Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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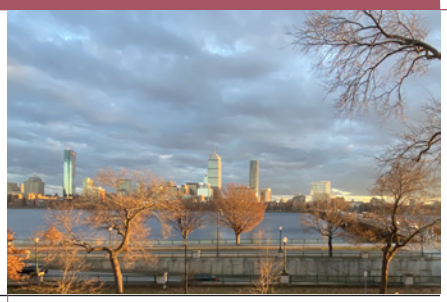
# MIT Faculty Newsletter

https://fnl.mit.edu

in this issue we offer a wide-ranging, post-Compact approach to the future of the Institute (page 4); "A Primer on Decarbonizing MIT's Campus" (page 7); and a Faculty Travelogue: "Reflections on the Alhambra" (page 8).
*[Deadline for submissions for the January/February FNL is January 26.]*



Late Fall by the Charles River

Faculty Travelogue

## Lecturing in China

**Ruth Perry**

**IN THE FALL OF 1987**, released from teaching by a Guggenheim Fellowship and invited to China to lecture as an American feminist intellectual, I visited there for two months, lecturing in six eastern cities: Beijing, Xuzhou, Hefei, Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Guilin. I spoke about American women's history and the history of feminism, feminist literary criticism, contemporary women's writing (especially Black women's writing), and women's issues more generally, such as salary discrepancy, harassment, daycare, and eating disorders. This last issue shocked my Chinese audiences the most! Since I knew no Chinese, I prepared for my journey by reading every Chinese story and novel I could find that had been translated into English, so that I would have some common ground with my interlocutors. Many were my adventures in that large and various country.

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From The Faculty Chair

## Faculty Governance: From Recognition to Representation

**Roger Levy**

**I BEGIN THIS FIRST** column as Chair of the Faculty with a brief update on the work of faculty governance during the academic year's first three months. We have, by necessity, been off to a running start.

Financial planning has been central: the new federal tax on university endowments, together with potential changes to federal research & development funding and indirect cost rates, are projected to reduce MIT's annual General Institute Budget by approximately one-sixth – about $300 million per year. Because these developments have enormous implications for MIT, we dedicated substantial parts of the September and November Institute Faculty Meetings to presentations and Q&A by Provost Anantha Chandrakasan, Executive Vice President and Treasurer (EVPT) Glen

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Editorial

## Little Lights in a Long Winter

**Editorial Board of the Faculty Newsletter**

**THIS WINTER, A QUIET** tristesse has settled across the Institute as austerity narrows conversation. Yet renewal often begins in moments like these – when faculty take up the harder questions of governance, responsibility, and imagination. The *Faculty Newsletter*, a platform from faculty for faculty, is devoting this issue to urging faculty to shape the financial, environmental, and cultural choices that will define MIT's future. Across the issue three themes converge: independence, inclusion, and transformation.

- **Independence through a renewed resource model.**
The current budget crisis stems from the conjunction of three pressures: the 8% tax on investment returns, tighter F&A (indirect-cost) caps, and

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**Little Lights in a Long Winter**
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a federal posture increasingly willing to condition support – and campus conduct – on shifting priorities. Against this backdrop, President Kornbluth's firm rejection of the federal Compact – a decision that preserved academic freedom at real financial cost – reminds us that autonomy and academic freedom are not guaranteed; they are choices[1]. With this choice comes responsibility. The risk now is erosion by austerity. So the question is: how do we design a financial model that secures independence and inclusion? One that expands access, renews our civic partnership, and treats faculty as the stewards, not the subjects, of institutional change. Such a model must sustain a mission-driven Institute that serves the state, nation, and the world, encompassing the full breadth of MIT – science, engineering, business, the humanities, arts, architecture, urban planning, and the social sciences. It must also renew our commitment to educating new generations in civics, social justice, and ethics (not only digital ethics), linking knowledge with responsibility and public purpose. This is the focus of the essay, "Finance, Freedom, and the Faculty Post-Compact: The Case for Independence and Inclusion," which offers a faculty conversation starter (page 4).

- **The carbon-neutral campus: urgency reclaimed.**

Once the liveliest topic on campus, decarbonization has slid toward the back burner amid fiscal pressure and community stress. Yet the climate clock does not pause for budget cycles. Achieving a carbon-neutral MIT is more than environmental stewardship; it is a test of whether we can act collectively in the public interest even when resources are tight. Our campus – labs, studios, classrooms, meeting spaces, and housing – should be the living experiment that shows what a low-carbon future looks like and how we can reach that goal and thrive in it. Crucially, that future must model equitable resilience: upgrades and investments that protect everyone on campus and in our neighboring communities. Christoph Reinhart and colleagues' "A Primer on Decarbonizing MIT's Campus: What Every MIT Faculty Member Should Know" outlines what we could be doing now (page 7).

- **Transformation through initiative and inclusion.**

Since her inauguration, President Kornbluth has launched cross-Institute initiatives designed to lower barriers between fields and broaden participation in discovery – "to empower faculty to pursue their most innovative ideas, collaborate with others outside their field, and explore fresh approaches to teaching." These include The Climate Project, The Generative AI Impact Consortium, The Health and Life Sciences Collaborative, and The MIT Quantum Initiative[2]. In these dim months, they appear not as isolated sparks – singular and alone – but as signs of a cultural shift toward greater collaboration, transparency, common responsibility and shared purpose. Each embodies the same commitments that guided the Compact decision – merit, independence, and inclusion – and asks how a university can renew itself from within. Yet inclusion cannot end at the stairs of 77 Massachusetts Avenue. It must continue to expand outward – supporting scholars, students, and communities worldwide so that our knowledge, teaching, and resources flow in both directions and strengthen our capacity to meet shared, planetary challenges. As we await the Quantum Initiative – whose very logic invites us to move beyond the binaries that so often frame our conception of the world – spend or cut, scarce or plentiful, right or wrong, us or them – toward a more entangled and generous understanding of ourselves and of knowledge itself, our colleagues Martha L. Gray and collaborators remind us that the foundations of this renewal already exist. Programs such as the School of Engineering's Technical Leadership and Communication (TLC) initiatives (page 16) offer precisely the kind of structures upon which MIT can build – extending its leadership not only in technical innovation but in cultivating the civic and ethical capacities of those who will shape a better future.

These are some of the lights we need this winter: clear principles, deliberate action, collaboration, and the courage to renew and think anew. The FNL is proud to host this conversation. Write. Propose. Consider. Experiment. Vote. Teach. Submit a letter to the FNL, or a Faculty Travelogue, or an article – and share your own small lights; together they may yet change the season.

**The Editorial Board**
**of the MIT Faculty Newsletter**

[1] The Compact and the Future of MIT - MIT Faculty Newsletter

[2] Special Initiatives | MIT Office of the President | MIT - Massachusetts Institute of Technology

# Finance, Freedom, and the Faculty Post Compact: The Case for Independence and Inclusion

**Franz-Josef Ulm**

**MIT HAS ADAPTED ITS** *resource model whenever the world shifted around it. Post-Compact, we might do so again – exploring paced expansion over austerity to secure academic freedom, widen access, and strengthen our civic partnership.*

We are trying to run a twenty-first-century university on twentieth-century playbooks. The three levers that once defined MIT's eras – tuition, federal research, and investment returns – no longer align with our post-Compact reality. Over the past century, MIT's resource model has reinvented itself at least three times, each shift driven by larger economic and political forces. World War II, the Cold War and the Space Race, and the post–Cold War realignment each rewired how we financed discovery and, with it, the rhythm of teaching and research.

Post-Compact, we are again at a juncture – choosing what MIT will become over the next 25 years and the next half-century. Rather than tighten into austerity, we should explore expansion – investing in independence and inclusion by extending our educational mission at meaningful scale, keeping academic freedom non-negotiable, and building a city-facing campus that grows access, not scarcity. Our own faculty – economists, social scientists, urban planners, architects, engineers—already hold the tools to turn fiscal pressure into a living laboratory for a new university–city partnership: mens et manus of real civic consequence.

Understanding what earlier shifts enabled – and what they obscured – clarifies how we arrived here and what a durable path forward can be. What follows is less a blueprint than a faculty conversation starter.

## From Tuition to Federal Research

Before World War II, tuition and specialized training (naval aviation, aircraft inspection) paid most of the bills; undergraduate teaching set the rhythm. Wartime collaboration – architected by Vannevar Bush's model for sponsored research – rewired MIT's finances and mission. In just two years in the 1940s, research funding jumped from $105,000 to $5.2 million, and the rise continued: by FY1957, federally sponsored research reached $48 million, roughly two-thirds of a $75.2 million operating budget[1]. Prestige, intellectual capital, and budget fused with the federal research state of the Cold War and Space Race; the center of gravity shifted from undergraduate instruction to graduate research.

## The Endowment Era – and Its Limits

The end of the Cold War was the last great juncture: as federal growth flattened, MIT migrated from a research-driven to an investment-driven resource model. On campus (excluding Lincoln Laboratory), federal research support was $436M in FY2006, covering 75% of $588M in research spending[1]. By FY2024 it reached $580M – a nominal rise but roughly a 17% real decline after inflation. Fundraising and investment returns filled the gap: the campaigns under Presidents Vest, Hockfield, and Reif together raised over $12B, and the endowment grew from $6.5B (2000) to $27.4B in 2025[2] – about a 125% real increase ($100 in 2000 ≈ $188 in 2025). That 2.25× real growth lifted endowment (and other investable assets) per student to ~$2.75M, crossing the $2.0M threshold that now triggers the 8% endowment excise tax.

