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Demand Justice for Jewish Students

New report shows skyrocketing attacks on students' Jewish identity—rooted in anti-Zionism, a modern disguise for classic antisemitism. It's time to fight back.

Despite rising campus attacks on Israel, most Jewish students still support the Jewish state. But anti-Zionist hatred in the classroom and public square forces many students to hide their Jewish identity. Greater enforcement of Title VI anti-discrimination laws promises a cure to this injustice.

What are the facts?

According to a new report by AMCHA Initiative, bullying and intimidation of Jewish students on university campuses tripled in the last year, while attempts to censor Zionism increased six-fold. Calls to reject Jewish identity trips to Israel increased nearly 20-fold. Reminiscent of Jewish persecution in 1930s Nazi Germany, some 50% of U.S. Jewish students say they hide their Jewish identity, according to a 2021 poll by the Brandeis Center for Human Rights.

While discrimination against most ethnic minorities is strictly censured on campus, university administrators have generally failed to protect Jewish students from attacks against them. Fortunately, a spate of complaints recently filed with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) now seek redress under Title VI anti-discrimination statutes. Currently, George Washington University, City University of New York, University of Vermont, University of Illinois and University of Southern California are among schools facing OCR investigation for alleged antisemitism violations.

Not surprisingly, the AMCHA report implicated pro-Palestinian groups, such as Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) for responsibility in targeting Jewish students. Indeed, the report found that anti-Zionist groups like SJP were the largest overall contributors to attacks on Jewish identity. Despite their pattern of stoking antisemitic hate, to date only a single chapter of SJP has been permanently shut down on a U.S. campus—at New York's private Fordham University. The ban was upheld in court.

AMCHA's report also noted the contribution of nominally Jewish anti-Zionist groups and individuals to the assault on Jewish identity. One such group is Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP).

Bad enough that Jewish students are targeted for persecution by their peers, but even worse when university faculty support the persecution. No wonder, according to AMCHA, that universities with faculty who support the BDS movement were three to seven times more likely to suffer attacks on Jewish identity. In fact, AMCHA found that "twenty percent of threats to Jewish identity took place at events supported by academic faculty."

Sadly, without federal intervention, there's little hope universities will stop antisemitic attacks.

Tragically, Jewish students who feel their Jewish identity is threatened can seldom rely on their schools' harassment policies to protect them. These policies

usually forbid harassment based on one's ethnicity or religion, but in most cases, university administrators do not recognize hostility toward Israel and its supporters as a religious or ethnic issue.

This approach by university administrators ignores the definition of antisemitism established by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), which is recognized worldwide and includes discrimination and demonization based on anti-Israel hate.

Fortunately, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 may offer powerful recourse for Jewish students under attack. Because the statute prohibits discrimination based on ethnic identity, recent complaints to the OCR emphasize the integral connection between Zionism and Jews' historic relationship to their ancestral home, the land of Israel. Indeed, Zionism is not a political opinion—it is a

fundamental feature of Jewish ethnic identity. Likewise, the Jews are not simply a religious group, but rather are a people who also share language, culture, ancestry and a powerful territorial heritage.

While violations of Title VI do not carry criminal penalties, their costs can be massive.

First, recipients of federal government funding—which represents millions, even tens of millions of dollars for most universities—can be refused or revoked. Second, the OCR can require that causes of violations be remedied—ensuring Jewish students will no longer suffer attacks by students or faculty for their Zionist beliefs. Third, the reputational damage caused by civil rights violations can wreak untold damage on university fundraising and student recruitment efforts.

Attacks against Jewish students represent an assault on the American social fabric and our democracy. Higher-education administrators should be ordered by their regents to shut down all forms of antisemitism, especially in the form of discriminatory, demonizing anti-Zionism. Schools that fail to suppress these acts of hate should be prosecuted aggressively under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Punishment must be costly, painful and swift. Jewish students deserve better than the current hostile environment on campus. They deserve justice.

This message has been published and paid for by

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East

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