

REPORT OF TASK FORCE ON ANTI-PALESTINIAN, ANTI-MUSLIM AND ANTI-ARAB RACISM

May 13, 2024

Introduction

As a Task Force convened and charged to report to the EVCP on matters relating to Anti-Palestinian, Anti-Muslim and Anti-Arab racism at UCLA, we submit the following report documenting the racism and violence directed at Palestinians, Muslims, Arabs and anyone, including Jews, who express opposition to the war in Gaza and in defense of Palestinian rights. The racism and violence we document includes not only long-standing incidents of harassment and punitive actions taken against faculty and students for their support of Palestinian rights but the recent violent attacks from counter protesters on the Palestine Solidarity Encampment, the university's utter failure to protect the students under attack, and the violence perpetrated by police who at the administration's behest cleared the encampment by injuring, detaining and arresting peaceful protesters. Finally, the administration has yet to grant student protesters amnesty, offer to cover medical expenses for the injuries they sustained at the hands of counter protesters and the police, and protect their fundamental right to engage in peaceful protest. In this report we describe the racism and violence directed at Palestinians, Muslims, Arabs and defenders of Palestinian human rights, including many Jews, and we narrate our Task Force's attempts to bring the racism and violence to your attention, efforts that have largely been ignored.

The escalating crisis UCLA faces at the moment is the result of failed leadership as well as the administration's consistent anti-Palestinian, anti-Muslim, and Arab racism and pro-Zionist bias. These problems did not begin with the administration's response to the Palestine Solidarity Encampment, or with efforts to stifle academic freedom on our campus, or with the start of Israel's war on Gaza. The issues we address in this report and during our tenure as a Task Force have persisted for well over a decade.

We begin by reminding the administration how and why the Task Force came about in the first place—not codes of conduct, not bad behavior, not even campus safety, per se. Rather, the ongoing genocide in Gaza. As we prepare this report, Israel's invasion of Rafah has begun; the death toll continues to rise; there is no medical infrastructure left; the international community has come to recognize that what is happening in Gaza now is clearly genocide. This urgency remains. And this is why students risked so much to create a non-violent encampment on Royce Quad. As this report will show, they have faced horrific physical and psychological violence for protesting non-violently. We charge the administration with not only failing to keep students safe but taking actions that put them in harm's way.

History and Origins of the Task Force

The initiative for our task force came from the faculty as an urgent response to the genocide taking place in Gaza and the attacks on students, faculty, and staff at UCLA—and throughout the UC system—for speaking out against the war. We demanded some kind of statement from UC leadership condemning Israel’s actions and U.S. support. Our colleagues were losing family members by the dozens; the entire educational infrastructure was being bombed into oblivion, and many of our colleagues (faculty, students, administrators) in Gaza were being killed or maimed in the process. Many of us signed a letter in October calling on UC leadership to “recognize the plight of the Palestinian people and the horrors that have been inflicted upon them for decades, [which] the UC system has totally neglected and is complicit in the ongoing occupation of Palestine.”¹ By November, neither UC President Michael Drake, UC Regents Chair Richard Lieb, or our own Chancellor Gene Block had made a statement condemning the indiscriminate bombing of Gaza, the mass killing of civilians—more than two-thirds of which were women and children—the litany of war crimes that left Palestinians with little food, access to clean water, shelter, the very basics life.

As members of our community began to speak out publicly and discuss these issues in our classrooms, many of us came under scrutiny—exacerbated by a group led by Professor Judea Pearl calling itself “UCLA Faculty Against Terror.”² The letter erroneously characterized student anti-war protests as antisemitic and “incitement,” which had a chilling effect on speech as well as on the urgent effort to secure a ceasefire. These circumstances prompted well over 250 of our colleagues to sign a letter expressing our concerns over the attack on academic freedom, the safety of our students, and the administration’s indifference to Palestinian suffering.³ We then requested a meeting in late November, which ultimately led to the creation of this task force along with the “Task Force on Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Bias.”

¹ Condemnation Letter of the University of California Board of Regents Statement on Mideast Violence, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Tap_hmvGLSo0doQdvCDKRSQ54REFfBV5dhuks5VVb5A/mobilebasic#ftnt1 The letter was written in response to the statement issued by the UC Office of the President on 9 October, “University of California statement on Mideast violence,” <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/press-room/university-california-statement-mideast-violence>

² UCLA Faculty Against Terror, “UCLA must condemn Hamas attacks, fight antisemitism on campus,” Daily Bruin, December 5, 2023, <https://dailybruin.com/2023/12/05/op-ed-ucla-must-condemn-hamas-attacks-fight-antisemitism-on-campus> The letter was first circulated in November.

³ We submitted this letter by email to Chancellor Block on November 30, 2023, under the name “UCLA Faculty for Academic Freedom,” and similarly published it in the Daily Bruin. See UCLA Faculty for Academic Freedom, “UCLA must protect free speech, academic freedom of those advocating for Palestine,” Daily Bruin, December 5, 2023, <https://dailybruin.com/2023/12/05/op-ed-ucla-must-protect-free-speech-academic-freedom-of-those-advocating-for-palestine>

We met with EVCP Darnell Hunt and other administrators with the goals of: informing campus leadership of the hostile climate faced by Arab and Muslim students as well as members of SJP, UC Divest Coalition, and allied organizations for merely protesting Israel’s assault on Gaza; urging Chancellor Block to publicly and unequivocally affirm the value of Palestinian life and to make a clear statement rejecting the conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism; and to back up any statement with action. Suggested actions included (but were not limited to) forming a Chancellor’s advisory committee on Arab, Muslim and Palestinian life; investigating and responding to anti-Palestinian harassment and violence on our campus; taking steps to ensure the physical safety of students, faculty and staff; offering resources, services, and accommodations to members of our community affected by the genocide in Palestine and mounting repression campaigns; requesting that EDI and the Center for Teaching coordinate with faculty to offer programming on teaching Palestine on campus; and protecting the academic freedom of faculty and students — particularly untenured colleagues who faced retaliation, harassment, and possible termination for the political positions they were taking.

