

May 4, 2024

## **A Response to the “Open Letter from Faculty and Staff across the DC, Maryland, and Virginia Region” by DMV Faculty for Academic Freedom Concerning the Ongoing Student Demonstrations**

While we, faculty members and emeriti faculty in the greater DC region, support the right of students to protest peacefully, the [open letter](#) recently circulated makes a number of points with which we disagree.

First, the letter describes these student protests as “anchored in a clear moral compass in the face of Israel’s genocidal campaign against the Palestinians in Gaza.” The scholars who have signed the letter rely upon what we consider to be simplistic and problematic assertions and slogans. The absence of any mention of the massacre of Israelis and others on October 7, the longstanding terrorism of Hamas, and the holding of hostages – many of whom have been tortured and killed in captivity – also undermines their notion of a “clear moral compass.”

Second, taking “our obligation” as faculty “to prepare our students for leadership, critical thinking, global citizenship, and political engagement seriously in an increasingly divided and global society” is not fulfilled by the adoption of a wholly one-sided view of a very complex subject.

Third, while we oppose any attempt to ascribe antisemitic intent to all or even most of the protesters, it is indisputable that there have been numerous cases of harassment, abuse, and even physical violence against Jewish students on college campuses since October 7. Within the George Washington University encampment, for instance, signs reading “Students will go back home when Israelis go back to Europe, US, etc. (their real homes)” and even “final solution” appeared recently. It is false and offensive to claim that concerns about antisemitism are simply a “weaponization of unfounded presumptions of bigotry to intimidate, punish, and silence students who are not engaging in anything of the sort,” as the DMV Faculty for Academic Freedom letter states.

Fourth, while we oppose the deployment of police against protesters – something that has taken place on other campuses – we do not believe that “open and free expression of speech” and the upholding of the “democratic ideals of a society” are undermined by reasonable rules governing the time and place of protest when classes are in session and exams are being administered.

Finally, if the “current administration choose[s] to stand in their way,” would it really “be on the wrong side of history”? The right side of history, faculty signatories believe, is the position that they and they alone hold, the wrong side the one their opponents hold. But others might question whether an uncritical embrace of pro-Palestinian extremism, with slogans justifying armed “resistance” waged by Hamas, a terrorist organization which brutalizes its own people as well as others, with no references to the horrors of October 7 – constitutes the right side of history. If that is the future the signatories envision, many of us are appalled and want nothing to do with it. The satisfaction of claiming moral clarity must not come at the expense of ignoring the pain and justified grievances of both Palestinians and Israelis.

We agree that student speech and protest should be respected -- provided they follow reasonable university regulations and do not veer into the realm of harassment. We accept that there are

significant abuses on both sides in the current war in Gaza. We fervently hope for a peace that recognizes the mutual existence and rights of both Palestinians and Israelis. But we also believe that protesters' uncritical endorsement of Hamas's "resistance," celebration of its "martyrs," and toleration of abusive slogans, as well as silence on the slaughter of October 7, the holding of hostages, and Hamas's own role in the blockage of any lasting ceasefire belie any notion of "moral clarity" insisted upon by the signatories and undermine the credibility of their other claims.

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