

Right-wing witch-hunt drives black professor Jason Arday to suicide

Chris Marsden
19 August 2026

On August 9, Jason Arday resigned as Professor of Sociology at the University of Cambridge, after a witch-hunt set in motion by far-right forces. He told friends and colleagues that his life had been ruined and he could see no way out.

His resignation did nothing to stem the media feeding frenzy. Five days later, he took his own life. Hundreds of stories on Arday began to be taken offline, including many of the close to 200 posted in the days following his resignation until the day of his death.

Millions were outraged at his treatment and deeply saddened by his tragic end. A vigil organised by Stand Up To Racism in Trafalgar Square, London on August 17 was attended by tens of thousands.

There have been and will be denunciations of the media and of the clearly racist underpinnings of the campaign against the youngest black professor ever appointed by Cambridge; of its sheer scale and how this belies all claims that the issue at stake was a defence of academic integrity; of the stark contrast regarding how other (proven, not alleged) allegations of plagiarism by white academics have been treated.

Many will identify this as an example of the “culture wars” launched by the right against a supposed “woke threat” to “traditional”, “western” standards and values.

But identifying a threat is not the same as combatting it, which requires a clear-eyed look at Arday the individual and the politics he was associated with.

The only investigation of Arday’s work for plagiarism was regarding his PhD thesis secured in 2015 at Liverpool John Moores University, which exonerated him unreservedly. Though other allegations of plagiarism were made, most attention would come to focus on claims that he lied about his childhood and activities, mostly but not exclusively outside of education.

Arday suffered from various neurodivergent conditions, including autism, global developmental delay, and dyscalculia. It is also true that much of what he claimed about his life, including credentials relevant to his spectacular academic career, was outlandish and transparently false.

These provided legitimate grounds to question Arday’s appointment at Cambridge and the celebrity status he was afforded by academia and the media, which does not distract from their grotesque use by a right-wing campaign looking to discredit him.

The first internal efforts to question Arday’s bona fides came immediately after his appointment at Cambridge, in May 2023, from David Harris, an emeritus professor at Plymouth Marjon University and prominent opponent of Critical Race Theory, who alleged plagiarism in an article by Arday. He sought the assistance of sociologist Martyn Hammersley, who supported his critique.

The first accusations made outside academia were by *Times Higher Education* reporter Jack Grove, but a story was dropped after Arday accused Grove of harassment and threatened action through leading British defamation firm Carter-Ruck.

Arday spoke publicly, but obliquely in April this year at the 75th

anniversary conference of the British Sociological Association, of a right-wing “playbook” used to discredit black academics, accusing them of plagiarism, that should be eradicated from academia.

Precisely such an operation was by then well underway against him, led on his Substack account by Nathan Cofnas, who made more sweeping accusations of plagiarism against Arday in July.

An American Zionist who has built his career alleging that race determines intelligence, Cofnas was fired as a research associate at Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 2024. He had published a blog post stating that in a meritocracy, the number of black professors at Harvard University ‘would approach zero percent’ and that blacks ‘would disappear from almost all high-profile positions outside of sports and entertainment’.

His appointment ended only after a campaign by Emmanuel students.

In an August 9 online video, Cofnas spoke with right-wing historian David Starkey, who also resigned or was removed from various posts at Cambridge in June 2020 after stating that ‘slavery was not genocide, otherwise there wouldn’t be so many damn blacks in Africa or in Britain would there? An awful lot of them survived’.

Starkey boasted that Cofnas had secured Arday’s resignation, stating, ‘It is vengeance. Good old Christian vengeance. That’s the reason we are grinning’.

Cofnas’ accusations were followed by reports by *The Telegraph*, which led the ensuing witch-hunt.

All those cited as organisers of the witch-hunt of Arday are part of, or championed by an organised and well-funded network whose function is to provide the ideological underpinnings of a far-right movement.

