



**CUPE 3903 Stewards' Council, CUPE 3903 Executive Committee,  
YUFA Race Equity Caucus, and CERREC Condemn US  
Government Attacks on Grad Student Activists and  
Academic Freedom at American Universities**

CUPE 3903 Stewards' Council, CUPE 3903 Executive Committee, York University Faculty Association Race Equity Caucus, and Glendon's Race Equity Caucus (CERREC) strongly condemn the recent attacks by the US federal government on the right to protest, independent faculty governance, and academic freedom in higher education; we urge the administration of York University to publicly denounce this overreach. The York University administration must commit to protecting its students and faculty. Almost 100 postsecondary institutions are [under investigation](#) for their programs that are associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives—which are being systemically policed across many states—or for “[illegal protests](#)” associated with pro-Palestine organizing.

In particular, Columbia University is a notable recent example of those universities that have been targeted due to their role in the global student encampment movement last year. This growing climate of repression has clear implications for our own campuses, considering York University's [appalling destruction of the York Popular University for Palestine encampment in summer 2024](#).

Columbia has [long been a site of student struggle and resistance](#), dating back to April 1968 and May 1972, where students organized sit-ins in protest of US participation in the Vietnam War. In the Spring of 1985, students once again took over Hamilton Hall, demanding the university divest from investments held in apartheid South Africa. In the fall of that year, the university agreed to student demands. Considering this history, it is not surprising that Columbia is the current target of such harsh state repression.

On Friday, March 7, 2025, the Federal Task Force to Combat Antisemitism announced the [cancellation of \\$400 million in federal grants to Columbia](#). On March 8, Mahmoud Khalil, a green-card holding graduate student and activist, was [arrested by ICE at his university residence](#) in front of his pregnant wife, and on April 11th, a Louisiana immigration judge [ruled that the federal government's deportation case against Khalil can proceed](#). Additionally, on March 21, the university administration announced that it would capitulate to the Trump administration's demands, some of which include: forcing students to disclose their identities if they wear face masks on campus, and removing 'Regional Studies' programs from the purview

of faculty, and placing them in the portfolio of a newly appointed Senior Vice Provost. Some of these programs include the Center for Palestine Studies, the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, and Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies. In the midst of [global calls for academic boycotts of Israeli universities](#) by Palestinian civil society, the administration has [agreed to advance Columbia's Tel Aviv Center](#). This type of escalating repression that political activists are facing on our campuses is not exclusive to Columbia or to American universities. Here at York, we are seeing similar patterns with increasing surveillance, police presence, and censoring of activist students and faculty.

With the spread of far-right ideologies across Canada over the past several years, we—as graduate students, unionized workers, contract, and full-time faculty—are not immune to the pressures afflicting our colleagues in the United States. In particular, the precarity that contract-based academic workers face here and abroad puts them at greater risk when they speak out for justice. In addition, here at York, we have already seen that many of our [most crucial and critical programs](#) have had their Fall 2025 enrolments suspended. As this repression escalates, we need to be firm in [advocating for York University as a sanctuary](#) for critically, creatively engaged thought and action to flourish.

As students and workers, we know that our coordination and community is a crucial source of support, but we also expect and demand more from our University administrators in these unstable times. The CUPE 3903 Stewards' Council, the CUPE 3903 Executive Committee, YUFA Race Equity Caucus, and CERREC call upon York University President Rhonda Lenton and the Board of Governors to safeguard migrant scholars and join us as we denounce these attacks on freedom of speech, academic freedom, and independent governance in the university.