

Dear President McCartney,

We read your letter announcing Christine Lagarde's decision to withdraw as Commencement speaker. We read it because we are engaged with Smith, and what the future holds for the institution we have all called home. Take a minute to read ours.

Naming Christine Lagarde as Commencement speaker was disappointing, but not surprising. As the past twelve years of white Commencement speakers has shown, Smith's administration consistently prioritizes the words of privileged white women over those of women of color. Banners showcasing students of color and repeated statements about Smith's "diversity" are being used against students who are pleased with Lagarde's withdrawal. When it comes to promotional materials, "diversity" at Smith means images of smiling brown women, and feminist buzzwords printed in bold. When it comes to public speeches and platforms for debate, however, "diversity" at Smith means amplifying the voices of privileged white women in conventional positions of power. Marginalized students are not barricades to hide behind when you are called on to account for your actions. To tell these students that they must keep silent in order to allow the head of the IMF an "equal" chance to be "heard" is not only deeply inequitable, it demonstrates a shocking disregard for the lived experiences and opinions of Smithies everywhere.

You have suggested that with Lagarde's withdrawal "we will now be satisfied." You are mistaken. What we *wanted* was a critical look at how inviting the leader of the IMF, a financial institution built upon the exploitation of millions of poor brown people—many of whom are women—to the benefit of the Global North, is insulting and contradictory to messages of inclusion and progressiveness touted by the administration. It is particularly ironic in the face of the Women for the World fundraising campaign. Can Smith claim to be a institution supportive of women all over the world when it invites and honors the head of the IMF? Which women (get heard)? Whose voice matters?

Christine Lagarde has been heard. To claim that her resignation has harmed Smith's reputation is a distortion of reality and belittles the actions and concerns of current students by shaming them for expressing their right to peacefully voice grave objections to having Lagarde speak at Commencement. This claim also redirects the conversation to one that signifies that the respectability of the institution is more important than the voices and sovereignty of the students that uphold it. Furthermore, the claim that she is being prevented from sharing her opinions is completely false as her power affords her a platform that amplifies her voice all over the world. Your disclaimer that an invitation to speak does not equal endorsement is a transparent contradiction which relieves the institution of accountability for choosing who does and who does not have the right to speak at Commencement. You are honoring her; your email is peppered with praise for her, an honorary degree commends her choice of work and career, and an invitation to address a graduating class implies that you believe she has worthy advice for Smith graduates. To claim that students and faculty protested Lagarde as Commencement speaker in petty response to her individual political views, and not as a response to Lagarde's role as leader

of the IMF, is patronizing, as is your insistence that Commencement is the appropriate venue for “discussion and debate” of differing political opinions. It is dangerous to imply that protest is not an acceptable form of expression, or an essential part of an active community dialogue, but a disrespectful disruption to those in power. This has nothing to do with Mme. Lagarde’s personal views and everything to do with the IMF. Whatever political views Lagarde may hold, it is impossible to divorce Lagarde from her position as head of the IMF. This is not a refusal to debate beliefs and opinions. This isn’t about armchair politics; it’s about oppression and entrenched institutional violence.

Your letter suggested that we will now be satisfied, but questions “at what cost” to Smith College. We have seen this sentiment echoed again and again amongst our fellow students and faculty. What would honoring a symbol of imperialism and oppression have cost the students harmed by this selection? We have seen so much discussion about the hypothetical damage to Smith's reputation and its future. What about the very real damage to very real students? Smith advertises itself as a campus for all. What would Lagarde speaking have cost those students repeatedly asked to smile, recruit, fundraise, and ignore the erasure and abuses they suffer daily on campus? You have mentioned that the dissenting students were a small minority. This seems irrelevant—if even one student feels unsafe and silenced at Smith, that is unacceptable. The administration should be considerate of its students' varied backgrounds, and not just when said students can be touted as examples of diversity. The protesters did not silence Christine Lagarde, but it has become apparent that Smith's administration wishes Mme. Lagarde had been granted the opportunity to silence the students who were uncomfortable with her selection. Since when has Smith College become a place where women are encouraged to *lower* their voices?