This stretches from Toby Young’s Free Speech Union, which defended Nathan Cofnas, and others named, to Peter Thiel, the multibillionaire head of data-mining and surveillance corporation Palantir Technologies, who has backed James Orr, Head of Policy at Nigel Farage’s Reform UK, in targeting Cambridge University as a recruitment ground for the far-right.

By the time of his resignation, Arday believed he had nowhere to go. And the best efforts of his defenders did not change anything for him. A petition organised by the Good Law Project denouncing accusations of plagiarism as “entirely false” secured 10,000 signatures including Green Party leader Zack Polanski, Labour left John McDonnell and other notables. But some had already begun to withdraw, including National Education Union General Secretary Daniel Kebede.

Investigations had been announced by the University of Cambridge, Jesus College, Queen’s University Belfast and Durham University. The publication of his memoir, *Great and Unfortunate Things*, in the United States met with scathing reviews. Meanwhile the right wing was in a state of gleeful ecstasy and continued its vendetta.

Arday died at his Battersea home on August 14, aged just 41.

The obsessive self-publicist Prime Minister Andy Burnham described his death as an occasion for “reflection”, to be joined in the shedding of crocodile tears by his Education Secretary Lucy Powell and London

Mayor Sadiq Khan. Demands have been made for the dead-end of a public inquiry and for the media to be reined in.

All of which will have zero lasting impact.

The offensive on campuses will proceed at pace, as will the assault against migrants and asylum seekers as the spearhead of broader efforts to build a far-right movement to be mobilised against the working class, under conditions of escalating war and savage austerity measures. And Burnham's Labour government will continue to triangulate its own anti-migrant measures against those of Reform UK while employing sympathetic noises over Arday as camouflage.

Arday's death is a tragedy. But more and far worse is to come.

The right wing feels strengthened and will press on. *The Daily Telegraph* complained of "institutional hypocrisy" over its exposure of Arday, while Charles Moore boasted that "the press found out substantial untruths, seriously damaging to the reputation of one of our two greatest universities and reported them." *The Spectator* wrote that "Jason Arday wasn't the victim of a 'racist witch hunt', before railing against "(invariably white) left liberals in academia" and "progressive activists".

Arday, DEI and Critical Race Theory

The success of this right-wing campaign is an exposure of the politically bankrupt petty bourgeois protest politics, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, and Critical Race Theory nostrums which Arday subscribed to. The right-wing offensive in universities cannot be defeated on this basis and is rather strengthened by it.

Contemporary racial prejudice and the weight of historic oppression find stark reflection in academia, especially its elite institutions like Cambridge. In 2025, just 0.4 percent of the university's professors were black, even worse than the UK university average of roughly 1 percent. Twelve percent of Cambridge's faculty are from ethnic minority backgrounds, versus a third of its undergraduates.

But the fight against such discrimination cannot be pursued based on a strategy of appeals to the ruling elite to provide a more equitable distribution of privilege based on ethnic criteria. University administrations use such policies for their own ends, only benefitting a narrow layer of the black and ethnic minority upper-middle class, doing nothing for the vast bulk of the BAME working class and creating the conditions for a right-wing offensive.

Cambridge's role in the affair is particularly filthy. It made cynical use of Arday's appointment to conceal its function as a bastion of social privilege. Facing criticism for its lack of staff diversity, the university leapt at his colourful biographical claims, working class background, media prominence and attractive personality. On his appointment, a university spokesperson said this would help address "the underrepresentation of people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, especially those from black, Asian, and other minority ethnic communities."

One faction at Cambridge, taking a condescending attitude to any black (especially black working-class) academic, had no real interest in checking his credentials. To them, he was a much-needed high-profile hire. For another faction, it was simply enough that he had co-edited *Dismantling Race in Higher Education: Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy and other writings on Racism and Eurocentrism*. He suited their political agenda.

The result was an appointment which put a target on the back of a clearly quite vulnerable man, out of his depth and in no position to answer his critics and political opponents.

Fellow academics, including many of Arday's co-thinkers and those

from Black and Asian backgrounds, made this point. After Arday's resignation, a joint letter demanding an independent investigation into how he had been appointed began circulating at Cambridge.

