

Every week of the past six months has provoked a new wave of radicalization. For some, it was reports of the IDF targeting Palestinian hospitals in November. For others, it was IDF soldiers massacring starving Palestinians trying to reach an aid truck in February. Or the discovery of mass graves last month, with corpses stripped and bound. Or the realization that our tuition and tax dollars bankroll all of this death and destruction. Or our university's president bringing NYPD onto campus to forcibly disperse and brutalize our classmates protesting a genocide two weeks ago. Or that she did it again barely 72 hours ago.

We write to you from a place of overwhelming rage — rage at all of the institutions that were supposed to protect us, at those who cheer on the IDF, and at those who are sympathetic yet remain passive. We also write to you from a place of overwhelming grief — grief for the destruction of the Gaza Solidarity Encampment and assault on Hind's Hall, for the brutalization of our comrades, and for the ongoing genocide of Palestine.

But above all, we write to you with a call: show up. We try not to allow our fear and rage to consume us, but sometimes that is all that one can feel. Use that feeling. And let that feeling not only radicalize you. Let it liberate you.

What happened on Tuesday

Brave student protestors occupied Hamilton Hall in the early morning of April 30th and renamed it Hind's Hall, in memory of Hind Rajab. Hind Rajab was a 6-year old girl who liked to practice her handwriting and hoped to be a doctor, until the Israeli military brutally murdered her family around her in their car, as well as the medics who were dispatched to save her, leaving her alone at the mercy of further military force. Little Hind was left to die alone, terrified, with her mother desperately trying to reach her on the phone.

University President Minouche Shafik called riot police on her own students for the second time in two weeks. For reference, students in 1968 protesting against segregation practices on campus and for civil rights occupied the same building for weeks before any police intervention. The Emergency Management Operations Team emailed students at 4:35 AM, notifying us that they were locking down campus at Shafik's command. Later that evening, an army of cops wielding clubs, guns, and noise grenades encircled our campus. We all knew a violent and brutal crackdown was about to begin.



Protestors link arms in front of Hind's Hall, awaiting NYPD's impending assault.

While some of the student body celebrated NYPD's impending assault, others moved to defend the protestors. Our team of legal observers ("LOs") tried to enter campus repeatedly throughout the day, but were denied by public safety and NYPD. Black and Brown LOs were disregarded and dismissed by the NYPD. The administration wouldn't budge, even after the national and NYC branches of NLG and the University Senate demanded LOs be allowed entry to protect the protestors' constitutional rights.

As night fell, we remained stuck outside, facing a wall of riot police, unable to bear witness to the violence that was about to unfold. We felt a deep dread knowing that without any witnesses, the police could do whatever they pleased. This moment eerily echoed the telecommunications blackouts Israel has imposed on Gaza repeatedly since the genocide began, not to mention the ongoing blockade of Gaza that continues to prevent the provision of the most basic of aid to the population.

At around 9:09 PM, NYPD entered campus. The police unleashed violence upon the unarmed students blocking the entrance to Hind's Hall, who were peacefully linking arms and singing. Students were beaten and kicked in the face; one was thrown down a staircase and knocked unconscious. At least one cop fired his gun inside Hind's Hall. All protestors both inside and outside of Hind's Hall were arrested. In prison, some had their hijabs ripped off by cops. Many were denied water and use of a bathroom for hours. Some have been hospitalized. Some were incarcerated for nearly three days before being allowed to see a judge.

Nothing is happening in a vacuum.

The attacks on the Gaza Solidarity Encampment and Hind's Hall were not isolated incidents. They were repeated, intentional assaults on speech that threatens Shafik, the board members she defends, and the imperial university that is deeply intertwined with capital and the military

industrial complex. This was not a blunder. It was a calculated deployment of fascist state power.

The key issue is not whether Shafik followed proper procedure in siccing NYPD on her own students, as [this letter](#) from CLS faculty suggests. Nor is it the safety of Jewish students (see below). Nor is it the presence of the “outside agitator,” as the mainstream media wants to suggest.

A quick note on the “outside agitator”: This trope is beyond tired. In his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial ‘outside agitator’ idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.”

Framing the attacks in these terms, whether in good faith or not, is complicity in that repressive project and obfuscates the structural forces at play. *The attacks on the Gaza Solidarity Encampment and Hind’s Hall are about the university colluding with NYPD as arms of imperial power to punish those students who would challenge Israeli apartheid and our profiteering from it, and the insulation of the ongoing genocide of Palestinians from domestic pressure.*

Let this liberate you.

Think about how simultaneously thick and thin your privilege is. You enjoy a uniquely thick privilege because you are a Columbia law student, yet you are unwilling to risk that privilege. This law school rewards the intellectualization of these issues, where many students comfortably theorize in class about the mechanisms by which the law prioritizes property over human life. When dissent is no longer rewarded, but jeopardizes your future, what do you do or say?

At the same time, reflect on how thin that privilege is; how quickly it can be revoked, and how quickly violence can be deployed against you. None of us are safe in the empire. The past six months have been instructive. Law firms will gladly pay for your labor until you speak your conscience. Two legal observers—our classmates—were unlawfully arrested on April 18th for the “crime” of refusing to relinquish their duty to document incidents of police abuse.