For a generation, this investment era masked a structural imbalance between operating costs and federal support. In the post-Compact landscape, that imbalance has become visible, exposed by the collision of (i) the 8% tax on investment returns, (ii) tighter F&A (indirect-cost) caps, and (iii) a federal posture increasingly willing to condition support – and campus conduct – on shifting priorities. The arithmetic is stark: roughly a $300 million annual gap – about $240 million from the excise tax (including unrealized gains now counted as taxable income) and $60 million from F&A caps at 40%[3], widening toward $135 million at 15%. The so-called Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education offered relief – without numbers – in exchange for alignment with new federal priorities. In her October 10 letter to the Secretary of Education, President Sally Kornbluth captured the core issue: the Compact's principles "would restrict freedom of expression and our independence as an institution," and its premise is "inconsistent with our core belief that scientific funding should

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1 Canizares, C. "Sixty-six Years of Sponsored Research," *MIT Faculty Newsletter*, Vol. XIX No. 3, Jan 2007.

2 *MIT Treasurer's Report*, FY2025, https://vpf.mit.edu/sites/default/files/downloads/TreasurersReport/MITTreasurersReport2025.pdf

3 Provost A. Chandrakasan; EVP & Treasurer G. Shor, Faculty Meeting, Sept 17, 2025 (slides/remarks).

**Finance, Freedom, and the Faculty**
Ulm, from preceding page

be based on scientific merit alone"[4]. **For many of us, that is the juncture:** pressure on merit-based inquiry and academic freedom, and on the inclusive campus that sustains them. If scientific merit is our north star, then our financing has to safeguard the conditions that make it possible – independence, inclusion, and academic freedom.

### When "Clean" Grants Don't Add Up

In the post-Compact landscape, even a "clean" federal grant seldom covers its full costs. Once the endowment excise and tighter F&A caps are accounted for, the real value of a research dollar can drop toward half – and lower when compliance, advising, and internal scholarships are included. The point is not to lament the arithmetic; it's to name the model. Universities have always cross-subsidized discovery because discovery is a public mission. Faculty are not cost or profit centers; they are agents of learning and inquiry across science, engineering, the humanities, arts, and design. Cross-subsidy, then, is not a bug but a responsibility – so long as it is transparent, bounded, and periodically reviewed so budgets reinforce what we value (teaching, mentoring, durable scholarship), rather than letting margin quietly redefine the work.

## SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

Before the Compact, our "hold-the-line" plan was austere but legible: slow hiring, squeeze space, grow professional education, skip a merit year, and absorb the 8% tax[3]. That approach presumed a stable outside world. It isn't coming back. The endowment excise is structural; federal support is softening and more conditional; and indirect-cost recovery will not return to Cold-War ratios. Nor can we retreat to tuition as the primary lever: at roughly $64,000 sticker (with a median undergraduate net price near $10,000[5]), pushing harder on tuition would shred access and trust. Continuing to tighten inside the same footprint isn't strategy; it is slow erosion. At this post-Compact juncture, our model has to change in a way that insulates merit from political and fiscal pressure.

### The Distribution Problem

The current three-pronged approach – administrative efficiencies, more external revenue, Institute-wide cuts – stabilizes the spreadsheet without changing the footprint. By design, it channels opportunity toward units best positioned to earn (Science, Engineering, Sloan) while spreading austerity across everyone else. Left to run, that logic yields a two-tier campus. The costs aren't only fiscal: short-horizon projects crowd out foundational and public-interest work; tenure and promotion drift toward grant counts; junior scholars ride soft money; mentoring and field-building lose time. That is how a great engineering school drifts toward contract-first habits – and away from the broader public mission that built its reputation.

A sturdier posture treats the **faculty as a public good**. We measure teaching, mentoring, community, and durable scholarship; margin does not define the work. Budgets could be designed to make those measures durable. A transparent mission dividend – shared across Schools, with protections for junior faculty and limits on soft-money dependence – keeps the commons that makes discovery possible. In this frame, inclusion is faculty agency in action: who we hire, mentor, and promote determines who gets to learn, to lead, and to imagine the future. Embed that agency in governance and budgets, and inclusion becomes durable and self-renewing – rather than a program that can be pared back in the next round of cuts.

### The Enrollment Lever – Access, Not a Trick

As several colleagues have noted, there is one lever we actually control[6]: the denominator of the tax – endowment per student. At the September 17, 2025 faculty meeting, the provost noted that enrolling roughly 5,000 additional students would move MIT from the 8% bracket to 4%. That bracket shift is an outcome, not the point. Any relief from 8% to 4% should be earmarked first for affordability and core academic infrastructure, published annually. Over time, a larger cohort also nudges the numerator – more tuition/fee capacity and, more importantly, a broader alumni community that powers mission-aligned philanthropy and partnerships.

A sturdier posture treats the faculty as a public good. We measure teaching, mentoring, community, and durable scholarship; margin does not define the work. . . . In this frame, inclusion is faculty agency in action: who we hire, mentor, and promote determines who gets to learn, to lead, and to imagine the future.

But the deeper case isn't arithmetic; it's agency, inclusion, and merit. If we truly believe funding should follow scientific merit, then growth should follow educational merit: add seats we can teach well, where learning is transformative, and do it across all Schools – humanities and arts, social sciences, architecture and planning, science, engineering, and management – so the curriculum expands with the cohort. A growth model affirms that faculty are not profit centers but agents of discovery and learning; it invests in the

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4 President Sally Kornbluth's Response to the "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education" - MIT Faculty Newsletter, Vol. XXXVIII No. 2, Oct. 2025.

5 MIT Student Financial Services, "Cost of Attendance, 2024–25." Cost of attendance | MIT Student Financial Services

6 Community ideas: Potential budget responses to federal actions - MIT Provost Office, October 2025.

**Finance, Freedom, and the Faculty**
Ulm, from preceding page

work we actually do – teaching, mentoring, building fields – rather than rationing it.

To keep quality non-negotiable, any growth we consider would have to be paced and guarded. We would hold the student–faculty ratio at or below today's level (about 10:1, counting professors of all ranks, including Professors of the Practice and emeriti/ae counted only when teaching[7]) and cap average advising loads. We would stage housing, classrooms, health services, studios, and labs in step with each intake. We would publish those gates in advance. The result would be tangible across every discipline: new faculty lines, expanded studios and teaching labs, and additional TA/RA positions that strengthen mentoring and hands-on learning Institute-wide.

Inclusive growth could also rebuild public legitimacy. A larger MIT – paired with durable affordability (need-blind undergraduate admissions; indexed graduate stipends) – would signal access and national service at a moment when higher education is too often caricatured as exclusive. It could offer a better banner for a future capital campaign than austerity ever will be: Investing in MIT's Future and Academic Freedom. And it would honor the daily work of staff and students who make excellence possible.

Finally, growth could deepen our civic partnership. Looking out to FY2050 and FY2075, enrollment becomes a choice about what kind of university we want to become. Pursued with Cambridge and the Commonwealth, expansion could align housing production, anti-displacement measures, transit, and climate resilience – turning a budget problem into a platform for sustainable urban development, mens et manus at civic scale. In that sense, the growth lever is larger than a tax formula: it could be a faculty choice to widen access, secure academic freedom, and renew the public mission of a great research university.

[7] "Faculty & Instructional Staff," MIT Facts, Oct 2024. Faculty & Instructional Staff – MIT Facts.

### Questions for the Year Ahead

Since spring, we've lived under an austerity wave. Let's finish what's begun – harvest the savings we've already committed to – and then let that wave run its course. The next phase is about imagination, not retrenchment. Four lines of inquiry could frame our collective work:

1. **Phased growth with guardrails.** How might we model 1,000-3,000-5,000 enrollment scenarios that protect mentoring and thesis-advising time, keep teaching loads reasonable, and ensure housing, health services, classrooms, and labs expand in step? What does "capacity" mean in each School?

2. **A city–university compact.** What long-horizon partnership with Cambridge and the Commonwealth could align growth to housing, anti-displacement, transit, and climate resilience? Could a K–12 alliance in STEM, the humanities, and the arts advance diversity while strengthening public education?

3. **Governance for a mission dividend.** How might faculty design a transparent structure to return shared gains from professional education and industry consortia back to the commons? Any relief from 8% to 4% should put affordability and inclusion first across all Schools.

4. **Teaching and learning at scale.** What versions of the classroom, studio, and lab can preserve the hands-on spirit of an MIT education while drawing on digital and AI-enabled learning? How can scale deepen rather than dilute experience?

Answers to these questions can become the guardrails for realizing a clear value proposition: to expand access, secure academic freedom, and strengthen MIT's civic partnership – without diluting quality – through phased, transparent growth. Our own faculty – economists, social scientists, urban planners, architects, and engineers – already hold the tools to answer them. Expansion can mobilize the full breadth of the Institute's intellectual community, turning fiscal challenge into a shared design project – one that reimagines the university's role in the civic and economic life of Cambridge and beyond.