One of the reported 100 academic signatories, Priyamvada Gopal, professor of postcolonial studies at Cambridge's English faculty, said: "An independent investigation must scrutinise how such an early-career appointment to a very senior and prestigious professorial chair was made and what both the faculty of education and university management may have got very badly wrong," unleashing "grotesque racism" and doing harm to "the individual in the line of fire, to Black academics as a group, and the broader field of critical race studies."

The liberal *Guardian* editorialised on August 7: "By failing to do due diligence on Mr Arday before launching him, with fanfare, as Cambridge's youngest-ever black professor, and through its inadequate response to later challenges, the university has done a serious disservice to black and neurodivergent scholars more widely. It has also set back the efforts of all the people and groups who have worked in good faith, over many years, to boost the presence of underrepresented groups in influential positions."

But these comments are written from the same standpoint of moral pressure and appeals to authority which delivered the Arday tragedy, and a defence of the Critical Race Theory politics which underpins it. It should now be beyond serious question that the rise of the far right cannot be opposed by the petty bourgeois advocates of a worldview that mirrors the right's own national and racial approach.

The essential political falsehood of Critical Race Theory is its argument that the fundamental divide in modern society is race and not class. This determines its reactionary character, serving to divide the working class in its struggles against the capitalist class. White workers are even designated as beneficiaries of a system based on 'white supremacy,' concealing the fundamental source of inequality and oppression.

The working class is blamed for systemic inequalities, rather than the private ownership of the means of production by the bourgeoisie within the capitalist mode of production.

This in turn provides the basis for a narrow layer of the black petty bourgeoisie to focus on demands for their own self-advancement within capitalism, through DEI-based initiatives which do nothing to fundamentally challenge the profit system or its praetorian guards in academia and other areas of society.

The right-wing attack on black professors and students can only be opposed by breaking from the nostrums informing DEI and CRT, based upon the mobilisation of the working class, regardless of ethnicity, in defence of its collective social interests and democratic rights. Its goal must be to provide everyone with a decent, well-paying job, a home, high-quality healthcare and education that is free to access, instead of a more diverse allocation of wealth and privilege *within* the top tier of society.

The political right are at their happiest when any social issue is framed in racial terms and they can exploit and generate a backlash against those it can portray as seeking special privileges. That is why they have spent such effort on promoting their racial agenda on campus, to play to social grievances, especially within the upper middle class, who want to defend their own privileges from the "undeserving" leveraging race to seek their own "place in the sun".

Nothing progressive can come from such a conflict. It is a conduit for political reaction.

In December 2018, race pseudoscientist Noah Carl was appointed to a three-year research fellowship at St Edmund's College, before protests by more than 500 academics and by students forced his dismissal. Subsequently Carl mounted a legal challenge, before agreeing to an undisclosed financial settlement and transitioning to a career spewing "scientific racism" in right-wing journals.

The WSWS wrote in conclusion on the Noah Carl case in October 2019:

Networks of professors and politicians across the world are working to “prove” that German fascism was justified, that race exists as a meaningful scientific category, that the eugenicists have a point.

In opposing this campaign, appeals to scientific reason can only have a lasting impact if they are joined with a progressive, socialist political programme. Falsifications and pseudo-science gain power despite their untruth because they animate and are promoted by reactionary social forces of the kind strengthening daily under conditions of a global capitalist crisis.

The fascist and fascistic movements in which these ideas find a home are being cultivated to defend and enforce explosive levels of social inequality and imperialist violence. Defeating them therefore requires a defence of historical and scientific truth based on a turn to a far more powerful force with diametrically opposed social interests—the international working class, now coming forward into mass struggles against inequality, war and dictatorship.

This is the axis of struggle that must be adopted on campus. It means above all the building of the IYSSE to take up the struggle to build a socialist opposition oriented to the independent political mobilisation of the working class, not appeals to the “consciences” and deep pockets of the ruling elite.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact