overcome, right? That's not useful, right? If your version of Martin Luther King is Martin Luther King stood up on the march on Washington and uttered one line only about the content of his character. It was kids and that racism was bad everywhere. Oh, racism is bad. Well, that solves it and moved along. That has no connection to the present, right? That doesn't explain anything about where we are or what we're dealing with now. If, however, you go back and you look at what Martin Luther King said at the time, what he said in the speech and sorry election on this yesterday, so it's fresh in my mind. But what he said in that speech, he talked about police brutality. He talks about economic inequality. He talks about a limited citizenship. He talks about the kind of things that we're talking about today. Look at the Letter from a Birmingham Jail. If you read that today, if you rip the title off, that if you change the word Negro to African-American, you could convince people it was like a critical race theory approach. It's all about structural racism and inequality, and part of the law might seem equal on the surface, but it's discriminatory underneath. It's all of that, right? The past speaks to us today, something Dick Polenberg said, which still sticks with me, is someone asked him why he studies history, and Dick passed, just a year ago, someone asked him before he died, why you studied history? And he said, look, the big issues we're wrestling with today. What does freedom mean, what does justice mean, what does equality mean? We haven't maybe had the same specifics for that conversation in the past, but we've talked about those big issues again. And so if you look at how people in the past have reckoned with those issues of inequality, of injustice, of a lack of freedom and how they got better or how they maybe got worse, we can learn some lessons from that, right? There's a utility in history. If students see a connection in the past, see a utility in that if it speaks to them, it's not some distant foreign world, but it's got some connection and some resonants in their lives that they can borrow some from that--that's fantastic! That's what we should be doing. The goal here is if we're trying to make this relevant and meaningful to our students is it's all there. We just have to point them to the right parts of it because the past speaks to us today.

**AS** [00:13:16] Given all your scholarship, what would you say are some of those key points for students?

**Kevin Kruse** [00:13:22] A couple of things I like to do when I because I can't lecture on everything, right? So I've got to pick and choose. So I don't have pure chronological coverage when I do. I kind of teach the mid 20th century kind of the 20s to 70s, and I can't do everything in there. And so I try to focus on what are the biggest moments. So we do kind of deep dives on the Depression and the New Deal. And then in the 1960s and the civil rights movement, the Great Society and then kind of the white backlash era Nixon, each of those speaks to the present in deeply important ways. The New Deal, I think, shows us what government can do. We live in an era of kind of pinched expectations and kind of a retreat from the public sphere. It shows what an aggressive public policy can do. It also shows the way in which economic inequality in the past have been reckoned with and alleviated through public and private programs. So I think that's remarkable. The greatest idea in the civil rights era shows the way in which deeply entrenched structural inequalities that promote racism and discrimination were rooted out and dealt with. Not perfectly, but certainly a significant change at that period. Right. And again, affecting real power in the lives of ordinary Americans and in generating results. The kind of George Wallace Richard Nixon story, which I've always lean to do just given my interest in modern conservatism. But certainly in the last five years, those lectures have really taken on a new meaning as I think people, you know, students who came of age maybe in the in the Obama era and hadn't seen this kind of prominent white backlash really step up and take some part of that. You know, I've long lectured on and this lecture I love, it's based on Dan Carter's book on George Wallace in part, and which is a brilliant read. If anyone's looking for a book recommendation, it's called The Politics of Rage. And In I use video clips from a great PBS documentary and the American experience documentary on George Wallace, which is great. And I've long showed this. There's a great short clip of George Wallace at his rallies. It used to be something students laughed with. These kind of darkly funny, and he's kind of got a sinister edge, but it's kind of like comic touch in the era of Trump. Suddenly they stop laughing because it looked exactly like a Trump rally. Like, it was remarkable both the way in which he kind of vilified people abroad, singled out people in the audience retribution, pulled his followers and mobilized them against this kind of menacing other out there promise he alone could fix it on and on. You know, so those resonances are there, too. So there's a lot we can do, and it doesn't mean we're certainly not distorting the historical lens. When we do this, we're just shining a light on the part of the past that that has echoes of a president and amplifying it for the segments and letting them see those connections.

**AS** [00:16:06] History has a rhythm to it. Going back to helping students, especially those disproportionately impacted. The students, to understand the legacies, why some of them have experienced disproportionately impact, especially students of color, studying Wallace for them to understand we've been here before. This is here to stay, for a long time. What are we going to do about it? Just learning about it, knowing that it's part of the culture. So what are some lessons learned from how people fought back in those days and how we're fighting now? You know, Virginia was just went to someone that Trump supported, and it's just seems like the culture war, the manufactured culture war, continues to edge out policies that help those, that you know, who would benefit the most from those policies. So what are some lessons learned from the fights for the way people fought back then against Wallace and all that ideology and now?

