

# University of Pennsylvania president denounces lecturer for anti-genocide cartoons

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In a statement released on Sunday, February 4, University of Pennsylvania's interim president, Larry Jameson, denounced and smeared a lecturer at the university over supposed "antisemitic" political cartoons.

Jameson's statement, published on the University of Pennsylvania's Instagram account, targets Dwayne Booth, known as "Mr. Fish" for his drawings and political cartoons. Booth's illustrations, using the traditional satiric methods of the genre, have criticized Israel and the United States for the mass murder of Palestinians in Gaza.

In his statement, Jameson denounced the cartoons as "reprehensible, with antisemitic symbols, and incongruent with our efforts to fight hate." Jameson proceeded to smear Booth's cartoons by invoking the Holocaust. "They disrespect the feelings and experiences of many people in our community and around the world, particularly those only a generation removed from the Holocaust," Jameson said.

Jameson is seizing on allegations against Booth originally made in the right-wing publication, the *Washington Free Beacon*, which played a leading role in the witch hunt of Harvard University President Claudine Gay.

The accusations against Booth come during a wave of investigations into multiple universities by the Biden administration under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 over bogus claims of antisemitic activity on American campuses. They come two months since former University of Pennsylvania president Liz Magill was forced to resign after a congressional testimony turned into a right-wing frenzy demanding the suppression of freedom of speech and academic freedom on campuses.

Booth teaches courses at Penn on political cartoons.

His web page at Penn's Annenberg School For Communication says his primary research area is political communication. Booth is also a freelance writer and has published work which is critical of American politics and has been particularly critical of Israel since it launched its campaign of ethnic cleansing in Gaza.

The cartoons Booth publishes on his website and ScheerPost draw attention to the ongoing genocide against Palestinians and the hypocrisy of both the Israeli and American governments.

One cartoon that has been singled out by the media is called "The Anti-Semite." This displays three men drinking from glasses of blood labeled "Gaza" in front of American and Israeli flags, with one of the men saying to the others, "Who invited that lousy anti-semitic?" referring to a white dove in the distance meant to symbolize those calling for a ceasefire. Those attacking Booth claim he is invoking the "blood libel," the infamous far-right lie that Jews drink the blood of Christians.

This misses the point entirely. Instead of being antisemitic, the cartoon sends up the manipulation of antisemitism to attack the opponents of genocide—precisely what Jameson is now doing.

Another cartoon singled out by Booth's critics is entitled "Slaughterhouse." It depicts Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in an apron covered in blood with a bloody knife in one hand and a Palestinian flag in the other hand. Another cartoon shows Netanyahu shoveling skulls into the engine of a train with an ironic text saying that Netanyahu is "magnanimous enough to bring every last Palestinian man, woman, and child in on the peace process."

Responding to the allegations against him made by the *Washington Free Beacon*, Booth stated, "Being

accused of anti-Semitism by a reporter who presents no corroborating sources beyond her own misreading of my work is neither journalism nor responsible reporting.” In his remarks Booth also rejected the idea that the Zionist state of Israel is synonymous with Jews all around the world.

Penn President Jameson, it is clear, intends to use the episode to intimidate not only opponents of the war, but advocates of academic freedom and freedom of speech. His statement spelled this out in Orwellian fashion:

At Penn, we have a bedrock commitment to open expression and academic freedom... [but] we also have a responsibility *to challenge what we find offensive*, and to do so acknowledging the right and ability of members of our community to express their views, however loathsome we find them. [emphasis added]

There is an obvious difference between students and campus workers challenging speech they “find offensive” and an attack on a faculty member by a university president—an office that at Ivy League institutions like Penn pays more than \$1 million per year.

Summing up his conception of freedom of speech, Jameson concluded, “Not everything that can be said, should be said.”

The University of Pennsylvania has been at the center of the campaign targeting opposition to Israel’s genocide.

Back in November 2023, a Jewish student group, Chavurah, screened the anti-Zionist film *Israelism* to an audience of Jewish and Muslim students. The leaders of the student group were threatened by the university with disciplinary action for showing the film.

In spite of Penn’s efforts to quash opposition to Israel’s genocide, University President Liz Magill was summoned to testify before a Congressional committee, alongside Harvard President Claudine Gay and Massachusetts Institute of Technology president Sally Kornbluth. During the testimony, the three were ruthlessly berated by Elise Stefanik, a far-right figurehead and advocate of the antisemitic Great Replacement Theory, for the presidents’ alleged

“mishandling” of “antisemitic activity” on their campuses.

Under heavy pressure from the university’s billionaire backers and the Democratic and Republican parties, Magill was forced to resign her position as president. Gay was later forced out at Harvard over trumped up plagiarism charges. The real reason was always clear: The college presidents had not been ruthless enough in silencing all opposition to the Biden administration’s support for Israel’s war of annihilation against the Palestinians.

Jameson, who was brought on to replace Magill, was no doubt carefully vetted to be sure he could be relied on to move against political speech that opposes US imperialism and its Israeli proxy. In his bullying attack on Booth, Jameson has already delivered.

The conflation of opposition to Israeli and American sponsored genocide with antisemitism has only one purpose. It is meant to confuse popular consciousness and silence left-wing opposition. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality calls for a mass mobilization of students against these attacks on freedom of speech and against imperialist war and its root source, the capitalist system.



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