The Task Force’s Actions

April 24, 2024: As a Task Force, not all of whose members felt sufficiently protected so as to be able to reveal their identities, we began our work with two co-chairs. On April 24, we submitted an urgent report to EVCP Hunt conveying to him our grave concerns about the deteriorating climate on campus. First, we conveyed in detail that students and faculty were being harassed both internally and externally for any speech that was deemed critical of Israeli policies. Through an orchestrated campaign (echoed at times by upper administration at this campus and across the system), speech advocating Palestinian rights, no matter who it is expressed by—including Jewish students and faculty—was summarily declared “antisemitic” and those who express it faced sanctions, doxxing, threats, discrimination, surveillance or worse. We highlighted that at some campuses, including Columbia and Stanford, students advocating Palestinian rights had also been physically assaulted or sprayed with irritant gasses. We emphasized that while some Jewish students were reporting feelings of discomfort and fear on campus, across the nation anyone calling for an end to the genocidal violence unfolding was actually being doxed, attacked, shot, assaulted, threatened and either fired or suspended from university campuses; in other words, for all the attention on certain Jewish students’ expressions of worry, the people who have actually suffered material harm have been those advocating for Palestinian rights, including Jewish students and faculty members. We stressed that at a time when all of our attention should be directed at the genocide in Gaza, the mendacious narrative of “antisemitism” was being deployed in order to delegitimize protest against state violence and hence to screen or obscure the visibility of the genocide. We demonstrated that few avenues of violence protection were open to those who were harassed or who faced sanctions. For example, a guest speaker in a course on structural racism received death threats alarming enough to force the cancellation of events

hosted by the Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy. The Structural Racism course itself was “paused.” We have reported many incidents where faculty with Zionist viewpoints were using their position of power against students and in some cases, against staff. Academic staff have also reported a hostile work environment and retaliation through personnel reviews and merit processes for their defense of Palestinian rights. Indeed, retaliation seemed to be the order of the day with denials of professional opportunities rife among several groups—again, all in a one-sided manner: one side has taken the brunt of the harm; the other has been complaining about feelings of worry.

We emphasized to the Chancellor and the EVCP that when speech that is critical of Israeli policy (including the genocide in Gaza) and the academic study of race and racism are specifically targeted as “antisemitic,” Palestinians and their allies become criminalized and disciplined not simply for protest but for conducting their work as students as scholars. This is not an environment in which we can pursue meaningful dialogue, as the Chancellor and EVCP have charged us to consider. Finally, as we concluded in this letter, and a point we wish to continue centering: while the campus climate deteriorates and voices expressing or supporting Palestinian rights are silenced, a genocide is unfolding in the Gaza strip and an unprecedented level of state violence is directed at the Palestinian population across the territories controlled by the Israeli state. The silencing of critical voices serves to authorize the merciless killing and destruction of Palestinian communities, including the total destruction of dozens of schools and every single university in the Gaza strip, as well as the murder of hundreds of Palestinian teachers, students, professors, deans and university presidents, which should concern all of us in academic institutions and indeed the institution itself.

We offered concrete proposals for what should be done to address the escalating climate of hostility towards anyone critical of the Israeli state and ended this first report with the following: **“we believe that given the extraordinary tensions on campus and the widespread suppression of speech that is critical of Israeli policy, speech often unreflectively declared to be antisemitic, the best approach to combatting anti-Palestinian, anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism and to protecting academic freedom lies in an acknowledgement that there is no parity between what is happening to speakers who advocate Palestinian rights and to those who claimed to be rendered uncomfortable by speech critical of Israel and as such to be experiencing a rise in antisemitism. There cannot be a dialogue across difference, unless this asymmetry is recognized.”**

April 27, 2024: Once the encampment emerged, we continued our role to let administration know about the escalating violence against the Palestine Solidarity Camp and we served as a line of communication between the EVCP and the encampment whenever we were asked to do so. We noted that a very aggressive counter protest was building for Sunday April 28 and noted the large amount of money raised by counter protesters in order to disrupt the encampment. Students

were understandably preoccupied with this imminent threat but also indicated that they would welcome EVCP Hunt to the encampment to speak to them about their demands.

May 1, 2024: We wrote an even more urgent letter addressed to the Chancellor when violent counter protesters attacked the camp, as we had warned. UCLA conspicuously failed the students as the anti-war protesters were attacked by outside counter protesters including white supremacist groups such as the Proud Boys, as police stood by. We called on the Chancellor to take responsibility for this failure and take steps immediately against the counter protesters. We stated to the Chancellor, who wrote about Jewish students existing in a state of anxiety and fear despite the considerable violence directed at anyone speaking out against the genocide, that his emphasis on Jewish students feelings about Palestinian solidarity on the campus was serving to inflame the situation and embolden attacks on the Palestinian Solidarity Encampment. When we met with Chancellor Block on May 1, ostensibly to discuss with EVCP Hunt the considerable violence against the students, and to inform the chancellor that his remarks about Jewish students' fear and discomfort serve to authorize counter protesters and to frame the students as violent, UCLA had already decided to clear the encampment. In the ensuing police response, many students were physically hurt by police and over 200 students, staff, and faculty were arrested and charged (see below). We have documented multiple injuries from rubber bullets and police batons.