### Closing

Tuition built the Institute. Federally sponsored research carried it to prominence. Alumni and donors sustained its investment era.

Now, in the post-Compact moment, MIT stands at another junction – a choice about how independence and inclusion might shape the century ahead. The task may not be austerity but self-governance with equity: to bring every lever of our finances – tuition, research, investment, and enrollment – into a model that could protect academic freedom from political or fiscal coercion while widening access through deliberate growth.

We could stabilize now, expand with affordability, partner with Cambridge and the Commonwealth, and mobilize the whole faculty. This is not stimulus but possibility – phased, public, and accountable – undertaken to secure the academic freedom and inclusion on which scientific merit depends. Seen in that light, the budget is not yet a cliff; it is a design brief – one we might shape together, worthy of MIT.

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# A Primer on Decarbonizing MIT's Campus: What Every MIT Faculty Member Should Know

**Christoph Reinhart**
**David Hsu**
**Caitlin Mueller**
**Les Norford**
**John Sterman**
**Jessika Trancik**

**WHEN WE TALK ABOUT** the MIT campus, we're not only describing a collection of buildings along the Charles River. We're describing a living laboratory – nearly 200 buildings that power, heat, cool, and sustain thousands of people every day. How this campus uses energy is inseparable from the way MIT teaches, discovers, and leads.

Today, MIT faces a defining opportunity: to turn the campus into a working model of what a low-carbon future looks like. Decarbonization is the process of eliminating greenhouse gas emissions from how we operate, in this case from the systems that heat and cool our spaces and power our labs. Doing this on a complex, research-intensive, 24/7 campus is not simple, but it's exactly the kind of problem MIT exists to solve.

## Why this matters now

Climate change is no longer a distant horizon – it's a daily reality that shapes our natural and built environment alongside policy, funding, and student expectations. While Massachusetts works towards 85% emissions cut by 2050, Cambridge aims for absolute carbon neutrality. Across the Institute, roughly 95% of MIT's direct emissions come from burning natural gas to heat, cool and power our buildings. That means that the path to a decarbonized MIT runs straight through the campus itself.

Even in a time of global and local uncertainty, when large infrastructure projects are put on hold, this is the moment for creative planning and bold solutions. The decisions we make about energy and infrastructure today will define what kind of university MIT becomes in the next generation – resilient, innovative, and aligned with its values.

## What's at stake

MIT's past efforts led to modest local emission cuts and mainly brought new renewable energy to the grid. But to go further – to reach *real* zero emissions rather than paper offsets – we'll need to reimagine how the campus works. Current reports on campus decarbonization converge on one shared insight: there's no single fix. It will take a mix of deep energy retrofits, new ways to move and store heat, electrification, and clean power from the grid.

## Key issues every faculty member should know

- **Buildings are a key lever.** Most campus emissions come from heating, cooling and providing fresh air to research and lab spaces. Improving efficiency and reducing energy losses is essential.

- **Coordinating the decarbonization of heat is crucial.** While a general shift to electric heating systems – powered by clean energy – is necessary, meeting heating peaks in cold climates remains a regulatory and technical challenge worthy of MIT's focus and attention.

- **Timing matters.** Each decade of delay locks in costs and emissions. Acting now means MIT can learn, iterate, and lead instead of catching up later.

- **Offsets aren't solutions.** Purchasing credits may appear to balance ledgers, but they don't reduce the carbon we actually emit.

- **This is an educational opportunity.** Our students come to MIT to develop and demonstrate the technologies and systems they'll deploy globally. The campus itself can be a teaching tool – a real-time demonstration of energy transition in action.

## An invitation to engage

The new *How to decarbonize the MIT campus* white paper was triggered by our shared assessment that MIT's decarbonization strategy can be more ambitious and aligned with the Institute's aspiration to be a leader in tackling the climate crisis. It maps out the technical options – but also raises larger questions of governance, investment, and community vision. How ambitious should MIT be? How fast can we move? What experiments can we run on our own campus to accelerate global learning? Faculty play a crucial role in shaping these answers. Whether through research, teaching, or departmental leadership, we each have a stake in how MIT models the future.

Click here to read the white paper, or visit the FNL homepage: fnl.mit.edu. Join the conversation. Help make the MIT campus a prototype of the world we want to live in.

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Faculty Travelogue

# Reflections on the Alhambra

**Nasser Rabbat**

**SOME YEARS AGO, I SPENT** part of my sabbatical in Granada. I resided in the *Carmen de la Victoria*, the residence for visiting professors at the University of Granada. The historic house sits on a rise in the famous Albaicín quarter, a neighborhood whose urban fabric, spatial organization, and very name all hark back to the Islamic period. The word *carmen* itself, which today sounds thoroughly Spanish, is in fact a hispanized form of the Arabic *karma* (vineyard), a fitting designation for the Nasrid and Morisco houses of Granada, each of which contained a courtyard planted, at the very least, with a vine. This pattern recalls the courtyard houses of the Arab world at large, where a single tree – fig, pomegranate, orange, or vine – often dominated the central space and became its living emblem. The Albaicín, in other words, is not only a surviving quarter but a palimpsest of Mediterranean-Arabic modes of dwelling, visible in its terraces, winding streets, and houses that keep a vine or tree as their nucleus.

The *Carmen de la Victoria* is remarkable in its orientation: it directly faces the Alhambra, the most resplendent of Granada's monuments and one of the most celebrated achievements of Islamic architecture worldwide. The royal city of the Nasrids, the Alhambra was built and inhabited by the Banu Nasr or Banu al-Ahmar, from their rise to power in the thirteenth century until the fall of the city in 1492. From my window each day, I was treated to a view of the fortress-palace, at once majestic and haunting. My daily ascents and descents to the city center carried me beneath its walls, sometimes several times a day, and I cannot exaggerate when I say that the vision of this red citadel, ringed in verdant green, overwhelmed me with its beauty and solemnity. Especially at night, when illuminated dramatically, the Alhambra seems to slip away from its earthly site and float ethereally above the wooded slopes.

**The Palaces of the Alhambra Viewed from Sacromonte**

### Granada and the Memory of Loss

Granada is the perfect place for an Arab to meditate on exile and defeat. Inscribed in our collective memory as the last city in al-Andalus to fall to the Catholic monarchs in 1492, it still bears witness to that golden age of Islamic culture in the Iberian Peninsula. Its monuments testify eloquently: the Alhambra itself, the fourteenth-century Madrasa Yusufiyya (later the city hall), the Corral del Carbón (a caravanserai), several converted mosques, and above all the Albaicín, the hill-hugging neighborhood facing the Sabīka Hill, where the Nasrids raised their red citadel. Together they evoke an entire urban ecology of Islamic Granada, fragile but persistent.

For centuries, poets, essayists, and moralists recalled Granada, and the Alhambra above all, as our "Paradise Lost," the marvelous city that we could

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**Reflections on the Alhambra**
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not hold on to. Its loss haunted Arab memory, as testified in countless poems of lamentation, in didactic sermons, and in moral tales warning against disunity and indulgence. This remained the case until the mid-twentieth century, when Palestine became the fresh wound, the new and ongoing catastrophe, the *nakba* that has weighed on the conscience of generations of Arabs ever since. Palestine displaced Granada as the last loss, remembered in politics, art, and literature. Granada, meanwhile, perhaps because of its ethereal beauty and the growing distance from its tragedy, became the erstwhile *lieu de mémoire*, often evoked with resigned nostalgia and exaggerated visions of past grandeur.

But for me, the Alhambra impressed with more than its aesthetic brilliance or its status as the register of anguished nostalgia. Instead, it compelled me to reflect on the ongoing erasure of Palestine. Granada's history, before my eyes each day, offered itself as a prism through which to contemplate the enduring meanings of loss, exile, and memory.

The fall of Granada in 1492 to Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile marked the end of nearly eight centuries of Islamic presence in the peninsula. From that moment, al-Andalus passed from lived reality into memory, attaining an aura of perfection, *convivencia*, and creativity that grew ever more intense as the contemporary Arab condition deteriorated. The expelled Andalusians dispersed, mainly across the Maghrib, carrying with them their traditions, their refinement, and their sorrow. They founded new quarters, often called *al-Andalus*, preserved their music and courtly manners, and gave rise to a rich corpus of laments and elegies that has continued to this day.

**The Nasrid Dynasty and Its Monument**

The Alhambra itself still bears eloquent traces of that past, despite five centuries of transformation. Of its original seven or eight palaces, only two remain: the Court of the Myrtles with its long reflective pool and jewel-like throne room, and the Court of the Lions with its celebrated fountain borne by 12 marble lions and its two intricately adorned halls, the Halls of the Two Sisters and of the Abencerrajes, whose muqarnas domes remain unrivaled in their complexity and splendor. The ensemble is at once delicate and monumental, fragile yet enduring, modest in scale yet infinite in detail.

The Nasrid dynasty's history was undeniably tragic. Founded in 1238 by Muhammad bin Yusuf bin Nasr (Ibn al-Ahmar), the emirate endured for two-and-a-half centuries as a fragile Islamic enclave surrounded by the ever-advancing Christian Reconquista. Its survival depended on precarious diplomacy, alternating between Muslim and Christian alliances, while internally it was riven by intrigue, assassinations, and struggles for power. List al-Din bin al-Khatib, Ibn Khaldun, and Ibn Zamrak – all of whom lived and wrote within the Alhambra – testify in their writings and in their fates to the brilliance and the instability of its culture. Ministers became exiles, poets

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**The Muqarans Dome of the Hall of the Two Sisters – Alhambra**

**Reflections on the Alhambra**
Rabbat, from preceding page

**View of the Court of the Myrtles Toward the Palace of Carlos V**

became martyrs, scholars became political pawns. The very walls of the Alhambra carry their inscriptions: verses of Ibn Zamrak inscribed across the halls, lyrical celebrations of beauty and power, but written in a palace where conspiracies and betrayals ended in exile or execution.

And yet, paradoxically, this weak and isolated polity enjoyed an economic and cultural efflorescence. At the very moment of its greatest political vulnerability, it produced works of exquisite refinement in architecture, literature, and the arts. Successive rulers, especially Ysusf I and Muhammad V, lavished resources on embellishing the Alhambra and its surrounding suburban estates such as the Generalife (*Jannat al-'Arif*), perhaps the most accomplished expression of garden design in the western Mediterranean. The paradox is profound: a polity doomed politically, yet producing an architecture so refined that it continues to inspire awe and imitation centuries later.

Indeed, there is little dispute that the Alhambra represent one of the most celebrated achievements of world architecture. Nor is there any disagreement that these palaces have entered the global artistic and cultural imagination alongside the other great marvels of humanity such as the Pyramids of Giza, the Acropolis of Athens, or the Taj Mahal of Agra. These monuments long ago transcended their architectural, artistic, and historical meanings to assume symbolic, exalted, even mythical associations. They stand in the global imagination not only as structures but as ideas: the pyramids as humanity's challenge to death and its tragic submission to mortality; the Acropolis as the birth of aesthetics, philosophy, and democracy; the Taj Mahal as the universal emblem of love.

The Alhambra is different. It is neither grand nor monumental. Nor has it carried the same weight as a universal symbol of an essential human ideal. Its palaces are delicate, refined, even flimsy: a sequence of modest courtyards ringed by slender halls and arcades, leaning against the fortress walls, gazing toward the hills, and partly hidden behind Charles V's intrusive palace. They appear incomplete – almost amputated. And yet, when one enters, one steps immediately into a self-contained world of geometry, water, inscription, and light.

It is perhaps this very contrast – the fragile grace of the palaces and the storm of hostile forces encircling them – that endowed the Alhambra with its symbolic aura. For the Romantic imagination of the nineteenth century, it became the last refuge of an exotic "Oriental" enchant-

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**Reflections on the Alhambra**
Rabbat, from preceding page

ment at the western edge of Europe. Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra* popularized its legends, Chateaubriand projected onto it his melancholy, and poets from Alfred de Musset to García Lorca, from Gustave Doré to Nizar Qabbani, filled it with verse, fantasy, and lament. Their works blurred fact and fiction, elevating the Alhambra from fragmentary ruin to luminous legend.

How did these modest palaces, the last relics of a vanished Islamic dynasty, survive? Perhaps because their beauty is not of scale or power but of proportion, delicacy, and integration with nature. Their muqarnas domes, epigraphic bands, and endlessly varied arabesques achieve a lyrical harmony with fountains, gardens, and vistas. It is this beauty – at once intimate and transcendent – that has ensured their vitality in the imagination of architects, poets, and visitors. Beauty, more than history or politics, has lifted the Alhambra from the fate of neglect into the realm of myth.

## Contemporary Resonances: Beyond Elegy

What, then, should the Alhambra mean for us today? Not merely the mnemonic weight of defeat, nor a picturesque relic of Orientalist fantasy, it should function as a paradigm: of proportion against gigantism, of layered inscription against emptiness, of water and garden against sterility, of lightness against bombast, and of beauty against destruction. To remember loss is necessary; to remember only loss is disabling. The Alhambra teaches that beauty is not consolation but method – an exacting discipline that binds memory to making and transforms nostalgia into creation.

To reconcile with the full legacy of al-Andalus – its triumphs and its tragedies alike – would be to re-engage its monuments as resources for contemporary creativity. Such reconciliation is not amnesia; it is the cultivation of forms that keep memory active. In this sense, the Alhambra remains urgently present in these tragic days. But instead of sublimating loss into myth, it offers a different labor: to translate wounded memory into a generative practice – cultural, architectural, literary, and visual – that refracts the past into promising future.

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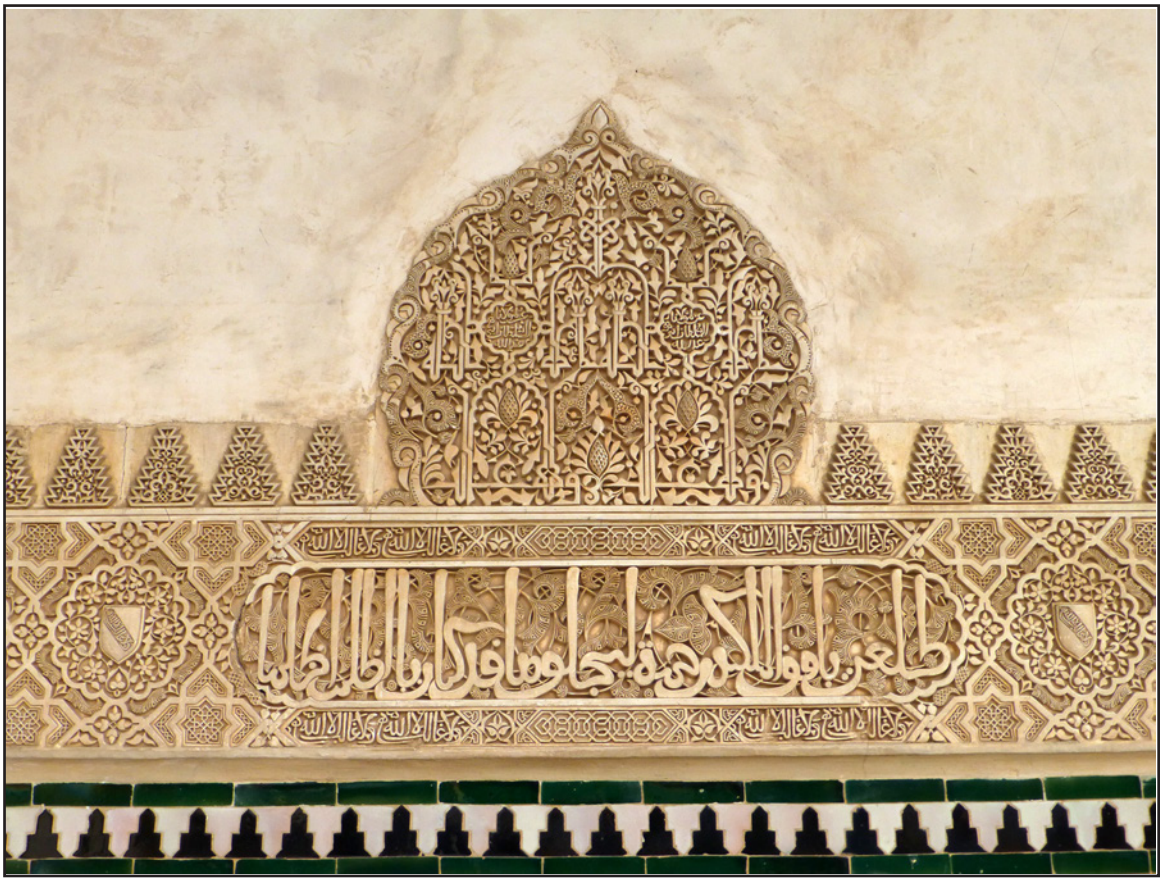

**A Cartouche of a Distich from a Poem by Ibn Zamrak Outside the Throne Hall in the Court of the Myrtles**

**Faculty Governance: From Recognition to Representation**
Levy, from page 1

Shor, and their teams, who have led the planning effort. Outside these meetings, the faculty officers have been listening carefully to faculty concerns about budget impacts, and we and the Faculty Policy Committee have spent considerable time in discussion with the Provost and EVPT, who have convened numerous information and feedback sessions across the Institute. This topic will doubtless remain a central concern in the months ahead. Faculty governance has no budgetary decision-making authority, but we will continue working to ensure that faculty concerns are heard, understood, and conveyed; that crucial facts and rationales are made available as transparently as possible; and that decision-making remains broadly collaborative.

On October 1, MIT and eight other US universities received the Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education. The Compact completely occupied our attention for the next week and beyond: seeking and hearing faculty views, reading and digesting analyses in public media, and communicating with the senior administration. President Kornbluth's response to the Compact the morning of October 10 coincided with the quarterly meeting of the MIT Corporation. The chair of the faculty attends Corporation meetings, and I can report that all three sides of MIT's triangle of faculty governance – the faculty, the administration, and the Corporation – are firmly and powerfully aligned in support of President Kornbluth's response. MIT is at its strongest when we are so aligned.

The Institute Faculty Meeting is also the designated assembly for conducting official business of the faculty. In this year's meetings thus far, we have heard reports from the Ad Hoc Committee to Review Faculty Newsletter Policies and Procedures, delivered by committee chair Susan Silbey, the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Freedom and Campus Expression, delivered by co-chairs Peko Hosoi and Mike Sipser, and the Committee on the Future of the Arts, delivered by chair Peter Fisher and committee member Keeril Makan, as well as the annual report of the Committee on Discipline, delivered by chair Tamar Schapiro. All members of these committees have my sincere thanks for their important work. The faculty also voted to change the Rules and Regulations of the Faculty so that the December Faculty Meeting regularly falls during the last week of classes, rather than during finals week, and to accept the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review Faculty Newsletter Policies and Procedures. One of these recommendations was for the chair of the faculty to appoint a Transitional Support Committee for the Faculty Newsletter. I have since appointed Krishna Rajagopal (Physics, past chair of the faculty) and Donca Steriade (Linguistics, past chair of the Committee on Graduate Programs) to this committee, together with Tom Kochan (Sloan, past chair of the faculty) as committee chair. The Editorial Board of the *Faculty Newsletter*, for its part, has constituted three committees – Elections, Production, and Policies & Procedures. I ask that all faculty support the Editorial Board and the Transitional Support Committee in implementing the full set of recommendations to secure for the *Faculty Newsletter* independence with accountability to the faculty.[1]

As may be clear from the above account, key to the work of the faculty officers is communication – with the broader leadership of faculty governance, with faculty members individually and in groups across the Institute, with the senior administration, and with the Corporation. Indeed, every item on an Institute Faculty Meeting agenda is the result of a rich communicative history: perhaps within a committee, perhaps among a group of advocates for a motion, perhaps with a team of dedicated MIT staff supporting the work of faculty governance. And much important faculty governance communication happens entirely outside Institute Faculty Meetings. Therefore I will devote the remainder of this column to how we sense community priorities, resources, and concerns in the service of best representing the faculty, and to a brief review of specific mechanisms that are at your disposal for communication with faculty governance.

MIT has just under 1,100 faculty. This is an interesting number: easily small enough that each of us could, in principle, recognize one another (humans can recognize thousands of faces), but likely an order of magnitude too large for us all to be in one another's core social groups (more like 150 people).[2] This means that effective faculty representation cannot rely solely on the knowledge and core networks of the faculty officers. Rather, faculty governance is participatory by design, and at its best achieves the collective intelligence needed for effective representation and decision-making. Therefore, many of our mechanisms for communication involve convening groups of faculty, both for elected representatives to hear from the broader faculty and for faculty members to hear from one another.

**Before, during, and after the Institute Faculty Meeting.** The Institute Faculty Meeting itself is of course a forum for communication. Any member of the MIT

continued on next page

1 As noted by the FNL co-chairs in September, the Editorial Board election originally planned for spring 2025 was rescheduled for this fall. With my support and that of the provost, the target date is now February 1, 2026, to allow time for first carefully revising their nomination and election processes as recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee.

2 Recognition capacity estimates come from the face perception literature (Jenkins, R., Dowsett, A. J., & Burton, A. M., 2018, "How many faces do people know?", *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*). Core social network size estimates come from anthropology and neuroscience (see Dunbar, R. I., 2024, "The social brain hypothesis – thirty years on", *Annals of Human Biology*, for a recent commentary).

**Faculty Governance: From Recognition to Representation**
Levy, from preceding page

community can attend (except during executive session), and there is an opportunity with each agenda item and with new business for any faculty member to speak on the topic. The meeting takes place in an auditorium, only one person speaks at a time, and everyone can hear. However, the time available at these meetings is necessarily brief, and not all communicative goals are well suited to a formal one-to-all format. Therefore we continue a long tradition of a more informal reception hosted in the Emma Rogers Room (10-340) by the chair of the faculty for the hour after the Institute Faculty Meeting. New this year, we are also hosting tea and cookies in the Emma Rogers Room for half an hour (3:00-3:30pm) before each Institute Faculty Meeting. Small group conversations just before and after the meeting deepen engagement with the business of the faculty and strengthen our social bonds. You are always invited; please join whenever you can.

**Random faculty gatherings.** We are delighted to continue, now in its 39th year, the tradition first suggested by Joel Moses and initially hosted by Jay Keyser of convening groups of typically 15-20 randomly selected faculty for lunches and dinners, hosted monthly by the faculty officers. Each event runs 90-120 minutes, with the first half being small group discussions and the second half a single round-table group discussion. There is no set agenda: these gatherings offer an open forum for participants to discuss concerns and priorities regarding Institute matters. These gatherings contribute to Institute decision-making in three ways. First, due to random selection, you are likely to meet colleagues you might not otherwise encounter, which strengthens the social fabric and collective intelligence of the faculty. Second, the faculty officers and indeed all participants hear and learn from each other. Third, the faculty officers prepare an appropriately anonymized summary of each discussion and share it with members of the senior administration. These meals are part of the texture of MIT faculty life; if your name is drawn, we hope you'll join us.

**Monthly faculty coffee and breakfast hours.** We are also pleased to continue a more recent tradition, started by Chair of the Faculty Lily Tsai at the end of her term in 2023 and continued under Chair Mary Fuller during her 2023-2025 term, of monthly faculty coffee and breakfast hours at the MIT Museum. These breakfasts have typically brought together several dozen faculty to exchange experiences, concerns, and ideas, and simply to gather socially. The next coffee and breakfast hour will take place on Tuesday, December 9 from 8:30-9:30am. We gratefully acknowledge the MIT Museum and the Office of the Executive Vice Provost for the support to make these events possible.

**Ad hoc communications.** You are always welcome to contact the faculty officers by email, individually or together; you can easily reach the entire Faculty Officers Group (me, Associate Chairs Bevin Engelward and Erica James, and Faculty Governance Administrator Tami Kaplan) through the email address *mitfog@mit.edu*. Some matters are, of course, best discussed in person, so feel no qualms about sending a brief message asking for a meeting. More broadly, the work of faculty governance is carried out by our numerous committees and councils. Depending on the nature of the matter, we may point you to the committees most suited to address it. Please also feel free to reach out yourself to members of any committees you believe may be relevant.

A cross-cutting feature of the communication mechanisms described above is that they allow for exchange of information that is both bottom-up – reflecting concerns and views of faculty across the Institute, not limited to preconceived notions of faculty governance leadership about the most important topics – and granular, allowing faculty to characterize and contextualize their views as individually and deeply as desired. The response of MIT faculty to the Compact provided a remarkable example of the value of such mechanisms. Within days of the Compact's release, the faculty officers had received input from faculty that was stunning in its volume, depth, and range of opinion. As I noted at October's Institute Faculty Meeting, I have never witnessed such extraordinary passion and near unanimity from academia on an issue. This input gave us a clear understanding of the range of views – regarding both how to respond to the Compact and the reasons for doing so – as well as the strong center-of-gravity sentiment that it must be rejected. President Kornbluth's response captured that center of gravity. Moreover, the free, open, and collegial expression of wide-ranging faculty views testifies to the vitality of our academic culture. To everyone who communicated with us: it was an honor to hear from you.

Beyond the above mechanisms, we continually seek to strengthen and deepen communication from, to, and among the faculty. We are your elected leaders, but faculty governance is at its best with collective engagement. Please don't hesitate to contact us with your ideas, suggestions, and feedback. Thank you, and we hope to see and hear from you again soon. My term will be a great success if we each recognize more of our colleagues at the end than we did at the start – and perhaps a few of us just may push past those 150-person limits.

**Roger Levy** is a Professor of Brain and Cognitive Sciences and Chair of the Faculty *(rplevy@mit.edu)*.

**Lecturing in China**
Perry, from page 1

I explored the imperial palaces in Beijing, discussing the "cultural revolution" with people who had lived through it, those who had suffered and a few who had met their partners in the countryside and remembered this traumatic period as a romantic and idealistic time[1]. I saw the beautiful gardens of Suzhou and the lovely Yangtse River in Guilin and also that city's huge underground caverns, with great accretions pushing up from the floor and hanging from the ceilings, gigantic and creased and indented like brain tissue or lapped over like cloth from a giant's bolt. I remember arguing about subjectivity with a poet in Guilin, who told me that the best poems were simply more accurate to the phenomena they described than lesser poems – and that what I attributed to "subjectivity" was merely a matter of inaccuracy. I remember trying to describe psychoanalytic criticism to another literary critic as we rowed a boat on the famous West Lake in Hangzhao, taking my examples from short stories I had read in translation. I climbed the famous Huang Chan, the Yellow Mountain, in Anhui province, terrified most of the way because the path was so steep and perilous, often just shallow footholds cut into the rock, without anything to hold onto. The worst moment came when crossing a narrow arch of stone without guardrails in a high wind with a sheer fall to certain death on either side.

Everywhere I spoke I had to contradict the assumption that "women's liberation" was about sexual license, which I told them was a male fantasy. One woman told me that older men, 50 years or older, were more tolerant of feminism and more egalitarian in their relationships, because traditional masculinity in China had been more "feminine;" i.e., the ideal man was gentle, civilized, learned, helpful, thoughtful, and generous. But, she said, younger men were more arrogant towards women, aggressive and even rude, because they were imitating Western men in what is considered "manly." She said that the younger generation at that time thought everything "Western" was better.

When asked for the current political slogans about men and women and feminism, I was hard put to come up with any. We did not "do" slogans the way the Chinese did, I tried to explain. But then I thought of "The personal is political" and explained that, in the context of women's consciousness-raising groups, women were seeing that problems they had thought were personal were, in fact, part of the misogyny of the culture.

But one of my most precious memories from that trip came when I spoke to the Women's Cadre College in Beijing. I had been invited to talk about the history of women's rights in the US, not something I had ever studied or worked on, but I knew where to look. Much of my lecture came straight out of Eleanor Flexner's *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (1959). And before I began, I gave my real credentials

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**At the Imperial Palace**

**Lecturing in China**
Perry, from preceding page

**Betty Lewis, Ruth Perry's Maternal Grandmother**

for the talk – not my position at MIT or the books and papers I had published on women and gender in literature and history. I told them about my grandmother. She had been the first steward of her shop for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the ILGWU[2], and her daughter, my mother, had been on the picket line strapped to her back before my mother could even walk. With a roar, the audience broke into spontaneous loud applause, which lasted quite a long time. It was something to stand surrounded by this unprompted tribute, and to register their appreciation of the facts as I had heard them from my mother. I had always been proud of this history but had never mentioned it in public before. It had never seemed relevant. But here was this large hall of women from the other side of the globe clapping for my grandmother's dedication to her union. It was heartwarming at the time, and has stayed with me down the years as one of the high points of my memorable China trip. ■

1 China in 1987

Mao Tse-Tung died in 1976, and with him the "cultural revolution." Deng Xiaoping succeeded him, opening up the Chinese economy to Western market capitalism, which is why speakers like me were encouraged to come to China. But Deng also ordered the crackdown in Tiananmen Square in 1989: Western concepts of free speech were one thing, but putting them into practice quite another. 1987, when I lectured there, was a time when the interest in Western political ideas was encouraged, but their actual local practice was still frowned upon.

2 ILGWU

The ILGWU (International Ladies Garment Workers Union) was founded as early as 1900, and grew by leaps and bounds, especially after the 1911Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, in which 150 young women were burned to death or leaped to their deaths because the doors of the factory had been locked to prevent them from taking breaks. The tragedy became a cause célèbre, and 100,000 people attended the victims' funeral. My grandmother, an immigrant seamstress, joined the ILGWU a few years later, in 1913, and was elected the steward of her shop.

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# Developing Students Who Make an Impact: Introducing the SoE Technical Leadership and Communication (TLC) Programs

**Martha L. Gray**
**Douglas P. Hart**
**Joel Schindall**

**IN SEPTEMBER OF 2024,** President Sally Kornbluth announced the MIT Presidential Initiatives, a set of collaborative efforts "to empower faculty to pursue their most innovative ideas, collaborate with others outside their field, and explore fresh approaches to teaching."

We believe that in addition to fostering bold ideas and collaborations, our faculty, students, and the broader MIT community are deeply motivated to see innovations that have positive societal impact. To that end, students must develop the communication, teamwork, and leadership skills essential to turn ideas into implemented solutions. Accreditation and advisory bodies including ABET, the National Academy of Engineering, and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) emphasize the importance of this broader skillset. To maximize students' ability to change the world for the better, we must recognize that developing their capacity to conceive and design solutions is only the beginning.

MIT's *Technical Leadership and Communication (TLC)* programs were established to address this need. Organized in 2022 with Dr. Reza Rahaman as the managing director, the purpose of the TLC is to empower students to develop the critical skills that, combined with their technical proficiency, equip them to tackle the greatest technical challenges of our future. This organization is designed to consolidate and synergize on a robust and proven heritage, and comprises four existing programs, housed within the School of Engineering and serving the entire Institute, that have been nurtured, developed, and validated over the past 25 years: the *Undergraduate Practice Opportunities Program* (*UPOP*, founded in 2001), the *Gordon-MIT Engineering Leadership Program* (*GEL*, *founded in 2007), the Riccio-MIT Graduate Engineering Leadership Program* (*GradEL*, founded in 2017), and the *SoE Communication Lab* (*Comm Lab*, founded in 2013).

The TLC programs are not just complementary to MIT's world-class technical education – they are essential to realizing MIT's mission of advancing knowledge and preparing students to meet the world's greatest challenges. By equipping students with the skills that transform technical excellence into societal impact, TLC enables them to step into roles where they can make change happen.

The TLC programs are not just complementary to MIT's world-class technical education – they are essential to realizing MIT's mission of advancing knowledge and preparing students to meet the world's greatest challenges.

Taken together, the TLC programs have impacted thousands of MIT students. Many of you may know students who have participated in one or more TLC programs and who stood out as leaders in your own classroom activities. Our data demonstrate that TLC students are better prepared for future academic and professional opportunities. As supported by recent longitudinal studies, the individual TLC programs complement and empower MIT's outstanding technical education by experientially developing our students' teamwork, communication, and leadership skills, enabling them to leverage their technical expertise to develop and implement processes and products that will have an impact on the world. Findings also demonstrate that TLC program alumni advance more quickly into leadership positions of greater responsibility. The programs also equip TLC students to perform better in their current academic studies and research at MIT and in their job searches.

In supporting these programs, we are investing in MIT students' ability to turn ideas into impact, research into breakthroughs, and prototypes into solutions that matter. We invite you to encourage your students, advisees, and research group members to engage with TLC offerings, and we welcome your partnership in shaping how these programs can further serve our community. Together, we can ensure that MIT continues to lead – not only in technical innovation, but also in developing leaders who will shape a better future.

You can find more information about TLC and its individual programs on our newly redesigned website, tlc.mit.edu. ■

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# Where Are You? On Selective Outrage and Moral Credibility

**Yossi Sheffi**

**THE RECENT VIDEOS OF** Hamas executing Palestinians in Gaza were horrifying. Yet anyone who witnessed the terror attacks of October 7, 2023 – when Hamas militants murdered, raped, and tortured Israeli civilians – should not have been surprised. The cruelty and joy of killing on display then are now turned inward, against their own people. Even the BBC,[1] CNN,[2] and other anti-Israel outlets have reported Hamas gunmen firing on unarmed men and carrying out public executions without trial or due process.

This is not new. During the war, Hamas executed Palestinians who tried to get food directly from American humanitarian convoys rather than through Hamas's control.[3] Long before the current conflict, it murdered dissenters – often by throwing them from rooftops – for refusing to submit to its rule.[4] These acts of terror are not anomalies; they are central to the organization's culture of violence and repression.

Predictably, UNRWA and the so-called "Palestinian Health Authorities" have issued no condemnation, no report, and no expression of outrage regarding Hamas's reign of terror. The same institutions that loudly denounce Israel's every move fall silent when the perpetrators are Hamas. Their credibility erodes each time moral judgment is applied selectively. Only now, as journalists gain direct access to Gaza and bypass Hamas's information filters, are the world's media beginning to report the truth.

Here on campus, that same selective morality has become painfully visible. The passionate protests that once filled MIT's courtyards and lecture halls have vanished. No vigils, no open letters, no outrage over the summary execution of Gazans by Hamas. Even the recent **ceasefire agreement**, which offered a rare moment of relief for civilians on both sides, passed without comment. Where are the same voices that demanded "justice for Gaza"? are public executions not worthy of campus outrage?

It may be uncomfortable for the slogan-shouting students and their faculty and staff enablers to look in the mirror and recognize who all their demonstrations were really supporting. The absence of any reaction to Hamas's crimes suggests that the movement was never truly about sympathy for Gazans caught in the crossfire. Instead, it was an outlet for age-old antisemitism and its current anti-Zionism incarnation – an exercise in moral posturing by uninformed students and staff who practiced the age-old convictions directed at Jews. (The point is even more pronounced when one realizes the lack of campus demonstrations against the Chinese treatment of the (Muslim) Uyghurs, the gassing of hundreds of thousand Syrians by the Asad regimes, the genocide of Christians in Nigeria, and other atrocities.)

If outrage is expressed only when it can be directed at Israel, then it ceases to be moral at all. Outrage that ignores Hamas's atrocities with silence is not solidarity. It is ideology masquerading as empathy. To condemn one set of crimes while excusing another undermines the very language of justice and compassion that our community claims to uphold.

At MIT, a place that prizes evidence and truth, we should hold ourselves to a higher standard. Moral consistency is not a political position – it is the foundation of integrity. Condemning Hamas's crimes does not diminish concern for Palestinian suffering; it affirms it. It asserts that no movement can claim the mantle of human rights while turning a blind eye to murder and repression when committed by those it once championed.

If the campus movements that mobilized under banners of "liberation," "human rights," and "resistance" truly cared for Gazans, they would be protesting now. They would be demanding accountability from Hamas, welcoming the ceasefire (despite the fact that it was brokered by the "villain in DC"), and standing for the right of all civilians – Israeli and Palestinian alike – to live free from terror.

