



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
Association**  
of North America, Inc.

1957 E Street NW, Suite 401  
Washington, DC 20052

Phone 520-333-2577

Fax 520-207-3166

caf@mesana.org

mesana.org



24 August 2023

Christopher Eisgruber  
President, Princeton University  
fax: 609-258-1615

Professor Gene Jarrett  
Dean of the Faculty, Princeton University  
gjarrett@princeton.edu

Professor Jill Dolan  
Dean of the College, Princeton University  
jsdolan@princeton.edu

Professor Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi  
Chair, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University  
behroozg@princeton.edu

Dear President Eisgruber and colleagues:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern about the attacks to which Assistant Professor Satyel Larson has been subjected because she chose to include a particular book on the reading list of a course she plans to offer in fall 2023. These politically motivated attacks seek to prevent a member of Princeton's faculty from exposing her students to certain perspectives by, in effect, banning a scholarly work. They thereby threaten the principles of academic freedom which your university is committed to uphold.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the prestigious *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and outside of North America.

Professor Larson's reading list for her course "The Healing Humanities: Decolonizing Trauma Studies from the Global South" (Near Eastern Studies 301) includes *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*, by Professor Jasbir Puar of Rutgers University, published in 2017 by Duke University Press. The book received many positive reviews and in 2018 won the National Women's Studies Association's Alison Piepmeier Book Prize, awarded each year to "a groundbreaking monograph in women, gender, and sexuality studies that makes significant contributions to feminist disability studies scholarship." Nonetheless, because *The Right to Maim* includes critical analysis of Israeli state violence toward the Palestinians under its rule, the executive director of Princeton's Center for Jewish Life, several American Jewish organizations, a number of media outlets and a minister in the Israeli government have, according to media



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reports, alleged that the book is antisemitic and demanded that it be removed from Professor Larson's reading list.

We regard this campaign as yet another distressing instance in which self-described supporters of Israel have tendentiously weaponized false allegations of antisemitism and "anti-Israel bias" in order to silence criticism of that state and of its policies and practices toward the Palestinians. This weaponization is rooted in a dangerous conflation of criticism of Israel, of Zionism as a political ideology and of Israeli state policies, on the one hand, and antisemitism on the other. The current effort to intimidate a member of Princeton's faculty into denying her students access to an important scholarly work simply because some people based outside academia do not like what the book has to say constitutes, like other recent efforts by state and local authorities in this country to ban certain books, an egregious assault on the constitutionally protected right to freedom of expression. It is also a grave threat to the academic freedom of Professor Larson and every other member of Princeton's faculty. As the American Association of University Professors put it in 1940, "academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning."

We therefore call on you, as leaders of Princeton University, to publicly and vigorously express your full support for Professor Larson and for her right as a member of your faculty to decide what and how to teach her students. We further call on you to reaffirm Princeton's continuing commitment to freedom of expression and to academic freedom, and to develop, in collaboration with your faculty, policies to ensure an effective response to the kind of harassment to which Professor Larson has been subjected.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eve M. Troutt Powell". The signature is written in a cursive style with some capital letters.

Eve Troutt Powell  
MESA President  
Professor, University of Pennsylvania

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie A. Brand". The signature is written in a cursive style with some capital letters.

Laurie Brand  
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom  
Professor Emerita, University of Southern California