May 6-8, 2024: On May 6, members of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department and the LAPD unlawfully arrested 43 students and other members of the UCLA community as the students prepared for a peaceful sit-in. Students, lawyers, and members of the press were handcuffed and put in zip ties, forced to the ground for over four hours. The co-chairs of the task force implored EVCP Hunt with multiple text messages and a phone call to advocate on behalf of the students, to call the Chancellor and ask that the students not be arrested. We were told that this was no longer in the hands of the UCLA administration, due to the rapid constitution (over the previous weekend) of a new Office of Campus Safety after the school faced criticism for its inadequate police response to protests the week before. Yet this is a UCLA office, and the police officers on the scene of Parking Lot 2, where students were being detained on the morning of May 6, were UCPD. It is as though, by creating the new Office of Campus Safety, the upper administration had decided to hand over control of campus to the police, with disastrous results.

As this incident of May 6 unfolded, police officers refused to answer detainees' questions about whether they were under arrest or free to go. They confiscated and threw aside phones of observers and press, demonstrating UCLA's blatant disregard for basic democratic safeguards guaranteeing the right to dissent. Students were booked at the Inmate Reception Center in Van Nuys, after police speculated on camera that they would be charged with conspiracy to commit burglary. As students struggled to be released and to counter the considerable harm they experienced as a result of UCLA PD's actions, UCLA has yet to comment on this specific incident. Disturbingly, the police refused to return students' cell phones. People whose primary phones were being held were not able to access their Bruin Learn class materials because of the

duo mobile/authentication. At this writing, there has been no assistance from UCLA in retrieving this property. The EVCP responded to requests for updates from the Task Force with the information that everyone arrested was charged with misdemeanors, and speculated that the city will likely drop charges. UCLA has provided no assistance or resources for its students. All legal aid and jail support has come from community mobilization to support student protesters.

Subsequently, UCLA has become akin to a police state, with a dramatic increase in police around the campus, many of whom carried rubber bullet guns, and some of whom carried assault rifles, as they patrolled campus throughout the day on May 6. With such a heavy police presence, students and faculty reported feeling unsafe and on high alert. As visibly armed police patrol near classrooms and student centers, immigrant, undocumented, and formerly incarcerated students have reported feeling afraid to be on campus. Staff have also expressed reluctance to report to work. UCLA has become a militarized space, where peaceful protest and the right to free speech have become pervasively criminalized. They have alienated and isolated students from their right to learn and from each other.

Key Moments of Racial Violence: The Attacks on the Palestine Solidarity Encampment

The encampment was erected on Royce Quad on Thursday morning, April 25. Its primary organizers were SJP and the UC Divest Coalition, along with an array of allied students. From its inception until its violent destruction, the encampment was a multiracial, multi-national, and gender diverse assembly, composed of undergraduate and graduate students from North and South campuses. All “residents” of the encampment were required to sign a community agreement outlining shared principles and behavior, and most had to undergo training in de-escalation tactics. They appointed designated media liaisons, established a People’s Library and organized reading groups and teach-ins on a range of topics, from Kashmir and Palestine to Frantz Fanon and tenants’ rights. Many students simply studied together for class. Muslims, Jews, Christians, and followers of other faiths as well as atheists were welcome. Muslim salat and Jewish shabbat were commonplace. Families with children were also welcome on the first day of the encampment. Food was made available to all, and precautions were taken to protect anyone with severe allergies. For example, one member of the community had a banana allergy, so signs were posted prohibiting bananas in the encampment.

So-called “counter-protesters” who self-identified as Zionists began trickling into the camp around noon on the first day. They heckled people inside the encampment with racial and homophobic slurs, and comments such as "you're cool with rape?", "you're a jihadist," "you're a terrorist," " Hamas would kill you fags." Some entered the encampment without authorization and physically attacked the students.⁴ One in particular, identified as Nouri Mehdizadeh, walked

⁴ See <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gSC3s5ZsaOBgbqWqilYxPfm3RfM48SBP/view>

about the encampment with a sign that read “Israel is not apartheid. Come talk,” and proceeded to steal a student’s keffiyeh, pour water over chalk art, and assault a Black woman who tried to take his sign.⁵ However, members of the encampment were instructed by the lead security organizers *not to engage the agitators*: “They are only here to take attention away from our community, and by engaging with them we’re only opening the risk for the community to get hurt. I understand they make really heinous comments, but we need to keep in mind that these people should not be the focus, we should be the focus, our community should be the focus, and sustaining this encampment until we reach FULL DIVESTMENT is our focus.”⁶

The agitators showed up the next morning with greater numbers, appearing as early as 4:00 AM shouting "Death to Hamas," "wake up commies, it's time to work," "Fuck Allah," and spraying students with bear spray and other chemical agents. They sexually harassed women in the encampment, blasted loud music, and screamed throughout Muslim prayer times. The numbers grew exponentially by Saturday. This is when the agitators (the overwhelming majority of whom were clearly not UCLA students) brought bunches of bananas to throw into the encampment—which terrified and shamed the student with the allergy, who felt compelled to leave.

On Saturday April 27, UCLA granted counter-protesters a permit to place a “jumbotron”—a massive 10-12 foot high flat screen TV with powerful speakers—adjacent to the encampment for a pro-Israel rally on Sunday. The university granted permission for outside groups to rally against the encampment but did not sanction or authorize the space our own students created to peacefully protest. Protected by metal barriers and paid private security guards employed by the Apex Security Group, the jumbotron remained in place for five days, constantly playing footage of the October 7th attacks, audio clips of graphic descriptions of rape and sexual violence, sounds of gunshots, screaming babies, clips of President Biden pledging unconditional support for Israel, loud music, including a loop of the Israeli song ‘Meni Mamtera’, a children’s song Israeli soldiers used as a form of “noise torture” on Palestinian captives. The jumbotron was paid for by a GoFundMe account that had raised \$73,000 by Sunday night. The taunts and harassment continued throughout the day. One inebriated agitator harassed several Black women and femmes who were on encampment security, calling them slaves and racial slurs, followed by threats of rape. A Neo-Nazi, identified later as a member of the Proud Boys, actually shouted that they were “here to finish what Hitler started,” without any apparent protest from the self-identified Zionists. Later that night, several agitators broke through the encampment barriers and attacked students and pepper sprayed one of the security guards hired by UCLA.⁷

