

Columns

# Do Not Applaud Harvard for Doing the Bare Minimum



By [Violet T.M. Barron](#), Crimson Opinion Writer

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The verdict is in: Harvard [will not comply](#) with the Trump administration's demands to end diversity, equity, and inclusion programming and further restrict campus protest.

If only the University had not been carrying out a parallel campaign — of silencing dissent, prosecuting protest, and abandoning academic freedom — for the past eighteen months, maybe then the verdict would be worth celebrating; maybe then the [promises from Massachusetts Hall](#) would not ring so hollow.

Indeed, in all but name — and before being officially asked to do so — University President Alan M. Garber '76 has already actualized many of the Trump administration's wishes for the University.

In less than one month, Harvard has paused an academic partnership with Birzeit University after a months-long smear campaign against the West Bank institution; fired the leadership of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in apparent response to allegations of imbalanced programming on Palestine; suspended the Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative at the Harvard Divinity School amidst accusations of antisemitism; let go of RCPI's Associate Director, a Palestinian American professor; and, placed the Harvard Undergraduate Palestine Solidarity Committee on probation without clear basis.

As Garber took great pains to rid this campus of any mention of the word "Palestine" — whether in the classroom or in the Yard — he also moved Harvard closer to Israel, even as the one-year mark of the state's accelerated genocide in Gaza came and went.

At the semester's outset, Harvard adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism — which conflates certain criticisms of Israel with antisemitism — promised a partnership with an undisclosed Israeli university, and effectively established "Zionist" as a protected identity. That same month, Harvard Medical School canceled a panel with patients from Gaza — 1, 6, and 14 years old — on the grounds that it was too divisive.

In short, the damage has already been done. We cannot celebrate Harvard's "fight" against the federal government as the University stands knee-deep in another — against its own students, faculty, and staff.

Don't get me wrong: Harvard made the right choice in refusing to agree to the Trump administration's punitive and discriminatory demands. This does not make the University any less punitive or discriminatory itself. Harvard's shameful track record on Palestine is only the most glaring proof that in many cases, the University's agenda converges with that of the government they ostensibly reject.

Indeed, Garber did not miraculously grow a spine between Sunday and Monday, just as Harvard did not suddenly find its way back to veritas. Rather, yesterday was just another day of the University doing what it does best — executing a deeply conservative agenda from behind a fading blue facade.

Do not mistake Garber's scramble to retain a semblance of liberalism as a stand — let alone fight — against the Trump administration. No number of strongly worded statements nor invocations of “independence” or “constitutional rights” will allow Harvard to claw its way out of the hole it has dug itself into for over a year now. In this hole, academic freedom is not reality but myth, proved fictional by the systematic exclusion of Palestine from its bounds.

For there to be any sort of step forward, Harvard must fully walk back the prejudiced paces it has already taken.

It is physically impossible for an institution which has bent over as far backwards as Harvard has — for far longer than Trump has been in office — to stand up. If, and only if, Harvard renews its research partnership with Birzeit, then it will have stood up. If it reinstates Professors Rosie Bsheer and Cemal Kafadar to their leadership positions at CMES, then it will have stood up. If it resumes the RCPI at HDS with Hilary Rantisi at the helm, then it will have stood up. If it finally acknowledges the waves of student visa revocations and commits to not allowing Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents to disappear its students, then it will have stood up.

In the meantime, expect Garber to continue his campaign against all manifestations of Palestine on this campus — along with anything else that challenges the University's financial and political investment in the status quo. What starts with Palestine never ends there.

Yesterday, Garber stopped short of complete capitulation to the Trump administration's demands. This does not stop the University from carrying out a similar campaign on its own time, and it certainly does not erase the fact that Harvard has already done much of the work for Washington. Until the University rights its myriad wrongs, it deserves protest — not applause.

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