**Kevin Kruse** [00:17:11] Well, I think the real lesson is it's there. It's real. It's been kind of a perennial, you know, the culture wars took place in the 90s when we were at Cornell, that took place in the 70s, and the 50s, and the thirties, and on and on and on. We could roll all the way back, probably to Salem if we wanted to. So they've always been there. And the key is lot of times they succeed when they become the biggest issue in the room. And they become the biggest issue in the room, often by default. And it's that, we're recording this the day after the Virginia results, not even final yet. So this is a bit of a Monday morning quarterbacking. Regret this later on. You know, I mean, what we see here is a, you know, these states I think we often overreact to these year after flips Virginia and New Jersey often flip. And, you know, I think Reagan won Virginia by a huge margin, an then it flip the other way, like by 30 points. So this happens. That said, there are lessons to learn here about the success of this kind of ginned up anti critical race theory backlash there. And it's that the culture wars work when they're the point of conversation and they become the point of conversation, largely through default. If Democrats don't have real changes that impact ordinary Americans lives, then it becomes a conversation about CRT. Right? If Democrats can point to free community college or, you know that they like tax credits and things like that, they can point to expansions of Medicare at this point to, you know, universal pre-K. things like that. They can have something that they can point to and say, look, these people over here are talking about things that aren't even being taught to your kids in school. I'm talking about something that's going to make daycare affordable or make you know or give you a leg up for college or, you know, absolve your student loans, right? Those are wildly popular things. But they can do, if they don't do that, though, and all you have are the figures on the right. And that then becomes the point of conversation. So I think the lesson here isn't that it's not going to go away. It's going to be there. You've got to have a counter to it and the counter can be both. What people like me have said as a you're wildly blowing that out of proportion, that's not really what we're talking about, but it can't just be that they've got to be able to point to something really positive and really strong on the left. That's how from the New Deal up to Wallace, the Democrats kept the white working class was a core constituency along with a wide array of racial minorities. It was a core constituency of that New Deal coalition because for all these groups, they could point to, you know, real substantial economic gains, Social Security, minimum wage, you know, job protections, union laws, things like that and say, look, we've done that. We've helped your life in real ways. If you don't do that, then they're going to point to the imaginary threats.

**AS** [00:19:59] So those students that have a deeper sense of of history, of this rhythm, part of what we're learning here is that if they happen to go into politics, that messaging, it seems like at least the Democrats, they tend to lose on the message. I mean, here we are, right where we've had this pandemic. It's astonishing the amount of vaccines that have been distributed. That there are some economic indicators that things are much better. There are some things that need to be improved, but none of that is part of the conversation. They seem to always to be on the defense. CRT well it's important to to learn it but then they don't point out, well, we don't actually teach that K-12. So it's the messaging, Kevin, in part.

**Kevin Kruse** [00:20:50] Yeah. I think Democrats still have this naive assumption that we've made things better and people will notice. People don't notice. A lot of people aren't plugged into. I think people in democratic politics, and I'm not one of them, but the people who run it, I think, might have an overblown sense of how plugged in people are to what's going on really in D.C. and this is something Republicans I think have learned really well, not just in terms of amplifying a sort of unifying message through the kind of the Fox News universe, but just making sure their names are on popular things. George W. Bush and Donald Trump literally put their names on checks that were sent out to people. When Obama, you know, did the stimulus act, they had some payroll tax deduction that was going to be easier and cheaper in the long run, but people didn't see his name attached to it. They weren't thinking Obama gave me that money. They had a check from George W. Bush, $300, with his name, and they had a check from Donald Trump, literally with his name on it. And could say, Oh, OK, that was good. I see the concrete result here. And Democrats have got to be better about that. Now they've got some stuff they can point to, but I don't think they've done enough to. I don't think Biden has. I think Biden has overcorrected from that era in which Trump was completely in everyone's faces nonstop. And we all said, God, we'd love to have a president we didn't think about every day. Biden should step it up. Maybe a little bit. Let us think about a little bit more of what he does. But I think in general, they just got to do a better job of not just passing popular things. And there's so much they can do. And then, I realize the limitations on them in a 50/50 Senate on and on and on. But there's so much they can do that's popular that they said they want to do. But if they can just get a couple of these things over the goal line, and they seem to be close here now, they've got a couple of things over the goal line and then promote the hell out of it. And so if the conversation then is a year out, hey, we're still building the CRT drama or whatever it is, the new caravan, whatever the new boogeyman on the right is to say, OK, that's fine. They're telling you about all these things they're afraid of. Let's rattle off our accomplishments. And if they can do that, they'll maybe have a chance. Again, the deck is going to be stacked against them in the midterms for a variety of reasons, historical trends, gerrymandering on and on. But they'll have a better chance to cut their losses and limit their losses there if they've got a real agenda of success that they can point to. That's what worked in the past. Again, you know, the New Deal, the Great Society they racked up wins. They struck when they had the edge in Congress and made things happen, and they've got to do that again. These trifectas are rare, and they're going to be fleeting. If they don't get something done.

**AS** [00:23:26] The question I asked about updating the content, the curriculum, seems to me for students, it's important for them to understand these historical situations. But then the lessons learned about just even the messaging, right? Like what you just explained. If we could be more intentional for those who are going to go back to their communities, who are going to go work in government or get in politics to really understand that. And so they're learning this in higher ed. Is that why you feel that there's a segment of the society that really is against higher ed? We see this all the time and this has been going on for a long time. Right? Can you unpack that a little bit the origin of that and why that continues to persist.

**Kevin Kruse** [00:24:13] Talking off the top of my head here, I think a lot of it is that higher education leads us out of our, it complicates our assumptions, and it pulls us out of our preexisting state of mind. Ideally, broadens our horizons, makes us think about things in a new light. We question our previous assumptions. And if your politics are based on an idea that that's bad--that you should stick with the exact values your parents imparted upon you, that you should uphold their traditions, you should not question things, you should simply kind of push forward with what they've imparted to you. And yeah, I guess I could see higher education would be a threat to that. And maybe that's the the fear of its not just learning new things is learning different things, and that might make you a different person. Personally, I think that's a good thing. I think we all grow. The more we, the more we learn. I think it makes us into a stronger, more fully realized human beings. And it may not change your position. It might. In fact, it might make you. You know, better able to defend it, right? You know, these people who kind of live in an ideological bubble and never want to challenge, they fall pretty quickly. When you bring the facts to them, right? But I think, you know, if you're so safe, you're a, you know, hardcore conservative. I've seen ones go through Cornell and Princeton who came out even stronger because they kind of sharpened their their sword, you know, in any logical discussions in the classroom or things like that. And they got better at making their case. That can happen to us. You might have a change of heart. You might double down on what you got. But there's a way in which that knowledge, one way or another is going to make you stronger and make you a little more sure and a little more capable of not just believing certain things, but expressing them and holding them.

**AS** [00:26:15] So Kevin, you're currently conducting research for a new book focused on civil rights. Of particular interest to me is how people on the right side of history confronted segregationists in higher ed. So, for example, at Ole Miss and University of Alabama. Could you share more about your research? And again, how it applies to what's what's going on today in society?

**Kevin Kruse** [00:26:36] Yeah. So the book is on John Doar, who is the basically the head of the civil rights division in the in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations for much of that. And so he was kind of the point man for civil rights in the federal government and as was a principal, came from small town, Wisconsin. They came to Princeton and he donated his papers here after he died. And they're just incredibly rich. And so, yeah, those fights over over higher ed are huge flashpoints in this. And again, show us the way in which, for a long time, institutions of learning were effectively bastions of white supremacy and not just in the south. When I lecture on affirmative action, I ask my students, in what year did Princeton University first implement preferences by race and gender? And the answer 1746, because for the first two centuries of our existence, you had to be a white guy to come here and think of it that way. But that's true. So these institutions, public and private, north and south, east and west were largely, you know, held off and reserved for white people. And I think for a variety of reasons, and the most obvious one is that again, that point earlier about if people get educated, they challenge not only their own assumptions about themselves, but the assumptions you placed on them, the limitations you placed on them. There's a line I use when I when I am might butcher it here, but there's a quote I like to do when I talk about the role of education and segregationists. Resistance to school, of course, was the big thing. There were the big prize. And that and, you know, post emancipation, the the thing that scared southern whites the most were the new levels of education and literacy. They saw in free blacks and in a professor actually from Ole Miss put it best when he said that the reason why you're scared about this is that educated people make their own paths. They find their own places, and they didn't want freed blacks to do that. They didn't want them to have that mobility that leg up to have that, not only that vision of now where they wanted to take their lives, but the ability to do so. And that's what education is. Education opens doors. And again, I'm talking at all levels here, and you open this up by saying people might be surprised why this Princeton guy is on this podcast. I hope they're not. There was not a dividing line here now, and you know this better than anyone. OK, the path you took to come to Cornell started community college and people get great, great foundations, great educations and fine on their own. Sometimes a path to a place like Cornell or a place like Princeton is remarkable. I'm on the graduate admissions committee of my university this year, and every year we find somebody whose path started at a community college and there's going to come on and get a Ph.D. at Princeton. And and to us, that's a more impressive journey than some legacy kid who got into Harvard and, you know, had life handed to them. That shows somebody who has taken advantage of everything they've had in front of them and made the most of it and really shown a determination and moved up. And that's what education does. It's what it did historically in the 60s in the civil rights era, what it's what it does now, right? And I think one of the real positive changes I've seen this place is the way in which it's opened up just about time. I've been here from being a kind of a very elite and elitist institution to one that has, you know, shifted away and all incoming students get needs, blind admission. You get grants instead of loans. They've kind of, they've opened it up. So there's many more first gen students here. That's great. That's what we as faculty want to see because of the candidates. It's the core of our student body who is coming and hungry to learn. They're not doing this because it's expected of them and they're checking a box. They really want to be here. They really want this passion. And that's what makes our students stand out. It's what made you stand out when all those years ago. Cornell, I you said originally, I bet you don't remember. No, I remembered you because Dick Polenberg pointed me out to you and said, This guy has come up this way--Marine Corps, community college, and he's here now. I was like, that's a guy I want to work with. That's somebody who has got a drive here. So that's still alive and well. And it's some of that we've seen in the past. But it's something thankfully we still see in the present the way in which education can be a ladder, right? And I don't mean, you know, economic mobility. And it's partly that, but I mean, personal growth and getting people to be the best people they can be. That's that's what we're trying to do here.

**AS** [00:31:18] Well, thank you for the kind words. I appreciate that. One of the things I got to tell you that's been really beneficial having a degree from an Ivy League is the branding helps. Yeah, it's super helpful. I wish if, I can turn back time, I wish I would have network more. I was just busy just trying to do my work, but I would have networked more. And I think that for disproportionately impact the students, the Ivy League or other institutions like Stanford, they really could use those institutions. Not necessarily because they teach better, but because like, I still remember my community college instructors and by and large, they were better teachers them many of the university faculty. But yeah, there's this capital, currency, this branding currency. This networking currency that these institutions have, but for decades, man, you know this, they have used standardized test scores, which now we know from research, they're pretty much just measure family wealth and resources. And it took a pandemic to finally say, Hey, OK, we're not going to need them. They're optional. Is there going to come a time, Kevin, where these institutions finally let go of those antiquated practices that really contribute to inequities? And because here's the thing, these institutions have billions of dollars in endowments and they receive millions of dollars in federal funding, and they just, they're so proud of their rejective status. You know, we reject 90 to 95 percent of students! I mean, that's something to be ashamed of. So, do you see that changing anytime soon?

**Kevin Kruse** [00:33:12] Well, I mean, the numbers are, they're going to reject that percentage, but I think what I'm hoping to see is that who's in that percentage who gets in becomes much more diverse and again, just my experiences in 20 years here at Princeton. It has for us, at least, and I think in good ways, both by slightly slightly expanded that group with they added that we have residential colleges here. You step five and added a six to basically increase the student body by 20 percent. And then that 20 percent, it was largely geared towards getting underrepresented groups. Now the problem is that a lot of that percentage of these institutions are two groups I get when I lecture on affirmative action. I asked them, What are the two biggest categories for special admissions at a university like Princeton? It's not racial minorities. It's not women. It's legacies and student athletes, and the legacy stuff is what's really baked in. And I don't know how. I mean, there's obviously, you know, a kind of, a self-perpetuating emotion in that part, which is going to keep the legacy interest going so you can whittle away at that. I don't know how much you can do before the alumni rise up in arms, you know, defending their own poor children. But I think by expanding that group like we did, that's the easy way. So it wasn't it wasn't a zero-sum game. You know, again, to go back to George Wallace. That's how he always presented things at any game for someone else is a loss for you. And if African-Americans get something that's coming out of the hands of whites, that's how Wallace always presented things instead, kind of grow the pie. And so if you can expand that percentage a little bit, you can get more people in there and it improves it, not just for those people, but for everyone. I think my students, the students who come from a better off background here, have a better experience because they're not living in a bubble with people just like them from their background. Now, I think the campus is a richer place. It's a more lively place. There's more to do. There's more to learn from. Discussions and classes are better as a result of this diversity in every sense of the term. So, I think that's a real benefit here. So it's not going to be easy. Standardized testing is, I think, part of that kind of pushes up that group left. I do think you're seeing a slow revolt against that. It'll take time. But I do think we've seen it accelerated with the pandemic period, as you noted, where people started to realize this, you know, we didn't need it that year. Do we need it any year? I'm not thankfully not involved in admissions decisions at the undergrad level, but I see the signs are there that they might be starting to weaken from that. And I hope it changes