Instead, their silence exposes a deeper problem: selective outrage that weakens moral credibility. A double standard that condemns Israel, but excuses Hamas diminishes every genuine claim to justice.

True solidarity is not determined by who the victim is or who the perpetrator is. It is measured by the courage to confront evil wherever it occurs and to speak out, even when it challenges one's preferred narratives.

[1] https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c99g3p52k15o

[2] https://www.cnn.com/2025/10/15/world/video/hamas-killings-gaza-city-digvid

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-LjjY275_A

[4] https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/04/20/under-cover-war/hamas-political-violence-gaza

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# Letters to the Faculty Newsletter

## letters

**Reflections on the Compact**

*Dear FNL:*

**REGARDING FRANZ-JOSEF ULM'S** opinion ["MIT's Faustian Bargain"], I believe it was very well written and sincere. A robust and resilient government would have no fear of anything any university does – other than cease to create brilliant students and their ideas. Similarly a robust and resilient university should have no fear to actually "negotiate" line by line a "compact" with a government. There is no need to be "Tank Man."

In our case I am not sure we are stuck between rock and hard place – or the opposite of sorts – a "sponge and a soft place" for unless MIT wants to just go its own way and spend its endowment to replace all federal funding, we actually have constructive alternatives we must quickly come forward with, else I predict based on a red team blue team scenario I played in my head on a long run:

a) DC controls the courts, military, and national guard. They are not afraid to use them.
b) DC will not lose or back down.
c) The Compact "invited" the chosen to come to DC to discuss (and evolve?) and then sign, not showing up will be considered seditious behavior.
d) Seditious universities will be labeled a national security threat which the POTUS has the authority to do so.
e) ICE will come to campus and haul all foreigners away – and any who resist in any form are also arrested and hauled away. Go ahead and file lawsuits . . . make POTUS day! The prisoners will be on planes to a foreign land prison.
f) The university will effectively be shut down and cease to exist.

Think back in history for the sound of breaking glass in emergency if need an example. Many of us older folks have direct relatives/parents who witnessed such events. We must not dawdle because these things happen quickly.

The moral/ethical thing to do, in my humble opinion, is before the quartering wind blows and twists us and knocks us down, transactionally engage with the transactional administration – point by point to weld together poorly bolted joints and achieve some semblance of structural integrity to weather the thousand-year storm; for example:

1. Administrator bloat: this is a legitimate issue that must be looked into – why has the ranks of administrators seemingly swelled while profs. and instructors who teach hands-on has shrunk? Propose "To accommodate the need to shrink administration, AI has the potential to help, but

continued on next page

**Editorial Note**
The Faculty Newsletter (FNL) publishes letters, opinion pieces, and editorials that reflect the views of their authors. Occasionally, when concerns arise on the editorial board regarding accuracy, tone, or the treatment of members of our community, the FNL charges an editorial subcommittee to review the piece and work with the author to make revisions. Ultimately, however, authors retain responsibility for their words.

**Letters to the Faculty Newsletter**
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we need to accelerate the development of such focused AI systems, so we propose provide AI R&D funding for the specific task of automating administrative activities." A predicate is Dr. CaBot https://bioengineer.org/an-ai-system-utilizes-in-depth-diagnostic-reasoning-to-support-its-claims-a-closer-look-for-the-science-magazine/.

2. Foreign students: We all came from immigrants, as that is the nature of the human species to seek a better life. Those that come here to learn and go back and do better at home, we understand the concern that the US is losing critical knowledge. So propose that the Compact includes President Trump's own excellent idea for a green card for foreign students who earn advanced degree and want to stay in the land of the free.

3. The "gender bender issues": Male, Female according to biological fertility function at birth? Many "males" and "females" are sterile – so then what? Why not simply Male, Female, "XYX" (TBD? "Trans" let them decide) and as many businesses do these days, restrooms for Male, Female, and "Gender neutral." No more discussion needed. FYI I believe I am in tune here having been director of ESG for a decade and our second child is trans. Of course there will be those that disagree, and that's healthy, but please suggest measures that could potentially work, else be prepared to fight alone.

4. Admissions: I happen to agree with the admin (which one ☺) – give them what they want . . . WITH an experiment "OK next admin cycle we will do it our way and your way and before pi day (3.14.26), Dept of Education come and review who was admitted under the proposed DC way (the results will shock them btw I suspect).

5. Etc.^N.

We must in good faith go and try to face-to-face negotiate and evolve the proposed compact. In my humble opinion, the compact has arisen because many universities have created a climate of fear for conservative voices. I have personally witnessed "witch trials" (and "burnings") of colleagues as we fall over ourselves to be "perfect" and purge of all that is not pure in the minds of those who define it. Why did we banish/burn the works of Prof. Lewin and deny his teaching brilliance to countless people? The works could simply have carried a warning label, like a pack of cigarettes, that this person grew old, famous, and fell to the forces of darkness, so watch and learn physics and also the lesson of maintain humility and respect. Beware 29 is prime and the power of the triumvirate over the decade!

As part of my playing out what might happen scenarios, I predict there will be an outcry over my letter, and many will want to nail me like a hammer for even suggesting we do not just rally behind the president with complete loyalty. On the other hand I predict many will agree but remain cowed into silence for fear of retribution. Maybe all will think hmmmm, Alex should be MIT's next president! It would certainly solve my commute pains ☺.

Regardless, thank you FNL for the courage to getting conversations started! Personally I am not surprised by anything anymore these days, just trying to do my best to help students learn as much as they can, while they still can.

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**Alexander Slocum**
Walter M. May and A. Hazel May
Professor of Mechanical Engineering

## Double Standards of the FNL

*Dear Editorial Board of the MIT Faculty Newsletter:*

**IT IS ASTONISHING –** though perhaps no longer surprising – that the FNL would publish Ian Hutchinson's essay "Are Ad Hominem Attacks Legitimate Academic Freedom?" with its sweeping and defamatory claims, while only recently refusing to publish my own essay on related matters for fear of "libel" (see forwarded thread below about my submission). These double standards are glaring, and they raise serious concerns about the FNL's editorial commitments at a moment when the FNL is under review for its prioritizing certain faculty's voices over others – and, more generally, when issues of academic freedom and free speech are under intense scrutiny.

Most troubling to me is Hutchinson's treatment of the ongoing federal lawsuit *Sussman et al v. MIT et al.* Hutchinson concedes that the allegations against me are "as yet unproven," but then he immediately proceeds to treat them as established fact. On this basis, he accuses me of:

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*"... egregious abuse of power as a faculty member, failing in the academic responsibility to engage in civil and rational discourse, and instead attempting to intimidate those disagreeing by abusive ad hominem attacks and threats … academic harassment, unworthy of an MIT faculty member. … A perpetrator ought to have been restrained in a timely manner by the MIT administration and strongly disciplined..."*

So am I guilty until proven innocent, even if the relevant allegations are "yet unproven" – even by Hutchinson's own admission? This leap from "allegations" to "fact" is not only logically indefensible, it is profoundly unjust – an example of what President Sally Kornbluth has called "willful mischaracterizations" in a different context.

Equally striking is what Hutchinson omits: the Plaintiff's own published attacks against me, visible to all on social media platforms and in my articles in *Mondoweiss* and *The Tech*. By erasing this context, Hutchinson presents a one-sided picture that casts me as a "perpetrator" without acknowledging that I was responding to repeated, public attacks.

For contrast, one might look at a recent Substack post by Professor Eric Rasmusen, a self-identified Zionist and no ally of mine politically. Whatever one makes of the biases in his conclusions, Rasmusen at least lays out the main Plaintiff's record of lies, distortions, and mirror accusations, as he efficiently organizes some of the public evidence for others to judge. In other words, even those who disagree with me substantively have exercised more intellectual honesty than the *Faculty Newsletter* has shown in publishing Hutchinson's piece without the level of scrutiny and censorship they devoted to my submission.

That the FNL would censor my own essay for supposed risk of libel, yet print Hutchinson's accusations of "academic harassment" and his calls for my discipline, is difficult to reconcile with any consistent standard of editorial responsibility. At a minimum, FNL readers deserve to hear all voices on the issue at stake rather than reality-bending and selective amplification of certain faculty voices at the expense of others.

Given the FNL's mission and its ties to AAUP@MIT whose president is FNL's co-chair, the editorial board should be especially vigilant against reproducing the very inequities and silencing practices that threaten academic freedom and free speech on our campus.

"Hope springs eternal. . ."
-michel.

**Michel Anne-Frederick DeGraff**
Professor of Linguistics

## Replicating Moral Courage at MIT

*To The Faculty Newsletter:*

**SOME MIT FACULTY CONTINUE** to face opposition from the student body for their research contracts sponsored by the Israeli Ministry of Defense given crimes of starvation, ethnic cleansing, and genocide perpetrated by the Israeli government against Palestinians. Criticism has implicated a number of MIT professors. In the past two years, opposition has grown into majority votes by the Undergraduate Association, Graduate Student Union, and Graduate Student Council, the MIT Science for Genocide report, as well as the encampment in spring of 2024. In May, class president Megha Vemuri gave a searing indictment of MIT research complicity in her own graduation address.

