

Trump task force to investigate 10 universities for “antisemitism”

Kevin Reed
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On Friday, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced that the Federal Task Force to Combat Antisemitism—created by President Donald Trump following an executive order signed on January 29—will be investigating 10 universities, where pro-Palestinian demonstrations against the Gaza genocide took place last year.

In a press release, the DOJ stated that the task force had selected the 10 schools because they “have experienced antisemitic incidents since October 2023” and “may have failed to protect Jewish students and faculty members from unlawful discrimination, in potential violation of federal law.”

The statement said that Senior Counsel to the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Leo Terrell—a former legal commentator on Fox News whose selection was announced by Trump on January 9—had informed the 10 schools that they were being investigated.

The universities have been identified as Columbia University; George Washington University; Harvard University; Johns Hopkins University; New York University; Northwestern University; the University of California, Los Angeles; the University of California, Berkeley; the University of Minnesota; and the University of Southern California.

The DOJ press release said the task force would be meeting with “university leadership, impacted students and staff, local law enforcement, and community members as it gathers information about these incidents and considers whether remedial action is warranted.”

The aim of these investigations is to further the slander of campus protesters and demonstrations as “antisemitic,” and to intimidate anyone wishing to speak out against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Immediately after Israel launched the Gaza genocide in October 2023, the Democrats and Republicans and corporate media joined with fascist Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Zionist leaders in falsely equating opposition to ethnic cleansing and the slaughter of Palestinians with “antisemitism.”

The slander campaign reached a crescendo in December 2023, when the presidents of Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn), and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) testified before the US House Committee on Education and the Workforce regarding allegations of “antisemitism” on their campuses during the fall 2023 semester protests.

The bipartisan House inquisition turned reality on its head and demanded the university presidents answer questions about whether calls for the “genocide of Jews” violated university policies. The politicians and corporate media claimed the presidents’ responses were “evasive and insufficient,” and a campaign was launched demanding their resignations.

Liz Magill, president of the University of Pennsylvania, resigned on December 9, 2023 amid pressure from donors and other university stakeholders, just four days after the hearing. Claudine Gay, president of Harvard University, resigned under pressure on January 2, 2024.

When the campus protests resumed in the 2024 spring semester, the campaign against the demonstrators intensified, with over 3,000 students detained nationwide. Most arrests were for misdemeanors like trespassing or failure to disperse, with some cases dismissed while others remained ongoing. In Illinois, students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign faced felony mob action charges for participating in encampment protests.

In September 2024, at the University of Michigan, Democratic state Attorney General Dana Nessel’s office charged nine demonstrators involved in an encampment protest on the university’s Diag. Two individuals were charged with trespassing, a misdemeanor carrying a maximum 30-day sentence, for failing to vacate the area after repeated orders.

Seven others faced both trespassing charges and additional counts of resisting or obstructing a police officer, a felony punishable by up to two years in prison, due to alleged physical interference with law enforcement efforts. In October 2024, student Jonathan Zou received a trespass ban

after using a megaphone during an anti-genocide demonstration on the Ann Arbor campus. This ban effectively restricted his access to classes, dormitories and campus employment.

In January 2025, the University of Michigan suspended for two years the pro-Palestinian group Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE), the local chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine. The suspension resulted from “unauthorized demonstrations,” including protests outside a regent’s home and on campus, leading to the group’s loss of funding and prohibition from reserving university spaces.

Other universities have taken action against student protesters that violates their free speech rights. Vanderbilt University suspended several students and expelled three following a sit-in at the president’s office in March 2024. Some Palestinian students reported severe university retaliation, including disciplinary measures that hindered their academic progress.

In September 2024, Momodou Taal, a British Gambian Ph.D. student at Cornell University, participated in a peaceful protest at the Statler Hotel during a career fair that included defense contractors Boeing and L3Harris. The demonstration aimed to oppose these companies’ involvement, reflecting ongoing student campaigns urging the university to sever ties with organizations profiting from military engagements, especially those having contracts with the Israeli government.

Following the protest, on September 23, Cornell University suspended Taal, citing “escalating, egregious behavior and a disregard for the University policies.” Taal was told that his suspension would lead to a cancellation of his F-1 visa status, and then to his deportation.

Taal appealed the suspension, and a mass campaign emerged among Cornell students and university organizations across the country demanding his reinstatement. On October 11, interim Provost John Siliciano was forced to rescind Taal’s suspension, allowing him to remain enrolled and maintain his visa status. Despite this, Taal continued to face restrictions, including a ban from campus and suspension from teaching his course.

In January 2025, Trump signed executive orders targeting international students involved in pro-Palestinian activism, leading to deportation efforts. The names of the students facing deportation under these orders have not been publicized. The orders are designed to instill fear and uncertainty among international students who have participated in pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

With the DOJ announcement on Friday, the Trump administration is now formally taking the slander campaign to another level and launching a legal witch-hunt against university students, faculty and administrators and others

who participated in, supported or permitted the protests on campuses across the country. The new campaign is a direct attack on the First Amendment to the US Constitution that guarantees the right to free speech and the right to peaceful assembly.

Elaborating on the witch-hunt campaign based on threadbare lies, Senior Counsel Terrell is quoted in the DOJ press release saying:

The President, Attorney General Pamela Bondi, and the entire Administration are committed to ensuring that no one should feel unsafe or unwelcome on campus because of their religion. The Task Force’s mandate is to bring the full force of the federal government to bear in our effort to eradicate Anti-Semitism, particularly in schools. These visits are just one of many steps this Administration is taking to deliver on that commitment.

The claim that the campus demonstrations threatened the well-being of Jewish students is belied by the fact that many of the protesters were Jewish and opposed to Zionism and the racist and apartheid policies of the Israeli and US governments against Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

Leo Terrell is an African American attorney who hosted a talk radio show in Los Angeles, California. He began his legal career in 1990 and has held various positions, including chairman of the Black-Korean Alliance, advisory board member for the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and member of the Statewide Commission Against Hate Crimes.

Terrell has been a prominent legal and political commentator, appearing on Fox News programs, such as “Hannity & Colmes” and “The O’Reilly Factor.” Initially known for his liberal viewpoints and support for the Democrats, he underwent a political transformation and in 2020 publicly supported President Donald Trump, calling himself “Leo 2.0.”



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