

The Writing Is on the Wall for Jewish Students

We must challenge professors and students who tacitly endorse antisemitic violence in the guise of 'resistance'

BY THOMAS ULLMAN

Today, to be a Jewish student is to be alone. In the wake of Hamas' devastating attack on Israel in which it brutally massacred over 1,000 Israeli civilians, American universities have proven to be treacherous environments for Jews. Our peers now extol the would-be genocidaires, both in online posts and on stick-mounted signs. We are forced to watch as mobs of students demand the destruction of our homeland. What has been often overlooked by observers of these events, however, is the culpability of the universities themselves. The antisemitism of my classmates did not develop in a vacuum. It is the result of obfuscations by our professors, many of whom have portrayed Hamas as merely a "resistance group," as well as the refusal of our universities to denounce the terror.

I have had the displeasure of seeing this unfold firsthand. As a Jew and university student in Washington, D.C., I watched as thousands marched in support of the "martyred militants" of Hamas, an organization whose charter explicitly calls for the genocide of Jewry. Dispersed among the crowds were many of my classmates, people whom I once felt I could trust. They shared lunches with me, worked on projects with me, and shared textbooks with me. Now, they celebrate the deaths of people like me. The agitation came to a head last Friday, when a former Hamas leader called for an international "day of

rage," with the purpose being to extend the reach of the group's attack to the diaspora. Jewish organizations urged Jewish students to stay home and miss class. I hesitantly did so.

I emerged from my involuntary hiding the next morning and headed for one of the dining halls. I walked warily; every passerby could have been part of the flocks that defended the attacks. On my way there, I crossed paths with a close friend of mine. A student with a fervid interest in progressive politics, he was as compassionate a figure as one could be. I felt the tension immediately evaporate as he approached me with an outstretched hand. Our conversation began with typical niceties, but my heart sank when he told me that he was on his way to a demonstration. I dared not inquire further. I didn't want to know that he had joined ranks with the bloodthirsty marchers, but he nonetheless found a way to force that fact into the conversation. "I'm glad to see so many people standing up to barbarism and colonialism," he said at one point, pointing to an anti-Zionist flyer pasted onto a nearby lamppost. I pushed back gently, remarking that child murder wasn't exactly "standing up to barbarism." He appeared nonplussed. "Isn't it rather hard for the Jews," I asked, "to colonize the land from which they originated?" He stood unspeaking for a moment, as if he were reassessing our friendship. He sneered: "Of course *you'd* say that. You're a Jew."

I walked away from our encounter

disoriented. This was an individual who was avowedly "anti-racist." Hearing antisemitism come out of the mouth of a progressive friend left me dejected. After I returned to my room, I found the same vitriol on social media. Most of my peers had posted some sort of defense of Hamas' actions, blaming the victim by accusing Israel of igniting this horror. Various student organizations released similar statements online. One popular post from a pro-Palestine student group stated that it "reject[s] the distinction" between civilians and soldiers of the Jewish state. The "decolonial" impetus for the incursion, said the group, was not meant to remain "an abstract academic theory to be discussed and debated ... [it was meant to be] a tangible, material event." That event turned out to be a pogrom.

The likes on that post numbered nearly 1,000, equivalent to roughly 1 out of 11 undergraduates at my university. Looking through the list, each name that I recognized evoked a gut-wrenching feeling. Even in the comfort of our own rooms, the incitement was inescapable—Jewish students were inundated with hate, both in person and online. The mindless reposting of unoriginal diatribes more than irked me. The acquaintances of mine who did so typically had little knowledge of the conflict, or of international politics in general, and often had no personal stake in the matter. Yet many of them wrote accompanying screeds that justified the attacks. How did they suddenly develop such strong opinions on a conflict taking place 6,000 miles away?

I didn't have to wait long before my question was answered. A few days ago, every student received an email that advertised a panel discussion about the war. I eagerly opened the message. The panel featured several prominent professors of international affairs and political science, each highly influential in their field. My intrigue quickly faded as I read the description, which characterized Hamas and its cronies as an "array of Palestinian resistance groups." *Resistance?* That word cannot possibly describe the rapes, executions, and kidnappings that terrorized Israel recently. The term, though incredibly inappropriate,

was unfortunately one that I had seen used repeatedly by professors at my university. One such academic vocally supported the characterization of the attacks as “armed resistance,” adding that it was an “anti-colonial uprising.” This position is widespread and found throughout the country’s colleges, whose administrations have often refused to condemn Hamas. In doing so, American universities lend implicit support not only to these professors’ profane ideas, but to the antisemitism of the students who have adopted them. Our universities have sent a clear message to their students: Genocidal terror is an excusable expression of rage, so long as it is framed as “resistance to colonialism.”

Every time I scroll through the irate posts of student organizations or activists, I am struck by how similar they

sound to the equivocations of our professors. In their online infographics, they palliate Hamas’ crimes in the same way. They refer to the same literature. They use the same slogans. Their arguments have stirred the witless masses into a frenzy with the same idea: Death settles the issue. Only the murder of Jews satisfies the “decolonial” antisemite, whose mouth froths with the same rage that boiled in Europe 90 years ago. This time, though, he makes sure to carefully substitute “Zionist” for “Yid” in his howling tirades. This is a direct consequence of the rhetoric of our professors and the complete indifference of our colleges.

Our academics, who have spent all this time pontificating from their ivory towers, are deserving of blame. They have been entirely disconnected from the impact of their ideas for years.

Now, they are beginning to see the consequences of their words on their own turf. The propagation of support for ethnic hatred must be challenged. As long as American colleges continue to tacitly endorse calls for antisemitic violence, I will continue to earnestly write in defense of the Jewish student.

I walked to class this morning contemplating my experience, one that has now been shared by almost all other young American Jews. As I careened along the sidewalk, I paused in front of a white pillar erected by the university on a patch of soil. The words “May Peace Prevail on Earth” were printed in large black type on its sides. I couldn’t help but expel a bitter laugh. Peace, it seems, comes at the cost of Jewish lives. ■

This article was originally published on October 19, 2023.