⁵ https://drive.google.com/file/d/14V3ZnLoYtbTNx5S8QseoRGfX_g6fkpAl/view

⁶ Text message from SJP

⁷ Students interview with Task Force member, May 3, 2024

The Israeli American Council's LA branch sponsored the rally, which attracted between 800 - 1,000 people. Speakers included Hillel at UCLA executive director Dan Gold; candidate for student council, Eli Tsives (who was photographed high-fiving a UCPD officer); the regional Consul General of Israel, Israel Bachar; State Assemblymember Rick Chavez Zbur; and Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League. After the speeches denouncing our students as antisemitic and defending Israel's war in Gaza, the jumbotron blasted the U.S. national anthem hourly. The shouting and slurs intensified. Agitators were recorded shouting⁸ : ,
"Go listen to your master"
"You're a fucking dog"
"Come here, I'll fuck you up!" "Pussy, take your mask off!" "whores! Sharmuta! [Hebrew for prostitute]
"Palestine is a graveyard"
"We're not American Jews! We're Israelis! You stand up against us, we'll fucking slit your throat"
" Hamas would rape and murder you for what you're wearing, sweetheart. Yeah, and they'll kill your daughter."

Another called one of our students "a bitch-ass N—" and proceeded to spit at them.

At one point, leaders in the encampment learned of a bomb threat and contacted UCPD with this information, but it is not clear how they responded. Later that night, around 1:30 AM, one of the agitators emptied a backpack full of mice injected with an unknown substance into the encampment.⁹

Meanwhile, the students complained about the dangers they faced from agitators from day one. Some called UCPD directly, others contacted administrators and/or trusted faculty, and several students filed reports to our EDI office. In other words, there is an official paper trail documenting the attacks and the egregious failure of the university to do anything. Campus security made no effort to keep the mobs away from the encampment. In response, faculty staged a walkout in protest on Monday, appealing to the administration to act to secure the safety of our students. Several of our colleagues filed Title IX complaints since the jumbotron blasted

⁸ All of these statements are documented here:
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C6XK09SP6aQ/?igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA%3D%3D>

⁹ For video evidence and social media coverage of the mice attack, see :
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C6WwbyQy8fe/?igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA%3D%3D>
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C6WS9iELgdH/?igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA%3D%3D>
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C6W-rBVrw8q/?igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA%3D%3D>
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C6Xr0JHOjoB/?igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA%3D%3D>
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C6X1yp3OlrD/?igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA%3D%3D>

triggering images and language depicting sexual violence, not to mention the racist, homophobic, misogynistic slurs hurled at students by the mob.”¹⁰

Following the intensifying violent behavior of the counter protesters, Chancellor Block issued a statement on Monday, April 30th, observing that while “many of the demonstrators, as well as counter demonstrators who have come to the area, have been peaceful in their activism;” he found some of the tactics “shocking and shameful.” He never names these tactics or who perpetrated them. Instead, he only identifies reports that “students on their way to class have been physically blocked from accessing parts of the campus.” This is the sort of activism, he warns, “that harms our ability to carry out our academic mission and makes people in our community feel bullied, threatened and afraid. These incidents have put many on our campus, especially our Jewish students, in a state of anxiety and fear.”¹¹ First and foremost, no buildings were off limits and no classrooms were blocked. There were particular entrances to buildings that had been closed off, not by the encampment but by campus security. Those decisions were given the green light by the administration. Second, students responsible for encampment security wanted to limit congestion. Everyone inside the camp was masked in order to reduce possible Covid infection. Third, one of the students featured in a viral video where he is asked to go around the encampment is seen in another video with bear spray on his hip. The students were familiar with him because he had participated in some of the nightly attacks on the encampment. Once again, there were many Jews already in the encampment, so being Jewish was not the reason for the precaution. Finally, we are a campus under construction, where several pathways have been blocked to students, especially near Powell Library, and yet this inconvenience apparently does not rise to the level of disrupting classes. Nevertheless, the mother of the student who made the video then circulated it as evidence that Jews were being denied access to classrooms. This is likely to be Chancellor Block’s “evidence” that students could not get to class.

With respect to the video that we believe constituted Chancellor Block’s “evidence” in which it was claimed that the protesters were blocking Jewish students from accessing their classrooms, it is critical to note that the video played a key role in fomenting the violent counter protest. As the *L.A. Times* reported many members of the crowds that descended on UCLA were inflamed by posts such as this video. Interviews with counter protesters conducted by the *L.A. Times* revealed

¹⁰ Anahid Nersessian, “Under the Jumbotron,” London Review of Books Blog (May 6, 2024), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2024/may/under-the-jumbotron>

¹¹ Chancellor Gene Block, “Affirming our Values in a Challenging Time,” April 30, 2024, <https://chancellor.ucla.edu/messages/affirming-our-values-in-a-challenging-time/>

that rumors circulated on social media about Jewish students being denied access to classrooms contributed to the belief that the protesters were specifically targeting Jewish students.¹²

On Tuesday night, April 30, the agitators launched a coordinated assault on the encampment.¹³ They came armed with bear mace and other chemical irritants, hammers, knives, stink bombs, high grade fireworks, baseball bats, metal and wooden rods, and reportedly at least one of the attackers had a gun in his backpack. Just prior to the attack, students were subjected to loud recordings of screaming babies, followed by a fusillade of fireworks shot directly into the encampment. One student recalled “agitators congregated at every entrance, probably to try to distract us. . . I thought they were shooting at us. Men in full-faced white masks began breaking down the barriers using knives, hammers, and their feet. One armed with a long metal rod “ would try and, like, spear people and bash people with this big pole.” Others started throwing chunks of wood and stink bombs and spraying chemicals—bear mace, tear gas, pepper spray. “I saw planks of wood come sailing into the camp and strike some girl in the back of the head and she just fell to the ground.” Another student was struck in the back of the head by fireworks and had to be hospitalized. The medics were simply overwhelmed, forcing students with little experience to attend to wounds. “People were crying and being like, ‘can you call my mom, I need to call my mom, please help me’ . . . We were trying to do the best that we could but we ran out of saline needed to flush the chemicals out of people’s eyes.”