We also invite you to reflect on how arbitrary the rule of law is. The law is about power — who wields it, and who’s at the business end of it. Policing, militarism, the law, and capitalism lock arms when their power is challenged, both domestically and globally. Whether it’s the CIA in Latin America or the US military in the Middle East, people in the Global South know that US foreign policy is nakedly arbitrary, bound neither by international law nor its own constitution. Poor Black and Brown people here have also known just how fickle the rule of law is for decades. They know that cops can kick their door down whenever they want, because cops neither know nor care what the law is.

The Gaza Solidarity Encampment and Hind's Hall were attacked because they posed a threat to power. Debating the appropriate balance between "free speech" and "academic disruptions," the proper norms regarding the presence of police on campus, or the requirements of due process in matters of student discipline is a waste of time. When acting in its own defense, power is unconstrained by legality and protocol. When you threaten power, every tool in its arsenal will be used to repress you. So, no more hand-wringing about procedure and policy — instead, we must build our collective power. We keep us safe. In the pain, anger, and hopelessness that comes with fighting against the empire, we find solace in community. We find liberation in each other. And we find hope in reimagining a better future. Don't let our oppressors take away our ability to dream. *So, join us and show up.*

To law professors:

Tenured Columbia Law School professors enjoy some of the greatest job security in the world. Yet few have stood up for their students and even fewer have spoken out against the genocide. Their response has been overwhelming, deafening silence. To those professors: you have forfeited the respect of your students. Does cowardice stop you from acting? Or do you support this genocide?

If not the latter, prove it. Student protestors don't want your internal letters with your names redacted or your shoulder to cry on after they've been arrested and brutalized. *They want your solidarity.* Draw courage from the faculty at Emory and NYU, who suffered arrest and physical injury while protecting their students from riot cops. Picket alongside us. Legal observe. Write publicly. Denounce your virulently genocidal colleagues. Join the small cohort of your colleagues assisting affected students. *Do something.*



Emory faculty locking arms in defense of their students' encampment last week.

Every day, law school tries to get us to hate the people who are being oppressed and love the people who are doing the oppressing. Our curriculum and, apparently, our professors prioritize order over justice. We struggle every day to de-program ourselves. Professors, join us and show up.

Beyond civility

Some of you may retort that we need to keep things civil. We respond with a quote by the great Kwame Ture: “In order for non-violence to work, your opponent must have a conscience. The United States has none.” Columbia University Apartheid Divest has taken all the “proper” steps—school-sanctioned protest, polling the student body (which overwhelmingly shows student support for divestment), writing to the Advisory Committee on Socially Responsible Investing—to no avail. We see our comrades linking arms at CUNY, setting up barricades at UCLA, and using empty water gallons to repel riot police at Cal Poly Humboldt. *Students have the right to resist police brutality in their fight for justice, just as Palestinians have the right to resist their genocidal oppressors in their fight for liberation.*

On the safety of Jews, from the Jewish members of CLS-NLG

We have repeated to the point of exhaustion that the protection of Jewish students and faculty is a dangerous, flimsy pretext for Columbia’s violence. By now, it is abundantly clear that this excuse is a gross perversion of the truth. This excuse has been weaponized by white Christian nationalists, including those in Congress, whose main motivations are dismantling diversity initiatives and promoting a Jewish majority in Israel to initiate the rapture.

The many Jewish students who were suspended, arrested, and subjected to police brutality are not safe. Jews of color, who are at risk simply by inhabiting a campus occupied by the police, are not safe. Any Jew speaking out against genocide, Israel, or the U.S. war machine—as we feel compelled to do by our Jewish values—is not safe. The Jews contributing to this letter are not safe. Columbia, the NYPD, and Israel do not protect us; they endanger us.

To the Jewish students, faculty, and trustees blocking divestment and urging the violent crackdowns on campus: you threaten everyone’s safety. Yet you continue to claim to speak for all Jews. *Keep our names out of your mouths.* You, who called us “Judenrat,” put us on lists of “bad Jews,” and cheered the brutalization of our comrades, do not represent us. While you repeatedly cried wolf with claims that anti-Zionist speech was antisemitic, which diluted the very real instances of antisemitism, we shared uplifting, welcoming Shabbat services in the Gaza Solidarity Encampment. While you threatened doxing and disciplinary action, we found community in the encampment and imagined a more just world.

Our safety cannot be predicated on the oppression of others, whether campus protestors or Palestinians. No Jew is safe until everyone is safe, and no Jew is free until Palestine is free.

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Imagine what we could collectively accomplish if we all joined the fight for a free Palestine and a more just world, in which everyone — *everyone* — has clean water, healthy food, housing, healthcare, and community. Show up when and where you can. Reach out to a friend you know who is doing the work, and ask where you can jump in. Get plugged in and get to work. Come to these spaces with humility. And when you do show up, be ready to fight like hell.

With love, in solidarity, and until liberation,

The CLS-NLG Organizing Committee

