

The anti-democratic firing of Princeton professor Joshua Katz

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The firing of Princeton University classics professor Joshua Katz is an anti-democratic action and an attack on academic freedom and free speech. The university dishonestly claims that Katz, a tenured professor who taught at Princeton for 25 years, has been dismissed because of sexual impropriety committed more than 15 years ago and for which he was already penalized. However, it is evident to any objective observer that Katz is being punished for his public criticism of racial politics at the university.

In the mid-2000s, Katz engaged in a consensual relationship with a student, an action which violated a university rule. An investigation by Princeton in 2018 resulted in his being suspended for a year without pay.

In July 2020, Katz wrote an article in *Quillette*, an online publication, in which he condemned a letter signed by 350 faculty members that claimed “Anti-Blackness is foundational to America” and demanded a whole range of special privileges for “faculty of color.” The letter, to which we will return, sharply expressed the grasping and selfish character of a privileged layer of black academics, supported by white “allies.”

In the course of his *Quillette* essay, which pointed to the far-reaching and absurd character of the faculty letter, Katz referred to the Black Justice League, which functioned on the Princeton campus from 2014 to 2016, as a “small local terrorist organization.” This reference was a serious error. If Katz meant that the group attempted to intimidate its political opponents, he should have said so. To use the word “terrorist” under present circumstances has definite and dangerous political implications, opening the door for the authorities to suppress political opposition.

In general, we take no responsibility for Professor Katz’s views, whatever they might precisely be, which he has expressed in *Quillette* and the *Wall Street Journal* and other right-wing publications. The attempt in particular by the Murdoch-owned *Journal*, the house organ of the financial oligarchy, to present itself as the defender of “academic freedom” and other basic rights needs to be rejected with contempt. The publication has defended each criminal war

and invasion undertaken by the US military over the past several decades, along with waterboarding and torture in general, the activities of the NSA, CIA and every other US government operation that represents a mortal threat to democracy and humanity in all parts of the globe.

It is an indication of the foul and essentially anti-popular character of racial and gender politics, and the upper middle class “left” in all its activities, that it provides, as it did in the case of the *New York Times*’ 1619 Project, an undeserved opportunity for the publications like the *Journal* to pose as the guardian of America’s democratic traditions.

Whatever his own political views, there is no question but that Katz had the right to his opinion about the faculty letter.

Katz’s intervention in July 2020 clearly stirred up a hornet’s nest. It immediately prompted two student reporters at the *Daily Princetonian*, the campus newspaper, to look into his history in a transparent attempt to discredit and, if possible, destroy him. The result was a scurrilous February 2021 article, “Alumni allege history of inappropriate conduct with female students by Princeton professor Joshua Katz.”

Typical of this sort of hatchet job, the article contains next to no verifiable information. It includes a breathless account of Katz’s affair with the student in the mid-2000s, for which he had been suspended in 2018, and otherwise a great deal of overheated language about next to nothing. The *Princetonian* claimed that its investigation had “uncovered allegations that Katz crossed professional boundaries with three of his female students.” One of them was already accounted for. The other two, unnamed of course, “did not say that Katz engaged in any sexual behavior with them, but assert that he behaved inappropriately.”

The *Princetonian* article notes that “Samantha Harris ’99, a former student of Katz’s and his attorney, responded to an inquiry from the ‘Prince’ by calling this story a ‘planned smear’ of Katz and ‘clearly yet another attempt to punish him for dissenting from the prevailing campus orthodoxy.’” It is difficult to argue with this.

The newspaper's "exposé" both spurred the administration into action and provided it with the pretext for getting rid of Katz. Princeton officials opened a new investigation into the same incident, an obvious case of "double jeopardy," while cynically claiming that its investigation "did not revisit" the original policy violations. The second inquiry determined that "Dr. Katz misrepresented facts or failed to be straightforward during the 2018 proceeding." All of this about an affair between two adults that occurred close to 20 years ago.

The "new issues" that came to light boil down to the female student's claim that Katz discouraged her "from participating [in] and cooperating" with the 2018 inquiry and that he also discouraged "her from seeking mental health care although he knew her to be in distress, all in an effort to conceal a relationship he knew was prohibited by University rules." Katz denies this and insists that she had "resolutely refused—of her own volition, I stress—to participate in the investigation that led to my suspension." On this basis, shamefully, Princeton organized his dismissal.

Lost in all this, and deliberately so from the point of university officials, is the deplorable content of the July 2020 faculty letter, the actual substance of the controversy and the impetus for Katz's firing.

The letter takes as its starting point that "Anti-Black racism has hamstrung our political process," that it "is rampant in even our most 'progressive' communities" and that it "plays a powerful role at institutions like Princeton." As to how it currently plays that "powerful role" at Princeton, the letter remains silent.

The missive demands the university "Give seats at your decision-making table to people of color who are actively anti-racist and inclusive in their practices. ... Redress the demographic disparity on Princeton's faculty immediately and exponentially by hiring more faculty of color. ... Elevate faculty of color to prominent leadership positions." In other words, this is about money, careers and social status.

Furthermore, the letter insists that Princeton "engage an outside committee of academics, law professors, artists, and cultural advisors from communities of color—experts in the study of race and challenging racism—in University decisions about race, racism, anti-racism, and racial equity" and form "an internal committee of faculty and students of color to whom the University, in carrying out this work, remains accountable." The Holy Inquisition would have nothing on such committees!

Remarkably, the letter also calls on the university to "Reward the invisible work done by faculty of color with course relief and summer salary," insists that "Faculty of color hired at the junior level should be guaranteed one additional semester of sabbatical" and demands that

Princeton officials "Provide additional human resources for the support of junior faculty of color." In response to these latter demands, Katz legitimately commented, "It boggles my mind that anyone would advocate giving people—extraordinarily privileged people already, let me point out: Princeton professors—extra perks for no reason other than their pigmentation." If such policies were adopted, they would generate a toxic atmosphere, creating serious divisions between black and white faculty.

And this is only the beginning. The preposterous letter, which views the university and the educational process exclusively through a racist prism, according to which, indeed, race is *the only factor in life* worth considering, consists of a list of nearly 50 demands along these lines. These demands, far too lengthy to enumerate here, would, among other things, hand virtually dictatorial powers to the administration and the various bodies of racists that it would set up. Along the way, they would eviscerate such phenomena as tenure and academic freedom. They are aimed at blotting out freedom of expression and thought, controlling curriculum and campus intellectual life, etc. The authoritarian, repressive character of this affluent crowd comes through clearly.

The issuing of the 2020 faculty letter and the dismissal of Katz for criticizing it demonstrate the extent to which Princeton and other elite institutions are thoroughly beholden at present to these gender and race-obsessed social forces, associated with the Democratic Party and leading sections of the American ruling elite. These forces both have economic and social interests of their own, which they pursue with ferocity, and they also serve as a means of polluting the social atmosphere with their demands for special privileges. As the Katz case demonstrates, through their relentlessly self-centered and undemocratic activities, the identity politics practitioners alienate wide layers of the population and push the most ideologically vulnerable into the arms of the extreme right.



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