Injured students were rushed to safety, either to the medic tent or out of the encampment altogether. Those who held the line were instructed not to escalate. As objects rained down on them, the leads shouted “Don’t throw back! Don’t engage!” The students displayed remarkable poise. They begged campus security to intervene but were refused. One encampment defender,

¹² Matthew Ormseth, Connor Sheets, Brittny Mejia, Ruben Vives, Jessica Garrison and Summer Lin, “Shut it down! How group chats, rumors and fear sparked a night of violence at UCLA,” Los Angeles Times, May 10, 2024, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-05-10/how-social-media-rumors-sparked-a-night-of-mayhem-at-ucla>.

¹³ The Daily Bruin coverage of the events from 4/29 - 5/2, is fairly thorough and accurate, and the violence also received national and international coverage. See Neil Bedi, Bora Erden, Marco Hernandez, Ishaan Jhaveri, Arijeta Lajka, Natalie Reneau, Helmut Rosales and Aric Toler, “How Counterprotesters at U.C.L.A. Provoked Violence, Unchecked for Hours,” New York Times, May 3, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/05/03/us/ucla-protests-encampment-violence.html>; Matthew Ormseth, Connor Sheets, Brittny Mejia, Ruben Vives, Jessica Garrison and Summer Lin, “Shut it down! How group chats, rumors and fear sparked a night of violence at UCLA,” Los Angeles Times, May 10, 2024, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-05-10/how-social-media-rumors-sparked-a-night-of-mayhem-at-ucla>; Jon Swaine, Hannah Natanson, Joyce Sohyun Lee, Sarah Cahlan and Jonathan Baran, “Despite warnings of violence at UCLA, police didn’t step in for over 3 hours,” Washington Post, May 11, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2024/05/11/ucla-protests-police-inaction-fights/>. Rather than rehearse those events blow-by-blow, we have decided to share direct testimony taken from students who were there. For the safety and security of our students, we decided not to disclose names.

UCLA alumnus Ismael Sindha, was reportedly told by a security guard that the violence “was their fault.”¹⁴ The hired guards would later retreat inside of Royce Hall. Sindha was subsequently attacked and taken to Reagan hospital for burns caused by a chemical irritant but left before treatment, returning to the encampment to help. He too reported hearing threats and taunts by the attackers: “I’ll kill you,” “I’ll rape your sister” and “What Israel does to Gaza, we’ll do to you.”¹⁵ Realizing that campus security was utterly useless, students under siege and their family and friends inundated UCPD with calls for help, only to be told that the situation was “under control” and have the operators hang up in their face. “You can’t continue calling unless you have an emergency,” said a UCPD operator in a recording of a phone call.¹⁶

The California Highway Patrol and LAPD assembled forces near the fighting before midnight, prior to the university’s statement, issued at 12:12 AM, that it was dispatching law enforcement to deal with the situation. However, the police spent the next three hours watching the violence unfold and doing nothing. The UCPD operators continued to hang up on protesters, leaving the people of the encampment to defend themselves and care for each other. One student saw a friend rolling on the ground screaming. “I’ve never heard any of my friends scream like that before. ... It’s still traumatizing until now, that I saw him go through that kind of pain.” Another student was twice struck on the head while trying to protect both the encampment’s barricade and their fellow students. They said they were taken to the hospital by their classmates, where they ultimately received medical treatment, including stitches and staples. “I thought I was going to die. I thought I’d never see my family again,” the student recalled. “The only thing that kept me moving forward was my ... classmates who were brave enough to protect the encampment from these terrorists. The same classmates that courageously brought me back inside the encampment after my attack. The same classmates who I relied on to save my life.” What also kept him going was remembering why they were there in the first place: “I had the luxury of getting sedated as they stapled my head back together. Currently, in Gaza, there are zero fully functioning hospitals,” Student C said. “The UCLA community deserves justice. The people of Gaza deserve justice.”¹⁷

When CHP officers finally began moving toward the violence, they allowed the attackers to pass through unmolested. They made no arrests, did not interrogate a single member of the mob, and made no effort to check on the health and well-being of the students or assist EMS with first aid

¹⁴ Catherine Hamilton, “I thought I was going to die’: UCLA encampment protesters recall April 30 attack,” Daily Bruin, May 11, 2024, <https://dailybruin.com/2024/05/07/i-thought-i-was-going-to-die-ucla-encampment-protesters-recall-april-30-attack>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ This exchange was reported in both the Daily Bruin (Hamilton, “I thought I was going to die’”) and the Washington Post (Jon Swaine, et. al., “Despite Warnings of Violence at UCLA”)

¹⁷ Hamilton, “I thought I was going to die.”

or help evacuate wounded students. The next day, as images of the attack circulated all over the internet and made it on cable and network news, Chancellor Block issued a statement bemoaning the violent attack on the encampment by “a group of instigators.” It was the first time he had acknowledged that the students and faculty protecting the encampment were the victims of violence. But he refused to link the pro-Israel rally that the university authorized to the attack, or to recognize that the attacks had been ongoing since April 25th. In a stunningly passive sentence, the Chancellor writes, “Physical violence ensued, and our campus requested support from external law enforcement agencies to help end this appalling assault, quell the fighting and protect our community.” UC President Michael V. Drake immediately followed with his own statement, declaring that “the encampment is unlawful and violates university policy” and disrupts “the functioning of the university.”