**AS** [00:35:49] As we wrap up, Kevin. Imagine yourself, you're doing a lecture for a group of community college faculty administrators. A lot of that, just a lot of higher ed. The morale is kind of low. You know, we've been through a lot these last five years and it's not going away now. We're seeing higher ed being attacked constantly. But from a historical perspective, you've seen these rhythms. Some optimism that you can give to these educators as we're in the midst of a lot of challenges, a lot of struggles.

**Kevin Kruse** [00:36:26] Yeah, in higher ed, it does come in waves. And there's the politically, there are periods of backlash which are followed by periods of advancement. We've seen this time and time again in terms of student demands that an interest student ability to attend some of that is driven by their own goals and needs. But a lot of it comes from external forces. The big boom in colleges in America in the postwar period post-World War II, because of the GI Bill, we shoveled a lot of money towards veterans like yourself and said, would you like to go to college? And that benefited, not just them. It added a lot of people to the rolls and that a lot of people to the university community, which then had a ripple effect on those areas and made them much more profitable and much bigger. Or go back even further. A lot of the, you know, the so-called land grant universities came about in the 1860s. If you're a fan of football in the Big Ten or Big 12, you owe a lot to what the Lincoln era Republicans did and then putting those universities on the map. Those kind of things can happen. And there's again discussions now about expanding access to community college, waiving student loans, things like that, which could make this much more amenable. And so there's a political aspect of this, too, and that's going to require, you know, pressure at our end to keep this up. But I think it's within, it's within the realm of possibility. And just when things look dark, I think the biggest lesson of history is that they don't stay dark. We have fumbled our way to the light. Time and time again, and part of the and this is again, just circle back to our conversation about why do you study the bad parts of the past to remember that they were once bad and when they got better and instead they got better, right? And so I find that I think the most depressing way to teach history would be that everything used to be perfect. And now, God, it's all screwed up. Well, we don't know why. You know, that's awful. Instead, show people how we muddle through the dark times of the path. That's why I teach the Depression. That's why I teach the civil rights struggle against institutionalized Jim Crow, right, is that those things were overcome, as they said in the civil rights movement, and they can be overcome again. And so I weirdly find some corners of optimism because I know just how bad things have been in the past. It doesn't make me feel like we're living in some unique end times, but rather to go back and sink myself into the depths of McCarthyism or the despair of, you know, of the economy in 1931 or how deep racism looked like. It was never going to be eradicated in the era of massive resistance in the 50s and in no, I can flip to the end of that book and see it came out. All right. OK, well, I'm in the opening chapters of another book, and I think what we can do is take some heart in knowing that things can change. So things are not great for education right now, but they've not been great in the past. They can be. They can be better again.

**AS** [00:39:29] That's beautiful. Thank you, Kevin. I needed that.

**Kevin Kruse** [00:39:31] Thank you. OK. All right. If I improve the life of one person and I'm glad it's you.

**AS** [00:39:38] Any last thoughts on our conversation that you would like to impart?

**Kevin Kruse** [00:39:43] This has been a great chat, and I've enjoyed it a lot too. I think just history speaks to us and it should take a little work to to dig it out and make sure we we really see it. But I hope students can can find the passion for it that we both had and see the meaning for it in their own lives today.

**AS** [00:40:06] So if you were to edit this this podcast and add an intro song and outro, what would it be?

**Kevin Kruse** [00:40:13] Oh my own intro and outro song. Anything I say I will immediately regret in five minutes because I'll think of something better. You can't go wrong with James Brown. We could start off with with an ending with probably the same song. You mean the eight minute drum solo. That be fine. I'll have somebody come here, put a put a cape on my back at the end and walk off in a cold sweat. How about that?

**AS** [00:40:38] Well, we'll end with tht image, Kevin. Thanks.

**Kevin Kruse** [00:40:40] I'm sorry for that. Yeah.

**AS** [00:40:41] Thank you for participating in the student success podcast, man. Really appreciate it.

**Kevin Kruse** [00:40:45] My pleasure. Al, take care now.