



**Antisemitism in the Aftermath of October 7:
How did we get here?**

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About the Author

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Executive Summary

- Following the October 7 Hamas attack, some parts of the left not only blamed Israel for the aggression, but also expressed hostility toward Jewish supporters of Israel because of their assumed privilege.
- This type of animosity is not new. It began during the 1960s and 70s, especially after the Jewish State's victories over a coalition of Arab nations in the 1967 War, and it can be linked to the ideology of some parts of the New Left, which included recurring attempts to link Israel with European colonialism and Jews with whiteness and privilege.
- Analysts of the period responded to these tactics by describing a "new antisemitism" that illustrated the parallels between hostility towards Israel's legitimacy as a state and hostility toward the authenticity of the American Jewish community as a minority ethnic group.
- In the 1980s and 1990s, the focus of the political left trended toward promoting multiculturalism and diversity. This tolerance was not all-inclusive, however, and the animosity toward Israel demonstrated by some factions within the left was coupled with hostility toward Jews, who were seen not only as white and privileged, but also as a particularly malicious example of some of the worst elements of whiteness.
- Against the backdrop of the second intifada and the rise in violence that characterized the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the opening years of the 21st century, vocal factions of the left on American college and university campuses labeled Israel a racist and illegitimate state founded through settler colonialism and fueled by apartheid.
- At the same time, Jews were denigrated both for supporting Israel and for their supposed white privilege.
- Critics claimed that these attacks on Israel, Zionism, and Jews often crossed the line into antisemitism. They also pointed out a seeming double standard in which hostile rhetoric toward Jews – whether it was connected to Israel or to whiteness – was framed as protected political speech, while hateful language towards other minority identity groups was more likely to be condemned and silenced.
- The conclusion of this analysis is that some elements of the left have deep, serious, and systemic issues, not only with Israel but also with Jews.

Antisemitism in the Aftermath of October 7: How did we get here?

The bare facts have become numbingly familiar. On October 7, 2023, Hamas operatives infiltrated Israel from the Gaza Strip, murdering more than 1200 and taking 240 hostages. The more graphic narrative details behind those facts, including widespread use of torture and sexual assault as tools of terror, will take months or years for Israelis and supporters of the Jewish State to process. Yet in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, one additional detail was surprisingly clear: Israelis and Jews found that they had to contend not only with the brutality of the assault but also with the hardhearted and even antisemitic reactions to the Hamas attack that came from some segments of the political left.

University faculty members expressed their exhilaration¹ at the brutality of the attacks on Israelis and excoriated Israelis in general as no better than excrement;² Academy Award-winning actress Susan Sarandon taunted those who reacted to the worrying rise in antisemitic rhetoric and actions in the aftermath of the attacks by saying that American Jews were essentially getting what they deserved³; and women's rights organizations like UN Women pointedly ignored all evidence that Israeli women were raped and sexually mutilated by Hamas terrorists.⁴ Perhaps the heaviest of these allegations was that victimized Israelis somehow deserved their gruesome fate.⁵

For many, both the callous disregard for Israeli life and the accompanying amplification of antisemitic rhetoric, especially on college and university campuses, was a shock. For others, however, this overt

¹ Sofia Rubinson, "Cornell Professor 'Exhilarated' by Hamas's Attack Defends Remark," *The Cornell Daily Sun*, October 16, 2023, <https://cornellsun.com/2023/10/16/cornell-professor-exhilarated-by-hamass-attack-defends-remark/>.

² Rebecca Rosenberg, "Chicago Professor Apologizes for Calling Israelis 'pigs' and 'Savages,'" *Fox 32 Chicago*, October 20, 2023, <https://www.fox32chicago.com/news/chicago-professor-calls-israelis-pigs-and-savages>.

³ Toi Staff, "Susan Sarandon Apologizes for Saying US Jews 'Getting Taste' of Muslim Experience," *The Times of Israel*, December 2, 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/susan-sarandon-apologizes-for-saying-us-jews-getting-taste-of-muslim-experience/>.

⁴ Katherine Rosman and Lisa Lerer, "Accounts of Sexual Violence by Hamas Are Aired Amid Criticism of U.N.," *The Times of Israel*, December 4, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/04/world/middleeast/israel-hamas-sexual-violence-un.html>.

⁵ Nia L. Orakwue and Sellers Hill, "Harvard Student Groups Face Intense Backlash for Statement Calling Israel 'Entirely Responsible' for Hamas Attack," *The Harvard Crimson*, October 10, 2023, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2023/10/10/psc-statement-backlash/>.

antipathy toward Israel and Jews was surprising more in its vehemence rather than its substance. Elements within the political left have been trending in this direction for decades. Unlike the liberal center, some activists on the far left can be inflexible in their animosity toward and opposition to Israel and Zionism, and their orientation is based not only on the allegation that Israel is a racist, settler colonial state, but also on the assumed privilege of Jews, particularly the American Jewish community.

