

Behind the Wall of Veritas: Harvard's cult of arrogance

Jacques Rogozinski

Regardless of where one stands on the measures Donald Trump is taking against Harvard University, one thing is undeniable: Harvard is a powerhouse of global influence, a fortress of privilege, and an institution steeped in arrogance. With an endowment exceeding \$53 billion and a vast alumni network embedded in the world's most powerful governments, corporations, and media outlets, Harvard has long operated as if it were above accountability. Until now.

So untouchable has it been that it hadn't revoked a professor's tenure since the 1940s. That changed only recently with the case of Francesca Gino, a star at Harvard Business School, accused since 2021 of fabricating data in several academic papers. It took four years for Harvard to finally strip her of tenure. And this wasn't an isolated incident. In 2023, Cedric Lodge, the morgue manager at Harvard Medical School, was charged with stealing and selling human remains on the black market—an act he had allegedly been committing for years. These aren't anomalies; they reflect a deeper culture of opacity, elitism, and ethical negligence at a university that should be held to the highest standards. In its relentless effort to preserve its prestige, Harvard has shown a willingness to distort the truth. I say this not as speculation, but as a firsthand witness.

Years ago, I discovered serious falsehoods in *Why Nations Fail*, the globally distributed book by Harvard's former professor James A. Robinson and MIT's Daron Acemoglu. The book makes allegations that had already been thoroughly debunked in court. I sent formal letters to Harvard, backed by verifiable evidence and official documents. I even proposed a public debate—an invitation to open academic dialogue. The response? Cynicism. Protecting the institutional image of Harvard—and the reputation of one of its academic celebrities—was evidently more important than confronting the truth, even if that meant discrediting others and ignoring final judicial rulings.

The contrast with Penguin Random House, the book's publisher, was striking. I submitted the exact same documentation. They reviewed the material seriously, corroborated the facts, and ultimately revised the book's wording in subsequent editions. That's no small gesture. Major publishers do not modify bestselling titles out of courtesy—they do so only when the evidence is irrefutable.

When I explored the idea of pushing the issue further with Harvard, nearly everyone I consulted—lawyers, journalists, publishing insiders—warned me it was futile. They said Harvard would not pay attention unless I hired top-tier attorneys and even then, Harvard's resources were so vast they could easily crush any effort to make them acknowledge wrongdoing. Most people believed that taking on Harvard was hopeless. The system seemed built not to listen to dissenting voices, no matter how strong their evidence, but to shield those in power.

This wasn't just a matter of editorial dispute. One of the most egregious claims in the book involved Carlos Slim and his companies allegedly violating a contract with CompUSA in the U.S., supposedly resulting in a \$454 million fine. That was a lie. And I don't use the word "lie" lightly. The Texas Court of Appeals and the Texas Supreme Court both dismissed that lawsuit—categorically and unequivocally—in 2004 and 2006. Yet six years later, in 2012, *Why Nations Fail* cited the case as fact. They needed the falsehood to prop up their theory of why nations fail. Harvard, fully aware of the rulings, looked the other way.

Another example hits closer to home: Robinson, Acemoglu, and by extension Harvard, called into question my integrity by misrepresenting the privatization of TELMEX—a process I personally led. They claimed Carlos Slim didn't submit the highest bid but was awarded the company anyway. They conveniently omitted the fact that the offer came from a consortium including Slim, Southwestern Bell, and France Telecom. This isn't just inaccurate—it's a direct attack on my professional conduct in a process that was thoroughly reviewed, audited, and approved. I submitted every document proving the transparency of the deal. I asked to present my version of events to Harvard students and to publicly debate Professor Robinson. Both requests were denied. Instead of fostering dialogue, Harvard chose silence. Instead of correcting errors, it protected its narrative. That is arrogance masquerading as academia. Penguin Random House, by contrast, corrected the record.

Moreover, Harvard sent its reply to me marked "Personal and Confidential," as if a university that prides itself on the motto *Veritas*—truth—could justify responding to public falsehoods in private. My response was clear: this is not a personal matter. It is a matter of public interest—one that affects the credibility of individuals and institutions both in Mexico and abroad. All correspondence should be public.

The pattern is unmistakable: Harvard only acts when scandal threatens its public image. Consider the case the university itself finally admitted. Since 2010, there had been repeated reports of antisemitism on campus. Harvard did nothing. It took more than a decade—and the political pressure that came with Trump's recent criticisms—for the university to finally acknowledge what had long been known.

What can an ordinary citizen do against an institution like Harvard? Very little. They don't have access to media platforms, they lack a powerful network, and they certainly can't afford legal teams to defend their reputation against a billion-dollar machine. This structural imbalance makes Harvard not only judge and jury, but executioner. Only when a figure more powerful than the institution—like Trump, or any critic capable of threatening its impunity—emerges, does Harvard show signs of panic.

When Harvard decides to protect a lie, not even facts, legal rulings, or reputational harm can stop it. It is an institution entrenched behind a wall of arrogance, shielded by wealth, and sustained by the fear of losing its aura of infallibility.

This moment of heightened media scrutiny is a rare chance to reopen the case and push Harvard to do what it has long refused: acknowledge and rectify what even Penguin Random House already admitted. With luck, it will also empower others to come forward about similar abuses—those long buried by deference to authority and misunderstood prestige. Harvard must be held accountable.