After ignoring five straight days of relentless harassment and violent action toward the encampment, Chancellor Block made it clear that his primary concern is the safety of “our Jewish students.” The only Jewish students who faced actual physical danger and experienced both physical and psychological trauma were in the encampment, advocating for Palestinian rights.

The egregious failure of Campus Security or UCPD to intervene to protect the students led to intense scrutiny from the media, the legal community, faculty, students and their parents. The next day, May 1, Chancellor Block issued another statement admitting that the mob had attacked the students. He condemned the attacks, acknowledged the trauma our students endured, even expressed “sympathy” for those who suffered injuries. He called for an investigation, urging “those who have experienced violence to report what they encountered to UCPD, and those who have faced discrimination to contact the Civil Rights Office.” In the wake of five nights of police and administration inaction, students and faculty found Chancellor Block’s concern to be disingenuous. In fact, we suspect that by declaring the encampment “unauthorized” emboldened the mob to escalate their attack.

Our suspicions were confirmed when a couple of hours later the Chancellor announced plans to clear the encampment by 6:00 PM, giving UCD and SJP leaders just two hours to finally discuss their demands with Executive Vice-Chancellor Darnell Hunt. The meeting went nowhere, in part because the administration did not try to negotiate in good faith and left no time to reach some kind of agreement just hours after students had been assaulted, injured, some hospitalized, and part of their camp destroyed. They were understandably demoralized after being told that the encampment will be dismantled no matter what happened. And they understandably vowed to protect the encampment from demolition.

The night of May 1st began as a repeat of the previous night, except that the mob was bigger and more violent, and there were more police on hand to watch. It seemed as if the mob had been

deployed as the front lines of the police operation. Faculty showed up in significant numbers in an effort to protect students. As one of our colleagues recalls, “Almost exclusively, the students tried to hold the line of the encampment without escalating or responding in kind to the attackers. It really looked like a one-sided attack. 99% of the students seemed to just hold the barriers and evade objects hurled from the other side, including rocks, barricade pieces, likely tear gas capsules – smothered with a blanket by students. . . . I witnessed [a student] passing out after being hit on the head. Saw another student hit by a steel/iron rod. Many students [were] badly sprayed by pepper spray or other chemical agent. There were chemical red rashes/burns all over their bodies. Eyes were swollen and red due to chemical agents. . . . Attackers, after police arrived, almost broke into [the] encampment and started swinging rods/bats – whatever they had in their hands.”

Similar to Tuesday night, the police did not disperse the mob. “Some contingent of the mob continued attacking in front of the police,” another colleague reported. “Not one of the attackers was detained or arrested. Some of the attackers were older – definitely not students. Some of them looked like they had militia training.” When police finally intervened, there are ample reports of LAPD snipers dispatched to the roof of Royce Hall, the California Highway Patrol shooting rubber bullets at people trying to protect the encampment. We have seen the injuries to the face, head, legs, and chest. Some students were shot at close range. The police shot regular volleys of stun grenades, beat protesters with batons, and arrested over two hundred protesters. Perhaps most shocking was the police command’s decision to block EMS from entering the encampment to aid the injured. The medics were already overwhelmed, leaving the remaining students and faculty to administer first aid. One colleague recounted seeing a very young woman break down, exhibiting signs of PTSD. “She was crying as she described the way that these fireworks were like bombs coming in. . . . Lots of folks were crying, lots of folks were processing this level of violence and attack. . . . Students literally feel like they’re in a war zone.” Meanwhile, the police did not arrest a single attacker from the mob. While police took pictures of protesters and the encampment, they were not taking pictures of the mob. To date no counter protester has been charged while dozens of peaceful protesters have been arrested and charged or cited.

On May 2nd, Chancellor Block issued a statement essentially declaring the encampment illegal. His justifications were replete with distortions and outright falsehoods. He wrote that their goal all along was “to support the safety and well-being of Bruins.” If safety was a priority, why allow a violent mob to come on to our campus, grant them the right to drag a huge jumbotron near the encampment that played triggering sounds of gunshots and screaming babies where students were trying to sleep and study?

Chancellor Block declared “the need to support the free expression rights of our community.” Who is the community the chancellor wishes to protect? Members of the Proud Boys? Right-

wing Zionists who have no relation to the university? Everyone knows that the majority of the attackers were not university students. He also declared “the need to minimize disruption to our teaching and learning mission.” Of course, if Chancellor Block had come to the encampment and spent some time there, he could have joined the many study groups, teach-ins, discussions over history and politics taking place throughout the day. He would have seen the free library with its impressive number of volumes. Interaction between undergraduate and graduate students deepened beyond a weekly 50 minute discussion section. Students across disciplines, even across the North – South Campus divide, shared knowledge, information, experiences that provided a more enriching and interdisciplinary learning space than what they found in their classrooms. Furthermore, the camp attracted several leading intellectuals from across Southern California and in some cases other parts of the world who were willing to engage these students and share their own wisdom.