Anti-Israel and anti-Zionist sentiment was firmly rooted in the ideology of the New Left of the 1960s and '70s, especially in the aftermath of the Jewish State's victories over a coalition of Arab nations in the 1967 War. Israel was often characterized on the left as a thoroughly racist endeavor, an oppressive and illegitimate nation. For instance, organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), originally a student-run civil rights organization founded in 1960, eventually reoriented toward a more radical left political stance, including in its opinions on Israel.⁶ SNCC's newsletter of June-July 1967, published soon after the end of the Six Day War in which Israel defeated a coalition of Arab states, contained an article entitled "Third World Round Up: The Palestine Problem: Test Your Knowledge." Accusing the "white American press" of hiding the truth about the conflict, the newsletter offered its own set of "documented facts" on the war. Each fact completed the lead-in "Did you know..." The first two points were as follows:

1. THAT Zionism, which is a worldwide nationalistic Jewish movement, organized, planned and created the "State of Israel" by sending Jewish immigrants from Europe into Palestine (the heart of the Arab world) to take over land and homes belonging to the Arabs?"
2. THAT in this operation, they received maximum help, support and encouragement from Great Britain, the United States, and other white western colonial governments?⁷

The attempt to link Israel with European colonialism was a standard element of New Left rhetoric. What was original, however, was the insinuation that European Jews were in a position of great power at the time of the creation of the State of Israel, an accusation that conveniently ignored the marginalized status of European Jewry leading up to World War II and the resulting genocide that was based on the widespread belief, supported by the Nazi movement in Germany and others, that Jews were racially different from and inferior to Northern Europeans.

⁶ "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)," The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-sncc>.

⁷ "The Palestine Problem: Test Your Knowledge SNCC Newsletter, June-July 1967," <https://www.crmvet.org/docs/6707-ip.htm>.

The New Left's animosity toward Israel and many of its followers' insistence that Israel was a racist and colonial endeavor also influenced the movement's attitude toward American Jews, including those who supported left-wing and liberal ideals, such as ending the Vietnam War and supporting the civil rights movement. Consequently, liberal or leftist Jews could be seen as suspect if they voiced support for Israel, even when it was tempered by criticism.⁸ Another component of New Left animosity toward Jews was connected to the movement's perception that Jews were part of the American power structure and needed to atone for their perceived whiteness and privilege.⁹ This allegation about privilege was complicated because it would be difficult to deny the remarkable success story that American Jews represented. Eastern European Jews, who comprised the majority of American Jewry and had been despised and persecuted in their former countries of residence, rose relatively quickly in the United States from their humble immigrant origins and prospered, both economically and socially.

This does not mean that they did not suffer from prejudice and discrimination. However, by the end of the 1960s in the United States, tangible antisemitic animosity against Jews, such as quotas in universities and professional schools, exclusion from certain professions, and enforced social segregation, was declining, and Jews in general were understood to be an American success story and a model minority. Conservative or right-wing antisemitism never fully disappeared, but it was increasingly seen as a fringe issue. Intermarriage rates began to rise, and many Jews appeared to be content to assimilate to be more like their white, Christian neighbors. Still, many American Jews saw themselves as a distinct minority identity group in the United States. One of many reasons for this was that the Jewish community was only two decades removed from the genocide of European Jewry and the violent birth of the State of Israel. Jewish acknowledgement of their relative privilege in comparison to other groups was conditioned by the remembrance of the long history of antisemitism, as well as the fragility of liberal democracy and the impermanence of its benefits.

It was against this backdrop that American Jews began to contend with heightened animosity from the left. However, they found that their problem was difficult to define. The challenge was like the one faced by second wave feminist Betty Friedan, who theorized about a "problem that had no name" in describing the malaise of the socioeconomically privileged American housewife; she eventually solved that issue with the

⁸ Linda Maizels, "'Charter Members of the Fourth World': Jewish Student Identity and the 'New Antisemitism' on American Campuses, 1967-1994" (unpublished dissertation, September 2010).

⁹ See, for instance, Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

title of her classic 1963 work, *The Feminine Mystique*.¹⁰ Perhaps it was this model that inspired radical young Jewish activists like Aviva Zuckoff and Itzhak Epstein, who tried to describe the animosity toward Jews and Israel that emanated from the New Left. Both were members of the Jewish Liberation Project, a progressive group that was in sync with the New Left's support for civil rights and its opposition to the Vietnam War, but parted company with the movement in its reactions to Israel and to Jews. Like Friedan, Zuckoff and Epstein attempted to give a name to the problem: the Fourth World.

At the time, global geopolitical realities were described in terms of three worlds: the First World, including the United States and its democratic allies, the Second World, comprising the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe, and the Third World, including the non-aligned nations of Asia, South and Central America, and Africa, that were less economically and technologically advanced than the first two worlds. Zuckoff and Epstein argued that both Jews and Israel occupied a unique place as part of a Fourth World that could experience discrimination from the other three worlds. The persecution of the Jews in the Soviet Union (i.e., the Second World) was widely acknowledged, but describing animosity from the First and Third Worlds was more of a challenge.

Zuckoff adopted the theory that Jews had been essentially forced to assimilate to benefit from the privileges of the countries of the First World, particularly the United States. In other words, Jews were told "Give up your distinctiveness and be rewarded-- OR ELSE." Zuckoff explained,

We should not be side-tracked by the fact that [Jews] happen to be, by and large, economically well-off and not subject at the moment to the kind of physical oppression faced by blacks, Indians and chicanos [sic]. It is necessary to look at what is going on beneath the surface, otherwise we might actually believe that women have true equality and Jews are not oppressed either.¹¹

To describe the animosity that Third World nations held toward Israel, and the hostility that the political left of the First World aimed toward Israel and Jews, Zuckoff and Epstein identified what they called a "new racism" to challenge the idea that the countries and people of the First World, which was more or less identified as white, could only be seen as strong, privileged, oppressors, and that the countries of the non-white Third World, as well as people of color in the United States and other First World countries, could only be described as weak, helpless, and oppressed. Zuckoff and Epstein argued not only that Jews who

¹⁰ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: Norton, 1963).

¹¹ Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, "Oppression of Amerika's Jews," originally printed in *Jewish Liberation Journal*, November 1970, American Jewish Archives, Jewish Radical Community, Box 2, No. 9, Collection 285.

lived in the First World suffered from animosity as “charter members of the Fourth World,” but also that “Israel as a state has become the Jew of the world,” subject to attack from the First, Second, and Third Worlds.¹²

The Fourth World analysis suggested by Zuckoff and Epstein was complicated, not widely acknowledged, and quickly faded into obscurity, but the unnamed problem remained. Other observers within the Jewish world in the late 1960s and early '70s also attempted to identify the realities of this unidentified animosity toward both Israel and Jews. For instance, analysts like Robert Alter, a scholar of Hebrew literature at the University of California at Berkeley, expressed similar sentiments when he opposed unthinking leftist animosity toward Israel as the “popular New Left mythology of world politics in which the nations are divided into sinister superpowers and innocent freedom-loving peoples of the Third World.”¹³

None of these intellectuals and pundits used the term “new racism” suggested by Zuckoff and Epstein, but some of them began using the phrase “the new antisemitism.” The focal point of their analysis was the rise in animosity, not only toward Israel and Zionism, but also toward Jews. Thus, in 1974, Benjamin R. Epstein, the director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and Arnold Forster, the ADL’s associate director and general counsel, published *The New Antisemitism*, a book detailing what the authors saw as a dangerous rise of antisemitic and anti-Israel attitudes from both the political far right and radical left; from Christians as well as the Muslim and Arab world; from the media; and from a range of countries and regions, including the Soviet Union, Europe, and Latin America. Despite the broad spectrum of the animosity toward Jews, the authors explained, antisemitism was often ignored or minimized:

There is abroad in our land a large measure of indifference to the most profound apprehensions of the Jewish people; a blandness and apathy in dealing with anti-Jewish behavior; a widespread incapacity or unwillingness to comprehend the necessity of the existence of Israel to Jewish safety and survival throughout the world. This is the heart of the new anti-Semitism.¹⁴

Other professionals in the Jewish organizational world like Earl Raab, then the executive director of the San Francisco Jewish Community Relations Council, concentrated specifically on animosity toward both Israel

¹² Aviva Zuckoff and Itzhak Epstein, “The Fourth World,” *Jewish Liberation Journal*, February-March 1970.

¹³ Robert Alter, “Israel and the Intellectuals,” *Commentary*, October 1967. <https://www.commentary.org/articles/robert-alter-2/israel-the-intellectuals/>

¹⁴ Arnold Forster and Benjamin R. Epstein, *The New Anti-Semitism* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), 324.

and Jews on the political left and how they were fundamentally linked. “There is a symmetry between the hostility expressed toward the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state and the hostility expressed toward the legitimacy of the American-Jewish community as a distinct ethnic group” Raab warned.¹⁵

The New Left waned as a coherent movement in the 1970s after the end of the Vietnam War and the victories, however imperfect, of the civil rights movement, but the animosity toward Israel and Jews demonstrated by some segments of the left remained. As the students and young adults who had made up the bulk of the movement stepped into the next phase of their lives, many took the leftist ideology of their formative years with them as they entered law, international relations and diplomacy, academia, and other professions. For instance, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, one of the founding editors of *Ms. Magazine*, gave shape and definition to the problem of left-wing antisemitism, this time within the context of the feminist movement. In her article, “Anti-Semitism in the Women’s Movement,” Pogrebin described a variety of ways that Jewish women were marginalized, not only when they supported Israel but also when they were vocal about their identity as Jews. Pogrebin quoted a colleague, Sonia Johnson, who had attended the World Conference on Women in 1980 in Copenhagen. Johnson remembered,

In Copenhagen, I heard people say that Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, and Bella Abzug [Jewish-American second-wave feminists] all being Jewish gives the American Women’s Movement a bad name. I heard “The only good Jew is a dead Jew.” I heard “the only way to rid the world of Zionism is to kill all the Jews.” The anti-Semitism was overt, wild, and irrational...”¹⁶

Additionally, Pogrebin described Jewish women’s invisibility, or “the omission of Jewish reality from feminist consciousness” as a recurring issue:

I thought of how often I had noticed Jews omitted from the feminist litany of “the oppressed.” And I began to wonder why the Movement’s healing embrace can encompass the black woman, the Chicana, the white ethnic woman, and every other female whose struggle is complicated by an extra element of “outness,” but the Jewish woman is not honored in her specificity. Will feminism be our movement only so long as we agree not to make our Jewishness an issue?¹⁷

¹⁵ Earl Raab, “Is There a New Anti-Semitism?” *Commentary*, Vol. 57, No. 1, January 1974, 55.

¹⁶ Letty Cottin Pogrebin, “Anti-Semitism in the Women’s Movement,” *Ms. Magazine*, Vol. 10, No. 12, June 1982, 48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

Pogrebin's article was written in the years after the Soviet Union had succeeded in exerting its influence over the countries in its orbit as well as the non-aligned movement to pass the infamous "Zionism is Racism" resolution at the UN General Assembly in 1975. The resolution underlined the international left's lack of interest in positive sentiment toward Israel and its supporters. But the writings of Pogrebin and others demonstrated that part of this hostility could be traced to animosity and resentment toward Jews, particularly those who felt that their identity was distinct in many ways from that of the white majority in America.

One of the successors to the ideals of the New Left was the movement toward multiculturalism, the recognition of cultural pluralism and its effects on American society, that influenced left-wing movements on campuses and in the workforce in the 1980s and '90s. However, this emphasis on diversity, while acknowledging the need for greater inclusion of people of color, gays and lesbians, women, and people with disabilities, to name a few, typically ignored the existence of Jews.

In one critique of multiculturalism, political philosopher Marla Brettschneider tried to tread lightly by emphasizing the movement's positive aspects while commenting on the dangers that arose from the omission of Jews from its list of marginalized groups. In her commentary, she attempted to confront a central challenge: how could Jews, who were often identified by members of the left as white and privileged, defend themselves against antisemitic attacks that came from groups identified by the political left as oppressed?

The strict separation employed by many on the left to divide the world into good and evil ensured that Jews were often identified as oppressors rather than victims. Some on the left were content to rationalize instances of antisemitism, if they acknowledged it at all, as part of the price Jews paid for being white and privileged. Brettschneider explained this issue in the context of campus politics:

As identities become fair game in politics, Jewishness takes a beating from the Left in ways Jews are usually more accustomed to being attacked from the Right. Even in a politics that courageously seeks to understand, name, and overcome oppression as well as to rethink and rewrite history, historic anti-Semitic fantasies have resurfaced at times – now from marginalized, rather than powerful, groups – about how Jews run the world and are to blame for all the world's problems. Recent media attention to particular anti-Semitic Black Muslim speakers or the "Holocaust hoax" problem only amplifies what Jews and multiculturally oriented student activists have faced every day around the country. The

campus has felt like a battleground and Jews too often have found complications with progressive efforts to diversify canonically based curricula. Despite our community's apparent success, we remain marginalized from the majority Christian culture; adding insult to injury, despite our minority status and experience, often we are marginalized in multicultural circles.¹⁸

The conception of Jews as a particularly malicious subset of white America was reflected in a rash of incidents that occurred in the 1990s. The publication of *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews* in 1991 gave credence to the false allegation that Jews were the primary instigators and masterminds of the Atlantic slave trade. Written and distributed by the Nation of Islam, an offshoot of mainstream Islam founded by Black Americans that regularly expressed hostility to white people and, especially, Jews, the book originally received little mainstream notice. However, when it began to be assigned as a text in academic courses by professors of African and African American studies on campuses such as Wellesley College and City College of New York, the Jewish world – and others – rose up in protest. In the end, the American Historical Association (AHA), an organization that traditionally recused itself from making pronouncements on the correct interpretation of history, felt compelled to issue a policy resolution in 1992, in which they condemned “as false any statement alleging that Jews played a disproportionate role in the exploitation of slave labor or in the Atlantic slave trade.”¹⁹

Analysts of antisemitism also argued that the commitment that colleges and universities espoused to support free speech, even when controversial, was a standard that was not applied consistently or equally. They noted that antagonistic or even blatantly antisemitic rhetoric attacking Jews was framed as protected political speech, while hateful language deemed racist, homophobic, or misogynist was more likely to be shut down. This issue was elevated when student groups invited speakers to campus, such as Louis Farrakhan from the Nation of Islam, or Kwame Toure, the former leader of SNCC, both of whom brought a message of black empowerment to the campus while at the same time disparaging Jews with antisemitic allegations and conspiracy theories. Jews who opposed these speakers were often accused of racism when

¹⁸ Marla Brettschneider, “Multiculturalism, Jews, and Democracy: Situating the Discussion,” in *The Narrow Bridge: Jewish Views on Multiculturalism*, ed. Marla Brettschneider (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 1-2.

¹⁹ AHA Staff, “AHA Council Issues Policy Resolution About Jews and the Slave Trade,” *Perspectives on History*, <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/march-1995/aha-council-issues-policy-resolution-about-jews-and-the-slave-trade>.

they protested. Still, as one researcher noted, ““The fact that prejudice sometimes comes from a disadvantaged minority group does not give university heads carte blanche to ignore it.”²⁰

Referencing a 1992 study that showed an increase of antisemitic acts on campus in a year when such incidents declined in the United States in general, Peter Langman, a psychotherapist specializing in Jewish engagement with multiculturalism, wrote,

It is particularly disturbing that the same period which has seen the rise of multiculturalism and increasing attention to issues of diversity on campus should be a period of increasing antisemitism on campus. Perhaps this may be a result of the general exclusion of Jewish from the multicultural agenda. It is also an indication of the on-going antisemitism within American culture.²¹

These various ideological currents provided a backdrop to the second *intifada*, which began in September 2000. What began as a violent expression of frustration by Palestinians at the lack of progress in implementing the tenets of the Oslo peace process became a protracted conflict in which more than 3000 Palestinians and more than 1000 Israelis were killed.²² The widespread use of suicide bombing by some Palestinian factions to spread violence and terror within the Israeli population was one of the more horrific new developments in the conflict. Additionally, the uprising exacted a heavy psychological toll on Israelis, who felt that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s efforts at the Camp David peace summit sponsored by U.S. President Bill Clinton in July 2000 was answered by President of the Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat with violence rather than any kind of counteroffer.

Just as in the 1967 War, much of the political left had little sympathy for Israel, and a number of campuses around the world provided the grounds for an ongoing clash between Israel supporters and the bulk of the political left. Activists referred to Palestinian suicide bombers as “freedom fighters,”²³ ignoring the resulting

²⁰ Jeffrey Ross, *Schooled in Hate: Anti-Semitism on Campus* (Anti-Defamation League, 1997), 1-3, <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/schooled-hate-anti-semitism-campus>.

²¹ Peter Langman, *Jewish Issues in Multiculturalism: A Handbook for Educators and Clinicians* (Jason Aronson Inc, 1999), 127-128.

²² Times of Israel Staff, “US pro-Palestinian group lauds Second Intifada that ‘renewed flame of resistance,’” *Times of Israel*, September 30, 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-pro-palestinian-group-lauds-second-intifada-that-renewed-flame-of-resistance/>.

²³ “Suicide and Other Bombing Attacks in Israel Since the Declaration of Principles (Sept 1993),” <https://embassies.gov.il/MFA/FOREIGNPOLICY/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/Suicide%20and%20Other%20Bombing%20Attacks%20in%20Israel%20Since.aspx>.

terror and trauma when Israelis lost their lives in restaurants,²⁴ on buses,²⁵ and at a hotel during the celebration of Passover, one of the most important holidays on the Jewish calendar.²⁶ Unmanned bombs were also weaponized, such as the explosive device planted in a cafeteria at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem that killed nine students and staff members and wounded almost 100 others.²⁷ That the university comprised both Jewish and Arab students, as well as a sizeable school for international students, was largely ignored by campus activists. Once again, analysts began to bring up the existence of a “new antisemitism.”²⁸

Indicative of trends toward excoriating both Israel and Jews on American campuses were a few episodes that took place at San Francisco State University. In April 2002, a flyer promoting a pro-Palestinian rally on campus blurred the lines between criticism of Israel and antisemitism by highlighting a picture of a dead baby, with the words, “Canned Palestinian Children Meat – Slaughtered According to Jewish Rites Under American License.” The use of the word “Jewish” rather than “Israeli” or “Zionist” was an indication that this was not just a protest against Israel – this was classic antisemitism. The content of the flyer insinuated that all Jews were responsible for Palestinian deaths and echoed the medieval blood libel, which claimed falsely that Jews slaughtered non-Jewish children to use their blood in religious rituals. On May 7, 2002, hundreds of Jewish students staged a pro-Israel and pro-peace demonstration on campus by which they hoped to engage pro-Palestinian students in dialogue. At the end of the rally, pro-Palestinian students surrounded and threatened the remaining Jewish students, screaming, “Hitler didn’t finish the job,” “F..the Jews,” and “Die racist pigs.” University and city police were called in to escort the students to safety.²⁹

²⁴ Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Suicide Bombing at the Sbarro Pizzeria in Jerusalem,” August 9, 2001, <https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/suicide-bombing-at-the-sbarro-pizzeria-in-jerusalem>.

²⁵ “Bus Bombing in Israel Kills At Least 15,” *PBS*, March 5, 2003, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/middle_east-jan-june03-israel_03-05.

²⁶ “‘Passover Massacre’ at Israeli Hotel Kills 19,” *CNN*, March 27, 2002, <https://www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/meast/03/27/mideast/>.

²⁷ “Remembering Victims & Safeguarding Freedom,” *The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*, July 2002, <https://en.huji.ac.il/remember-them-all>.

²⁸ Books on the new antisemitism that appeared after September 2000 include Phyllis Chesler’s *The New Antisemitism: The Current Crisis and What We Must Do About It*; Abraham H. Foxman’s *Never Again? The Threat of the New Anti-Semitism*; Gabriel Schoenfeld’s *The Return of Anti-Semitism*; and an anthology by Ron Rosenbaum, ed. *Those Who Forget the Past: The Question of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Random House, 2004).

²⁹ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, “Campus Antisemitism,” Briefing Report, July 2006, 22, <https://www.usccr.gov/files/pubs/docs/081506campusantibrief07.pdf>

A more pivotal event in left-wing animosity toward Israel took place in September 2001, a year after the beginning of the intifada and a few days before the 9/11 attacks on the United States: the United Nations World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) convened in Durban, South Africa. The intention was to secure a historic international agreement on race, including efforts to combat contemporary instances of racism. Previous conferences of this kind had been derailed by attempts to insert language designating Zionism as racism, so efforts were taken before the conference to avoid such an outcome. These efforts were unsuccessful, in large part because the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and its allies insisted that language condemning Israel as a racist state and downplaying the seriousness of racially based antisemitism be inserted into the draft document. This single-minded focus on Israel, which would be the only country named specifically in the document, ignored the serious problems of human rights and racism around the world. It also meant that other essential subjects such as addressing the effects of colonialism and the slave trade, which were of particular interest to African nations, were effectively sidelined. The United States and Israel withdrew from the WCAR conference, which Tom Lantos, a U.S. Congressman from California and an official delegate to the conference, referred to as a “diplomatic farce.”³⁰ Lantos also described the concurrent NGO forum in Durban, which deteriorated into a series of antisemitic and anti-Israel protests. For instance, one flyer that made the rounds of the forum showed a picture of Hitler with the caption, “What if I had won?” The answer was, “There would be NO Israel...” The final NGO document called Israel a “racist apartheid state” that was guilty of “genocide” against Palestinians.³¹

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement was one outgrowth of the Durban conference. Energized by their abilities to redirect the trajectory of the conference, activists came together to strategize their opposition to Israel. The movement issued the Palestinian Call to Boycott Israel in 2005, which was quickly followed by the emergence of the U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. Presented as a non-violent campaign to pressure Israel to acquiesce to demands for a Palestinian state, the primary aim of the BDS movement is to isolate and shun Israel as uniquely evil among all nations and deserving of censure as a racist, apartheid state. Its simplistic and one-sided description of the conflict

³⁰ Tom Lantos, “The Durban Debacle: An Insider’s View of the UN World Conference Against Racism,” *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 26, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2002): 31–52, <https://dl.tufts.edu/pdfviewer/r207v073p/tx31qt958> .

³¹ “World Conference against Racism. NGO Forum Declaration” (Durban, South Africa, 2001), <https://i-p-o.org/racism-ngo-decl.htm>.

between Israel and the Palestinians distorts the complexity of the situation and places full responsibility on Israel.³²

The BDS movement's message has proved appealing to students who are interested in social justice and attracted by the non-violence of its message. What is not always clear to these students, however, is that BDS is not only pro-Palestinian, but also actively anti-Israel. Movement co-founder Omar Barghouti has appeared in a variety of contexts supporting the end of Israel as Jewish state and the denial of the self-determination of the Jewish people, making it clear that, "We oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine... [only] a sellout Palestinian would accept a Jewish state in Palestine."³³

Like Barghouti, Hatem Bazian, a Lecturer in Middle Eastern Languages & Cultures & Asian American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and a co-founder of Zaytuna College, has long promoted extreme anti-Israel and anti-Zionist thought on California campuses and through the BDS movement, including denying elements of Jewish history and comparing Israel to Nazi Germany.³⁴ He has also promoted antisemitic views, such as when he retweeted two cartoons, one of which depicted a stereotypical caricature of an ultra-Orthodox Jew joyfully proclaiming, "'I can now kill, rape, smuggle organs and steal the land of Palestinians."³⁵ The false allegation of systematic organ stealing from Palestinians by Jews was yet another echo of the antisemitic medieval blood libel. As a student at Berkeley 2002, Bazian also indulged in conspiratorial allegations about Jewish power and influence when he instructed participants at an anti-Israel event to "take a look at the type of names on the building around campus—Haas, Zellerbach—and decide who controls this university."³⁶ While straightforward criticism of Israeli governmental policy is unexceptional, the offensive, untrue, and even antisemitic elements of Bazian's anti-Israel invective are an entirely different matter.

³² See, for instance, Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm, eds. *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel* (Chicago: MLA Members for Scholars Rights, 2015) or Cary Nelson, ed. *Israel Denial: Anti-Zionism, Anti-Semitism, and The Faculty Campaign Against the Jewish State* (Academic Engagement Network and Indiana University Press, 2019).

³³ Omar Barghouti, "Strategies for Change" (<https://vimeo.com/75201955>).

³⁴ Jason Holtzman, "Rewriting History and Telling Lies," *Jerusalem Post*, February 13, 2011, <https://www.jpost.com/blogs/live-from-america---campus-talk/rewriting-history-and-telling-lies-367732>.

³⁵ Stuart Winer, "Berkeley lecturer apologizes for retweet college condemned as anti-Semitic," *Times of Israel*, November 27, 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/berkeley-lecturer-apologizes-for-retweet-college-condemned-as-anti-semitic/>.

³⁶ Yair Rosenberg, "Co-Founder of Students for Justice in Palestine Shares Insanely Anti-Semitic Memes, Offers World's Least Convincing Apology," *Tablet Magazine*, November 28, 2017, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/co-founder-of-students-for-justice-in-palestine-shares-insanely-anti-semitic-memes-offers-worlds-least-convincing-apology>.

Taking a cue from the BDS movement, some students took the principle of free speech and turned it on its head. In the past, many on the political left argued for their right to invite controversial speakers to campus, even if they used offensive or antisemitic language against Jews and Israel. But by the 21st century, the interpretation of free speech for many on the left included the right to shut down any speech deemed offensive to leftist sensibilities. Israeli speakers, among others, were regularly shouted down, a tactic referred to as the “hecklers veto.” Pressure mounted on universities to act against this type of censorship by enforcing university codes of conduct to curb student behavior rather than framing the issue as a question of freedom of speech. As the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), made clear,

Disrupting a speech is not, properly understood, an exercise of the right to free speech. (It may be a form of civil disobedience, but engaging in civil disobedience does not relieve someone of legal responsibility for their actions.) While the protesters’ actions may have an expressive purpose, the disruption is ultimately conduct with the primary goal of silencing an opposing viewpoint. Thus, the authorities both can and should act to end the disruption.³⁷

BDS orthodoxy also proved appealing for a number of leftist campus groups that used the theory of intersectionality to tie the inflexible views of the BDS movement on Israel to other causes. Academic theorists expanded on the premise of intersectionality, a term originally coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain the interconnected and overlapping prejudices experienced by women of color, to insinuate that all oppression was related. Crenshaw clarified in 2017 that “[s]ome people look to intersectionality as a grand theory of everything, but that’s not my intention.”³⁸ Nevertheless, wide swathes of the left made opposition to Israel one of the overarching tenets of the movement, along with opposing racism, supporting LGBTQ rights, and believing women who assert that they have been victims of sexual assault. For instance, at protests that devolved into riots in 2014 over the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, a Black man who was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, protestors carried signs with the slogan

³⁷ Robert Shibley, “Heckler’s Veto Hits Minnesota Law School,” *FIRE* (blog), November 5, 2015, <https://www.thefire.org/news/hecklers-veto-hits-minnesota-law-school>.

³⁸ “Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later,” *Columbia Law School* (blog), June 8, 2017, <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>.

“From Ferguson to Palestine” to indicate that supporting racial justice in the United States obligated support for Palestinians and opposition to Israel.³⁹

Consequently, Jewish students and organizations could be seen as suspect if they happened to be Israel supporters, even if their views were in all other ways congruent with leftist views. Thus, transgender activist Janet Mock, a trans woman of color, was pressured into canceling an appearance at Brown University in 2016, not because of right-wing opposition to her presence, but because the organization Hillel, which has catered to all aspects of Jewish life on campus since the 1920s, had volunteered to be a co-sponsor of the event.⁴⁰ This was the case even though the event had no connection whatsoever to Israel or Palestinians.