Some faculty conclude that this opposition represents an unreasonable development in the student-faculty relationship. For instance, professor Yossi Sheffi in a recent edition of the *Faculty Newsletter* adopted a "go fly a kite" attitude toward student objections, arguing that "Students are not entitled to detailed information on faculty projects, nor do they have the authority to scrutinize them in this way." However, many MIT faculty have chosen to respond positively to moral demands and spoken truth to power in the service of a more just scientific enterprise. In this letter, I consider three exemplars and reflect on the relevance of their courage to a moral issue of our time.

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MIT mathematician Norbert Wiener is today celebrated as a founder of cybernetics who modeled stochastic noise processes in electronic control systems. In 1947, he published a bold letter in response to a missile firm asking for a paper he wrote. Anticipating Eisenhower's Cross of Iron speech six years later, Wiener foresaw that rearmament in peacetime was dangerous and required decisions about research sponsorship. The mass civilian

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killings in Japan by US nuclear weapons had confirmed, in the mathematician's words, that "to disseminate information about a weapon in the present state of our civilization is to make it practically certain that that weapon will be used."

He concluded: "If therefore I do not desire to participate in the bombing or poisoning of defenseless peoples – and I most certainly do not – I must take a serious responsibility as to those to whom I disclose my scientific ideas." Making good on that promise, Wiener refused to take funding from the US military and the weapons industry for the rest of his life.

In 1966, mechanical engineering professors Ascher Shapiro and Ronald Probstein decided to shift the research agenda of the Fluid Mechanics Laboratory to civilian technology. Under pressure from the movement against the Vietnam War, they pivoted the laboratory's sponsor network to civilian sources. Shapiro left ballistics research to study fluid mechanics in heart valves. Probstein investigated techniques to desalinate sea water more efficiently. Others in the lab shifted to studying nitrogen oxide emissions and oil spills. By 1969, two-thirds of lab funding came from civilian sources, and half of graduates were entering civilian industry. In 1970, Shapiro called for full divestment from the Pentagon across the entire MIT funding apparatus.

In subsequent decades, apartheid in South Africa became a generation-defining issue in the United States. Three luminaries of the anti-apartheid movement at MIT were political scientist Willard Johnson, urban planner Mel King, and materials scientist Gretchen Kalonji. Scholars of strong moral fiber, they led successful faculty votes in support of divesting endowment assets implicated in apartheid. But unlike peer institutions, MIT President Gray and the MIT Corporation refused to divest, a damning moral stain on MIT's legacy.

The political logic of divestment was straightforward then and applies now. As Willard Johnson wrote in the April 1990 edition of the *Faculty Newsletter,* "action now to rid ourselves of the moral fetters that continue to link us to apartheid would not go unnoticed and would add important popular pressure on the US Congress and Administration…" He later recounts that the strategy to leverage state legislative (and university) power to address a national foreign policy question was deliberate, one conceived in dialogue with the African National Congress president Oliver Tambo. It made sense for those who could not make national progress to focus on local domains of influence.

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Today, the MIT community also faces a generation-defining moral question in Palestine. According to both the Ministry of Health in Gaza and the IDF Chief of Staff, Israel has inflicted more than 200,000 direct casualties, or 10% of Gaza's population in the past two years. From late May to August 2025, at least 1,838 people were killed at Gaza aid sites – another 13,409 wounded – overwhelmingly by Israeli snipers. Tens of thousands in Gaza have died violent deaths by gunfire, tank round, and airstrike, including our own loved ones. In August, IPC authorities declared that half a million were starving under a famine siege. More than a month into a one-sided ceasefire, Gaza endures daily bombings and denial of vital supplies.

Paramedics and journalists have been systematically killed; in the words of one source in the military's Southern Command, air strikes are "carried out to ensure that rescue efforts do not take place. First aid providers, rescuers – kill them. Attack again, on them. This is the procedure." More than 90% of Gaza's buildings were razed by January 2025. Settler attacks in the West Bank are at record high. Home demolitions are at record high. The colonization process and apartheid laws continue. The torture and sexual abuse of Palestinian captives continue, as we learn from their lurid and shocking testimony.[1]

It is no surprise why the largest professional organization of scholars studying genocide, IAGS, voted in September 2025 to recognize the genocide in Gaza. By recognizing genocide, the association joins Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the United Nations' highest authorities. Yet the new ceasefire agreement has moved Gaza from the fire back to the frying pan, as its people are held hostage to a plan of colonial bondage that denies Palestinians any right to determine their future.

Despite the ongoing case *South Africa v. Israel* at the International Court of Justice, despite arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court against Israel's prime minister and defense minister, MIT continues to co-sign the atrocities by approving research sponsorships by the Israeli Ministry of Defense. We know this despite Institute attempts to conceal. This summer, MIT removed access from tools to understand our Institute's research funding, such as the Brown Books which track the flow of external funds into MIT and the Kuali Coeus grant management website. Yet public records reveal that Israeli ministry contracts at MIT are accepted and approved on an ongoing basis.

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MIT's ties to the Israeli military and its weapons firms are wrong. As MIT students in 1937 wrote in their petition against the Institute sending a delegate to the Nazi festival in Göttingen, MIT's participation would "condone the acts and practices of the forces now controlling Germany." Similarly, approving contracts with the Israeli military condones the acts

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1 See for example Palestinian Centre for Human Rights report "Torture and Genocide: The Shattered Futures of Former Palestinian Detainees in Gaza" May 12, 2025. B'Tselem's report "Welcome to Hell: The Israeli Prison System as a Network of Torture Camps" August 2024. Testimony of Israeli state torture is reported in PBS, New Yorker, The Guardian, and 972+.

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and practices of Israeli forces. Academic freedom does not protect such ties. As the student leader Ira Rubenzahl told The Tech in 1969 during the Vietnam War: "One doesn't have the right to build gas chambers to kill people."

MIT already recognizes this principle at least partially, limiting or barring collaborations with the governments of Saudi Arabia, China, and Russia on the basis of human rights concerns. When activists revealed the MIT Media Lab took money from convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, no one in MIT officialdom publicly defended the funding nexus on the basis of academic freedom. No one rationalized the ties by appealing to the 'fundamental' basic nature of research sponsored by Epstein. Instead, MIT officials apologized and attempted financial redress. A similar apology is required now. Faculty have a role in supporting efforts to make our research more ethical. The International Advisory Committee can advise a broad ban on Israeli government research sponsors or insist on implementing the red lights of the 2020 Suri report. Faculty can demand transparency: make Kuali Coeus and the Brown Books available again. They can flex mechanisms of faculty governance and pressure colleagues to reject unethical partnerships. One professor has already pledged to his lab to end Israeli military sponsorship; another cancelled an IMOD grant after student pressure and found alternative funding.

Faculty have influence over students and set the tone for what collaborations are acceptable. What does it say to young, aspiring scientists when their mentors accept money from the Israeli government? That its crimes are irrelevant as long as you can hire a post-doc? As the abolitionist Frederick Douglass argued in 1840s Scotland, for the church to accept the "blood-stained" tithes of American slaveholders lent them a specious respectability; it also denied the dignity of enslaved people. Taking funds from the Israeli ministry similarly denies the dignity of Palestinians and launders the reputation of a genocidal actor.

It can be tempting to avoid critical reflection but history warns us of the seductive power of such quietism. Most of us know about the horrors of Nazi human experimentation led by physicians such as Eduard Wirths and Josef Mengele – ardent believers in the Nazi cause. The medical profession established the Nuremberg Code of ethics in their wake. Yet many German scientists, including most physicists, never joined the Nazi party. Some were critics. That did not keep them from effectively tying their research projects to the demands of the Nazi state.

One was Otto Hahn, who helped lead Germany's nuclear weapons program throughout the war. As recounted in the letters of his long-time colleague Lise Meitner – the Austrian-Jewish physicist who first discovered nuclear fission and whose work he took credit for – Hahn was not a raving Nazi idealogue. He was an unreflective careerist, focused on research and securing funding for his Institute, without critical reflection about whom he was serving.

After the war, Otto Hahn rationalized Nazi crimes as no worse than the allies and claimed his wartime work had been nothing but "purely scientific" research: fundamental, openly published and of no military relevance. In an unsent letter to Hahn, Lise Meitner wrote bitterly: "it was clear to me that even people such as you did not understand the true situation. . . . You all worked for Nazi Germany. . . . Certainly, to help buy off your conscience you helped a persecuted person here and there, but millions of innocent human beings were allowed to be murdered without any kind of protest being uttered."

Others refused to serve the Nazis and acted on it.[2] MIT faculty must make a choice now if they want to be an Otto Hahn or a Lise Meitner. Innocent people are being ruthlessly attacked in Palestine as I write. Among the greatest protests to mass atrocities that we can utter as scientists is to say no more research for the Israeli government.

**Richard Solomon**
PhD Student, Course 17
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2 Elisabeth Schiemann, James Franck, Max von Laue, and, most famously, Albert Einstein come to mind.


Alexander Slocum

# A Most Joyful and Happiest of Holidays to All