If anything, the mob disrupted teaching and learning; it disrupted the students’ ability to sleep, to speak freely; to feel safe. All of us who taught during this academic year witnessed a marked change in our students, an alertness and dedication; they demanded that we make space to discuss the events of October 7 and its aftermath. We all did our best to create a safe environment for all of our students, knowing that discomfort comes with the territory of learning. Despite ill-informed attacks from some of our colleagues, issuing false and dangerous accusations of antisemitism for examining the roots of the current crisis from a historically-informed and critical perspective, our faculty for the most part did a remarkable job. And still, for months prior to the encampment, senior colleagues in certain departments have threatened or intimidated junior faculty for making any statements critical of Israeli policy or on the impact of genocidal violence on the people of Gaza. Indeed, for the first three months of the war many of us were warned that using the word “genocide” in this context was antisemitic and risked censure or worse. Indeed, these were the circumstances in which we approached Chancellor Block, EVCP Hunt, and the administration because such attacks threatened academic freedom.

In the wake of this ongoing violence against supporters of Palestinian rights, we are left with specific questions: Why was there no statement about the jumbotron? Is it because this group of agitators had a permit? Their permit expired on Sunday afternoon but the machine remained for days afterwards, disrupting all classes on the quad. Why wasn’t their violent attack on the camp declared unlawful and a breach of policy? Why were violent counter protesters not arrested, let alone interrogated by UCPD or other law enforcement? On the clearing of the encampment, Chancellor Block proclaimed: “Officers followed a plan that had been carefully developed to protect the safety of protesters at the site. Those who remained encamped last night were given several warnings and were offered the opportunity to leave peacefully with their belongings before officers entered the area.” If this is the case, then either the plan was never actually initiated or allowing terrorists to attack the encampment as they watched was part of the plan.

Aftermath

Nothing stopped the administration from engaging in meaningful, honest, transparent negotiation with student groups. It is impossible to build trust when one party—the administration—expresses concern for the safety of Jewish students (except for those inside the encampment) and takes no action to investigate or hold accountable mobs that had consistently attacked the encampment since its beginning. There is no trust when an increased police presence on campus continues the harassment of protesters in support of Palestinians, results in further arrests and, at the time of writing, an egregious breach of student rights by making publicly available a list of those arrested, an action that will inevitably lead to serious targeting of these students by counter protesters.

Chancellor Block had the opportunity to express concern for Palestinian and Muslim students, and has consistently—for years—refused to do so, despite numerous private and public appeals by faculty, including an open letter to the chancellor published in 2021 that anticipated many of the terrible events that have unfolded in recent days, to which, of course, the chancellor did not bother to reply, despite its public nature

The Root of the Problem

The problems encapsulated in the destruction of the encampment and the administration’s decision to allow mob violence to go unchecked for four days, and the escalation of cops on campus in order for the violent repression of student protesters to continue with charges pending against them, reflect Chancellor Block’s policies with respect to Palestine advocacy. Over the course of the last 13 years, at least, faculty have been harassed for teaching critical perspectives on Israel, and Muslim and Arab students have been profiled by campus police, harassed, attacked, endured racist epithets and graffiti. The Chancellor has been silent on these incidents, and in at least one instance—during the meeting of the National Students for Justice in Palestine in 2018—wrote an inflammatory piece in the Los Angeles Times that included misinformation about the student group and crudely Orientalist clichés about “our” tolerance and “their” intolerance.¹⁸

Chancellor Block made his position clear when he endorsed a UC-wide report, *President’s Advisory Council on Campus Climate, Culture, & Inclusion*, issued in the summer of 2012 arguing that a hostile environment for Jewish students pervades all of the campuses “as a result of activities on campus which focus specifically on Israel, its right to exist and its treatment of Palestinians. The anti-Zionism and Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)

¹⁸ Gene D. Block, “Op-Ed: The controversial Students for Justice in Palestine conference will go on at UCLA. Here’s Why,” Los Angeles Times, November 12, 2018, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-block-ucla-students-for-justice-in-palestine-conference-20181112-story.html>

movements and other manifestations of anti-Israel sentiment.” The report accused SJP and allied groups (presumably Jewish Voice for Peace) of “using imagery and accusations evocative of historical campaigns against Jews.” It put faculty on notice that if they raise issues in the classroom or assign reading critical of Israel or Israeli policies, he or she is using “the academic platforms to denounce the Jewish state and Jewish nationalist aspirations.” The report questions the legitimacy of terms like the “Nakba,” apartheid, descriptions of check points, and treats criticisms of Israel as a form of hate speech directed at Jewish students. As the report states: “for many Jewish students, their Jewish cultural and religious identity cannot be separated from their identity with Israel. Therefore, pro- Zionist students see an attack on the State of Israel as an attack on the individual and personal identity.” The report recommended, among other things, suspending support for Palestine Awareness Week from any university sponsorship; adopting a hate-speech policy that would not only mute criticisms of Israel but prohibit outside speakers deemed advocates of hate (the report compared such bans with keeping the KKK off campus); and introducing “cultural competency training” in the form of a required on-line course that would “address the root causes of harassment such as racism, bigotry, and ignorance.”

The myriad ways in which the campus climate report violated academic freedom and chilled speech are obvious. Nevertheless, it became the basis for the Block administration’s policies. In 2012, the Israeli lobbying group AMCHA Initiative filed a formal complaint against our colleague David Shorter, a faculty of World Arts and Culture, for including links to the BDS campaign on his course website as part of a range of sources for his “Tribal World Views” course. The chair of the Academic Senate at the time launched an investigation of Shorter based on this one complaint from an outside organization with no academic standing. In doing so, he violated protocols by never informing Shorter that he was under investigation. The Chair was supposed to refer the complaint to the appropriate academic committee—in this case, the Senate Committee on Academic Freedom-- but made the accusations public and passed on the information to AMCHA. As a result, Professor Shorter endured a nation-wide smear campaign, accusations in the press of antisemitism, death threats, the loss of independent contract work, among other things. Ultimately, the Senate Committee on Academic Freedom found that he was in his right to use this material. Three years later, the UCLA grievance committee ruled that his rights as a faculty member had been violated, in part because the Senate Chair had disclosed information about him to the public. At no point did Chancellor Block or the upper administration defend Professor Shorter or apologize after his ordeal.