On a day when the class of 2014—with students from “41 states and 38 countries”—are celebrating the culmination of their academic work, should we not consider that some of them do not want to share the day with a speaker who is the public face of an institution that causes serious and measurable harm in the world and in the countries that they themselves are from? We cannot fathom how those who continue to express their disappointment, hurt, and anger over the protests are unable to understand the disappointment, hurt, and anger of students whose lives have been affected by the harmful policies of the IMF. Please give us a coherent argument addressing how the IMF has bettered the lives of women in the world - other than Mme. Lagarde’s.

We had such hope that, with a working-class background, first-generation college student—an identity shared by many of us—at its helm, Smith would perhaps ensure that a wider variety of students' voices are heard and valued, but we remain disappointed. Your letter to the Smith community only reinforces that Smith's administration does not value the contributions of students whose voices are most marginalized—unless they’re contributing to fundraising campaigns. Now tell us again how *we’re* harming Smith’s reputation as an academic institution.

Sincerely,

Sarah Alper '15
Kate Andropoulos '14
Alex Asal '16
Nina Bailey '14
Alex Barrows '09
Callie Barstow '13
Chelsea Bartholomew '13
Brittany Bennett '15
Allie Bernard '13
Catherine Betances '13
Frances Black '14
Kylie Boazman '14
Lillian Bouvier Devine '13
Josie Brown '16
Lena Budinger '15
Yanil Burgos '13
Gabriela Caballero '13
Keisha Cassel '13
Xiomara Castro AC '13
CJ Cayanan '15
Laura Clampitt '13
Annecaroline Clark '14
Oliver Coley '14
Yolandi Cruz '16
Rebecca Davidson '16
Chi Davis '16
Odette De Jesus '14
Claire Delzell, '16
Isabella Dimambro '13J
Alejandra Doucette '13
Lares Feliciano '07
Hannah Findlay '16
Sarah Fitzgibbons '13J
Alyssa Flores '16
Samantha Floyd '14
Kayla Foney '17
Pia Furkan '16

Joanita N. Gakami '13
Kimberly Garcia '16
Sarah Goldberg '16
Maria Cecilia Gonzalez '14J
Elizabeth Haas '17
Kaitlin Clark Hackbarth '15
Erin Halling '16
MacKenzie J. Hamilton '13
Veronica Hernandez '13
Carro Húra '13
Sarah Iverson '14
Cade Johnson '16
Afiya Johnson-Thornton '16
Michela "Alice" Joy '13
Tanvi Kapoor '16
Andrea Kang '13
Jazmyne Keane '16
Ali Langley '13
Michele LaFleur '14
Hanna Lauritzen '15
Rebecca Lee '15
Dinah Lensing-Sharp '16
Amanda Lewis '14
Ella Longpre '07
Eddie Maisonet '15
Victoria Mandanas '13
Sirinya Matute '04
Erin McElhone '14
Katie Mikulka '16
Ariel Morton '16
Monica Muñoz '15J
Briana Murphy '14
Meghan Mussehl '13J
Sophie Nathan '14
Fulani Oghoghome '15
Sarah Orsak '16
Elli Palmer '16

Angelica Patlan '14
Maggie Peebles-Dorin '16
Stephanie Pereira '16
Nicholas Peterson '14
Jaimie Phillip '16
Kaolin Pitcher '14
Deborah Place '16
Sydney Ramirez '16
Grace Ramsay '16
Freda Raitelu AC '16
Zane Razzaq '15
Monika Reifenstein '16
Nathaly Reyna '17
L. Esperanza Robles '14
Emma Roderick '07
Johanna Santana '13
Pranayeta Shroff '14
Seataoaifalenaoti Shyon '13
Stina Soderling '06
Sophie Steinberger '15
Áine Sweetnam '13
Abigail Tatarian '15
Ashley Tolbert '14
Jes Tom '13
Caelan Tree Treacy '12
Jennie Wachowski '13
Elizabeth Walber '16
Emma Whetsell '15
Alice Wolff '15