Similarly, at UCLA in 2015, a Jewish student was questioned about her views on Israel in an interview for the Judicial Board of the student council. The student interviewers ultimately decided that they could not trust the student to be “unbiased,” because of her involvement with Jewish and Zionist causes and organizations, and they rejected her application. A faculty advisor reminded them that the applicant’s Jewish involvement was not disqualifying, and the students voted again to support the candidate. Nevertheless, video of the discussions, which echoed historical antisemitic allegations of Jewish dual loyalty, circulated on campus, leading to acrimonious debate. Outside analysts speculated that this type of discrimination was not only illegal but would also have been socially unacceptable if aimed at other minority groups. The *New York Times* reported that the incident had “set off an anguished discussion of how Jews are treated, particularly in comparison with other groups that are more typically viewed as victims of discrimination, such as African-Americans and gays and lesbians.”⁴¹

Beyond the confines of the campus, some actors on the political left expressed their animosity toward Jews in the language of privilege. For instance, the Women’s March, organized in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential elections in which Donald Trump defeated Hilary Clinton, was soon mired in controversy connected to allegations about antisemitism. As detailed in both the *New York Times*⁴² and *Tablet*

³⁹ James R. Thomas, “The Intersection of Palestine with Ferguson, Missouri,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1, Winter 2020.

⁴⁰ Emily Shire, “Brown Students Shut Down Trans Activist’s Speech—Because Israel,” *Daily Beast* (blog), March 25, 2016, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/brown-students-shut-down-trans-activists-speechbecause-israel?ref=scroll>.

⁴¹ Adam Nagourney, “In U.C.L.A. Debate Over Jewish Student, Echoes on Campus of Old Biases,” *The New York Times*, March 5, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/06/us/debate-on-a-jewish-student-at-ucla.html>.

⁴² Farah Stockman, “Women’s March Roiled by Accusations of Anti-Semitism,” *The New York Times*, December 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/23/us/womens-march-anti-semitism.html>.

Magazine,⁴³ two of the leaders for the March, Tamika Mallory and Carmen Perez, allegedly confronted one of the original organizers, a Jewish woman, with accusations that Jews were notorious for their exploitation of people of color. They also were described as accusing Jews of playing a leading role in the slave trade, a false assertion stemming directly from *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews*. Other activists later asserted that this incident was hushed up to avoid outside scrutiny. Additionally, Mallory, Perez, and another of the organizers, Linda Sarsour, appeared to be closely allied to the Nation of Islam and to Louis Farrakhan, a leader in the organization who not only makes antisemitic and anti-white comments but also attacks LGBTQ individuals and uses misogynistic language. All these elements clearly run counter to the ideals of the Women’s March.

Another complaint about the Women’s March was that the unity principles published for the event listed “Black women, Native women, poor women, immigrant women, Muslim women, and queer and trans women” as uniquely endangered by far-right forces and a Trump presidency, but Jewish women were purposely omitted from the list. One longtime feminist activist who was involved in early stages of planning the march, Mercy Morganfield, replied to a question from *Tablet* about antisemitism from the leadership of the March by concurring, “There are no Jewish women on the board. They refused to put any on. Most of the Jewish people resigned and left. They refused to even put anti-Semitism in the unity principles.”⁴⁴

The preceding discussion of the left’s animosity toward Jews that is based on their whiteness and privilege has one other significant side effect: it renders some members of the political left blind to the threat to Jews from the far right. Thus, despite the animosity that white supremacists hold against Jews, whom they classify as racially inferior to whites, a number of political activists on the left seem only to understand Jewish power and privilege. One wonders what type of reaction the organizers of the Women’s March may have had to the hatred expressed toward Jews by white supremacists during the Unite the Right rally that took place in Charlottesville in 2017, or the antisemitic fantasies that motivated the domestic terror attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018. Perhaps it would have been like that of Whoopi Goldberg, who kicked up a furor in 2022 with her statement that the Holocaust had nothing to do with race. “This is white people doing it to white people, so y’all going to fight amongst yourselves,”⁴⁵ she explained.

⁴³ Leah McSweeney and Jacob Siegel, “Is the Women’s March Melting Down?” *Tablet Magazine*, December 10, 2018, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/is-the-womens-march-melting-down>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Jenny Gross and Neil Vigdor, “ABC Suspends Whoopi Goldberg Over Holocaust Comments,” *The New York Times*, February 1, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/01/us/whoopi-goldberg-holocaust.html>.

Among other concerns, her statements seemed to downplay the horror of the genocide of European Jewry because she did not – or could not – understand it as a racial issue.

What should be clear is that some elements of the left have deep, serious, and systemic issues, not only with Israel but also with Jews. This animosity did not spring to life with the Hamas terror attacks – it dates back decades. This is not a question of Jewish oversensitivity to criticism of Israel, which is the argument brought up by those on the left who claim that Jewish opposition to hateful speech is offered not from a place of genuine pain but as a cynical means of silencing pro-Palestinian debate. This is a question of antisemitism, of animosity so pervasive that too many leftist activists felt justified not only in celebrating the gruesome deaths of Israelis at the hands of Hamas terrorists but also in suggesting that American Jews deserve to suffer because of their support for a Jewish state and for their designation as white and privileged. Jewish grief, fear, anger, and pain is rendered meaningless in these conditions, and the essential humanity of Jews is subsequently diminished. This means, of course, that the essential humanity of those indulging in the celebration is equally damaged.



Program on
Extremism