Chancellor Block has never expressed concern about Arab and Muslim students who endure harassment on UCLA’s campus, and despite many appeals he has yet to challenge the current blacklisting and slandering of students involved in Palestine justice work through the website Canary Mission. Through this site, financed by a wealthy supporter of Zionist organizations,

students and faculty members have been falsely accused of anti-Semitism, threatened with violence and/or death, and subjected to smear campaigns threatening their future livelihoods and job prospects. He has consistently downplayed the safety concerns faced by students and faculty--particularly students and faculty of color--who support justice for Palestine.

Likewise, when undergraduate students attempted to persuade the student council to divest from companies that do business in Israeli occupied territories, the students who led the initiative faced an unbelievable degree of intimidation and harassment. Non-university Zionist organizations came on campus, filmed students without their consent, engaged in on-line harassment, and organized visits by Israeli soldiers in full military uniform to frighten students who dared to speak up in support of divestment. SJP members and allies complained to the administration, specifically the Chancellor, but were ignored or told that the “other side” also “has it bad.” Several times Palestinian students and SJP members had asked to meet with the chancellor but he refused.

But the chancellor wasn't just indifferent; he proved to be an advocate for Israeli interests. When students learned early in 2014 that some members of student government had accepted free trips to Israel sponsored by groups such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and Hasbara Fellowships—organizations that not only lobbied on behalf of Israel but promoted “discriminatory and Islamophobic positions”—SJP successfully argued before the student judicial council that anyone who accepted these trips must disclose a conflict of interest and, in accordance with student bylaws, recuse themselves. They then asked candidates running for student government to take an ethics pledge and agree to be fully transparent. They simply wanted to end the influence of the Israel lobby on campus, which tipped the balance in favor of anti-divestment forces. SJP's complaint and call for an ethics pledge provoked a vicious backlash from the AMCHA Initiative and UCLA Hillel, who accused these students of “intolerance,” “harassment,” and “bullying” of Jewish students, and making them feel unsafe. Whereas Chancellor Block ignored SJP's request for meetings, he not only met with representatives of the AMCHA Initiative who demanded an investigation of SJP, but sided with them, issuing a statement “on civil discourse” characterizing SJP's advocacy as intimidation. The attacks on SJP and its allies triggered a resolution from the Los Angeles City Council condemning SJP actions as “bullying” and “harassment,” and requesting that UC administrators “refer cases of ‘intimidation or harassment’ to ‘the proper law enforcement agencies.’” And while Chancellor Block's administration virtually criminalized campus advocacy for divestment, UCLA Hillel engaged in borderline criminal behavior when it secretly worked with a public relations firm to, in the words of a leaked email, “‘isolate’ SJP on campus and to paint the group as ‘unrepresentative,’” while funneling money from wealthy real estate agent Adam Milstein to

support a pro-Israel student political party.¹⁹ Despite these tactics, in November 2014, a coalition of more than thirty student groups passed a resolution calling on student government “to divest from companies engaged in violence against Palestinians.”

Three months later, largely in response to the success of the divestment resolution, the David Horowitz Freedom Center (DHFC), (designated a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center) plastered posters all over our campus and in the surrounding neighborhood accusing SJP and individual faculty members of terrorism and antisemitism. Students and faculty were targeted for harassment under the banner of “Combat Jew Hatred on College Campuses.” At the time, only the Vice Chancellor of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Jerry Kang, issued a strong campus-wide statement condemning the posters as racist fear-mongering. Chancellor Block was silent.

When SJP decided to hold its National Conference on UCLA’s campus, participants not only faced outright violent harassment from mainly outside Zionist organizations (with very little protection from campus security forces whom they had to hire to protect the conferees). In an op ed piece for the *L.A. Times*, the chancellor announced that he was “allowing” the conference to take place (as if he had the right to simply cancel it) on the grounds of free speech, but used the occasion to attack both SJP and the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement rather than remain neutral. First, he conflated the non-violent political strategy of boycotts and sanctions with anti-Semitism, and secondly, he characterized Students for Justice in Palestine -- a national, multi-faith, multi-racial grassroots student organization that advocates for human rights – as an anti-Semitic organization. This only worsened the campus climate and revealed the chancellor’s bias against Palestinian students and advocates.

In short, Chancellor Gene Block has failed to sustain a rich, diverse, safe, intellectually stimulating, free and open environment for Palestinian, Muslim, Arab students, as well as students advocating for Palestine’s freedom, and an end to the genocide and ongoing occupation.

The events of the past few days have made clear that UCLA’s response to peaceful protest by anyone in solidarity with Palestinians is the violent repression of peaceful protest. Students and faculty have been injured, cited and charged. They continue to be so. Despite repeated calls from many quarters, protesters are not protected but instead detained and charged. There is no amnesty for those cited, and charged, and no health care for those injured. The UCLA campus has been militarized with armed police everywhere.

¹⁹ All of these incidents are documented in Palestine Legal and the Center for Constitutional Rights, *The Palestine Exception to Free Speech: A Movement Under Attack in the U.S.* (2017), 90 - 94.

We submit that UCLA has failed to acknowledge much less confront the growing violence against Palestinian, Muslim, and Arab students and faculty, and anyone supporting Palestinian rights, including many Jewish students, as a letter from Jewish faculty has shown. UCLA has exposed students to the violence of counter protesters and then to the violence of police and the law. Although we have called attention to racism and violence repeatedly, UCLA has chosen to ignore our efforts. Every instance we have documented remains without redress.

Task Force Members:

Gaye Theresa Johnson, Co-Chair

Sherene Razack, Co-Chair

Ali Behdad

Aomar Boum

Robin D.G. Kelley

Saree Makdisi

and

Three Additional Members
