

Harvard's former Black president warns U.S. institutes in danger of losing legitimacy



Boston, January 5 (RHC)-- Harvard University's Black president who resigned recently after a campaign was launched to tarnish her image said that she became a target of a sustained campaign of lies and personal insults.

A day after her resignation, Claudine Gay wrote in *The New York Times*: “Trusted institutions of all types – from public health agencies to news organizations – will continue to fall victim to coordinated attempts to undermine their legitimacy and ruin their leaders’ credibility.”

Gay stepped down on Tuesday after facing a severe attack from the pro-Israel lobby over her response to pro-Palestinian demonstrations on campus amid Israel’s war on Gaza and plagiarism accusations. Gay, who made history as the first Black person to be president of Harvard said she was targeted because she

believed "that a daughter of Haitian immigrants has something to offer to the nation's oldest university."

"They recycled tired racial stereotypes about Black talent and temperament. They pushed a false narrative of indifference and incompetence," Gay said.

Gay, a professor of political science was born in New York to Haitian immigrants. The former president said that the tactics used against her were "merely a single skirmish in a broader war to unravel public faith in pillars of American society."

Gay was accused by some members of Congress of not doing enough to condemn and combat anti-Semitism on Harvard's campus. When asked by a Congress member if a hypothetical call for the genocide of Jewish people would qualify as a violation of Harvard's code of conduct, Gay responded: "It can be, depending on the context." She later clarified, "Anti-Semitic rhetoric, when it crosses into conduct that amounts to bullying, harassment, intimidation — that is actionable conduct and we do take action."

Gay said that the call to testify to Congress about anti-Semitism on elite college campuses had been "a well-laid trap" and that the campaign against her was about more than one university and one leader.

Gay warned that the tactics that were used to oust her would soon be used to trap other institutional leaders: "For the opportunists driving cynicism about our institutions, no single victory or toppled leader exhausts their zeal."

For the past month, the campaign against Gay, which also included prominent Harvard donors, had centered on allegations of Antisemitism and plagiarism in her academic work, focusing on her widely criticized comments during a December congressional hearing on Antisemitism on college campuses, and on multiple passages in her academic work that closely resembled the work of other scholars, without the appropriate citations.

Many scholars whose work Gay has been accused of plagiarizing have told news outlets that they considered the citation issues relatively minor, or even not plagiarism at all, with one scholar saying, "This isn't even close to an example of academic plagiarism."

Some of the activists who campaigned most prominently against Gay made clear that their broader aim was opposing "diversity, equity and inclusion" (DEI) programs in all the universities of the United States and it won't remain confined to one individual Harvard president.

Bill Ackman, the billionaire Harvard donor who had been one of Gay's most prominent public critics, wrote in his X post that he believed diversity, equity and inclusion efforts were "racist" and dangerous, that he was concerned about "reverse racism" and "racism against white people", and that he saw DEI as "a powerful movement that has not only pervaded Harvard, but the educational system at large" and that it needed to be opposed.

Gay has said that in the past weeks her inbox had been flooded with death threats, and various racial slurs have been directed at her. "I've been called the N-word more times than I care to count."

The racism against Black people is not new in the US. A report by the Washington Post in 2016 said that 96% of the Black tenured faculty only worked in historically Black colleges and universities.

A 2021 article in Inside Higher Ed noted that Black women academics are taxed for doing much of the unpaid labor within their department. Many Black faculty members are forced to leave their positions over concerns about racism.

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