

Columbia University deploys NYPD against pro-Palestinian library protest, 78 arrested

Elliott Murtagh**8 May 2025**

Columbia University administrators called in the New York Police Department (NYPD) on Wednesday evening to violently suppress and shut down a pro-Palestinian student occupation of the campus' Butler Library. Approximately 78 protesters were arrested just over a year after the police-state crackdown at Columbia last April, when the NYPD swarmed the campus to arrest over 100 students and break up the "Gaza Solidarity Encampment."

On Wednesday afternoon, a group of around 100 anti-genocide student protesters took over Butler's main reading room and renamed it the "Basel Al-Araj Popular University," after the Palestinian activist and writer killed by Israeli forces in 2017.

The students' demands include Columbia's financial divestment from Zionist organizations, an academic boycott of complicit institutions, cops and ICE off campus and amnesty for all university members unfairly targeted and disciplined for pro-Palestinian actions.

Columbia's Public Safety officers immediately responded and violently barred protesters from leaving unless they showed identification, which created a prolonged standoff. The Popular University released a statement on social media during the standoff which stated:

Public Safety officers have choked and beaten us. But we have not wavered. We refuse to show our IDs under militarized arrest. We refuse to go down quietly.

A *New York Times* article entitled, "A Year Ago, Columbia Security Was Hands-Off at a Protest. Not This Time," commented:

The roughly four-hour occupation of Butler Library showed how much has changed about the way Columbia, and schools across the nation, are dealing with disruptive pro-Palestinian protests. This time, unlike during the occupation a year earlier, Columbia's public safety officers intervened aggressively, pushing

some demonstrators to the ground, as they worked to keep the occupation under control and end it, video posted on social media showed.

The officers blocked dozens of protesters from leaving one room at the library and locked the front doors of the imposing building with handcuffs to keep others from shoving their way in. Using powers newly granted to them, they arrested several demonstrators before the New York police arrived to finish the arrests.

Columbia officials summoned the NYPD's Strategic Response Group (SRG), which was formed in 2015 initially as a "counterterrorism unit" and is notorious for its use of excessive force against protesters.

A large crowd of supporters gathered outside the library, as officers clad in riot gear broke up, arrested and escorted zip-tied protesters out of the building and loaded them into police buses.

Multiple students were carried out on stretchers after sustaining injuries from the police. One Columbia Palestinian student wrote on X:

I was choked and going in and out of consciousness after the arrest. One of them kept trying to gouge my eyes. They slammed my head into the floor multiple times. It literally felt like I was getting jumped.

All those who were arrested were released Thursday morning.

As the Trump administration is aggressively trying to impose government control over top American universities in the false name of combatting "antisemitism," leading Democrats are endorsing and facilitating this repression, which began under the Biden administration.

New York City Mayor Eric Adams announced that NYPD officers were called to the university to remove so-called "trespassers." In a statement on social media, Adams said:

To our Jewish New Yorkers, especially the students at

Columbia who feel threatened or unsafe attending class because of these events: know that your mayor stands with you and will always work to keep you safe.

Similarly, Democratic New York Governor Kathy Hochul stated her support of the crackdown, saying that she was “grateful to public safety officials for keeping students safe.”

Acting Columbia University President Claire Shipman posted a 5-minute video slandering the library student protest as antisemitic and unacceptable, while praising the “professionalism” of both the NYPD and Public Safety. Shipman is a pillar of the mainstream corporate media world and the Democratic Party establishment, having worked at ABC News, NBC News and CNN. She was married to Jay Carney, White House press secretary under Obama (2011-14) who has senior positions at Amazon and Airbnb.

Trump’s “antisemitism” task force, which cut \$400 million in Columbia’s research funding, issued a statement on Thursday commending Shipman’s “strong and resolute” action:

We concur with Acting President Shipman that what happened was utterly unacceptable, which is precisely why the American people are demanding that the Administration act to implement meaningful and enforceable commitments to enforce civil rights laws with institutions that receive taxpayer dollars. The Task Force is confident that Columbia will take the appropriate disciplinary actions for those involved in this act.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Marco Rubio took to social media to threaten international students at Columbia, posting that his office would be “reviewing the visa status of any trespassers and vandals.” Rubio has already targeted students for the “thought crime” of opposing the Gaza genocide, including Columbia graduate student Mahmoud Khalil and Tufts University student Rümeysa Öztürk. Both Khalil and Öztürk, who have not been charged with any crimes, remain in detention as they fight deportation.

Despite these attacks, student-led anti-genocide protest actions are growing, as Israel announces a plan for the full military occupation and ethnic cleansing of Gaza. Thursday, the day after the Columbia library occupation, a group of students at Brooklyn College set up a Hassan Ayyad Liberation Zone outside the college’s main gates. Within hours, a large mob of NYPD officers descended onto the campus to violently break up the protest and arrest students.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote earlier this week on the effort by the New York University School of Law into

blackmailing students to halt their protests:

The repressive, reactionary policies being implemented on the university campuses reflect the broader assault by the ruling class in the US and internationally on all basic democratic, social and economic rights of the working class.

Driven by an ever-intensifying economic crisis, significant sections of the corporate and financial oligarchy have turned to the most right-wing political forces to escalate imperialist war abroad, strip all obstacles to the accumulation of vast private wealth and crush any resistance to war, inequality, exploitation and destruction of democratic rights.

The escalating attacks on basic democratic rights are continuing to provoke mass opposition among students, youth and workers. ... Mass protests that took place last month, involving millions of people across the US and internationally, revealed the tremendous opposition to the Trump administration that is developing across the globe. Strikes and protest actions among critical sections of workers are growing internationally.

The working class is the only force capable of putting an end to war, genocide and the destruction of democratic rights. Students and youth seeking to build a mass movement against conditions that exist must educate themselves in the history of the class struggle and of the socialist, Trotskyist movement and work to mobilize this revolutionary social force in a socialist and internationalist movement of the working class against capitalism.

All students and youth who agree with this perspective should join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).



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