

## Anti-Semitism at U.S. Elite Universities: Not a Word about Hamas

Since October 7, anti-Semitism has been visible on the U.S. campus. A one-sided view of the world has existed in teaching for a long time.

By Günther Jikeli, *Die Tageszeitung*, December 5, 2023.

<https://taz.de/Antisemitismus-an-US-Eliteunis/!5977408/>

On October 7, students from one of America's elite universities gathered to express their full solidarity with the Palestinians. "We [...] hold the Israeli regime fully responsible for all acts of violence," they began in a statement signed by 34 organizations, drafted by the Palestine Solidarity Committee.

"The massacres in Gaza have already begun [...]. The apartheid regime is the only culprit. For 75 years, Israeli violence has dominated every aspect of Palestinian life [...]. The coming days will require a determined resistance to colonial retribution. We call on the Harvard community to take action to stop the ongoing annihilation of the *Palestinians*," it continued, all on October 7, mind you.

Not a word about Hamas. But all the key words of the anti-colonial struggle were named, Israel was accused of apartheid and the annihilation of the Palestinians, and this on the day that Hamas carried out a pogrom that [can be described as genocide](#) according to the definition of the UN Genocide Convention.

A slip-up? After a public outcry, including among potential employers of the elite up-and-comers, especially large law firms, as well as a doxing campaign that published the names of the signatories, some co-signatories distanced themselves from the statement.

### Support for Hamas, in other words,

Just a few days later, Brown University's Students for Justice in Palestine group released a [very similar statement](#), co-signed by 48 other groups, in which it "unequivocally blames the Israeli regime and its allies for all suffering and loss of life, whether Palestinian or Israeli" and professes "solidarity with the Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation." Support for Hamas, in other words.

At many universities, demonstrations took place in the week after the massacre – for "the resistance." On October 12, five days after the massacre, the Students for Justice in Palestine called for "resistance" demonstrations at the universities, and many followed.

[In their toolkit](#), they celebrated the "surprise action against the Zionist enemy" and emphasized that "settlers are not 'civilians' under international law, as they are used militarily to ensure continued control over stolen Palestinian land."

A second round of organized student protests took place on October 25. [There were anti-Semitic incidents](#). Not only could the anti-Semitic call for ethnic cleansing "Palestine will be free, from the river to the sea" be heard and read, Jewish students were also physically harassed and threatened in some places.

### Star of David in garbage can

Cooper Union demonstrators in New York, chanting "Free Palestine," banged on locked library doors, behind which Jewish students had to barricade themselves. At a protest at New York University, two students were seen holding signs reading "Keep the world clean" and a drawing of a Star of David in a garbage can.

At the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Students for Democratic Society called for a strike, emphasizing in statements on social media that "Zionism has no place on our campus" and used the hashtag "#ZionismOffCampus." Students from George Washington University projected "Glory To Our Martyrs" and "Free Palestine From The River To The Sea" onto the exterior walls of the university library.

Over 100 students from the University of North Carolina called on the university to boycott all Israeli companies, as well as "companies that have supported Israel." A speaker at the University of Washington declared, "We don't want Israel to exist. We don't want these Zionist counter-protesters to exist."

A speech was also given at the University of Minnesota that explicitly called for the destruction of Israel. "We must have the destruction of the imperialist Zionist regime as our goal in order to achieve a successful intifada." To which the crowd chanted: "Intifada to victory! There is only one solution: intifada, revolution."

### **Israelis as threatened must be lost sight of**

At Cornell University, a mentally disturbed student was charged with threatening to kill Jewish students in a kosher restaurant. Posters with pictures of the hostages kidnapped by Hamas were defaced or torn down with conspicuous frequency. The fact that Israelis are still victims and threatened with death does not fit into the binary worldview and must disappear from view.

There was also little empathy for Israelis among the professors. A Jewish student at Indiana University showed me a photograph she took of one of my colleagues tearing down a poster of Israeli hostages. There were not only statements by individual professors justifying the massacre, but also jointly written open letters that were concerned with insisting on the "right to resistance".

According to a [letter from 144 Columbia professors](#), "the events of October 7 [...] as exercising the right of an occupied people to resist a violent and illegal occupation". At the City University of New York, more than 200 faculty members [downplayed](#) the massacre, which they euphemistically referred to as the "October 7 Hamas military operation."

Most university administrations, not at a loss for clear words on other global political or social issues, such as the war against Ukraine or the anti-racist protests around George Floyd, also found it difficult to name the pogrom in Israel as such and to condemn expressions of solidarity with the "Palestinian resistance", i.e. Hamas, as well as anti-Semitic slogans at rallies at their universities.

### **Reaction of university presidents only after massive pressure**

To the despair of Jewish students and teachers, it took massive pressure from alumni, donors and politicians in many places before there was a public statement from the university presidents condemning the Hamas pogrom and also the anti-Semitic incidents on campus. When anti-Semitism has been condemned, it has often been in the same breath as "Islamophobia." Critical inquiries from outside, such as politicians, are interpreted by professors as an attempt to restrict freedom of speech and academic freedom. However, this is rarely the case.

In many American universities, especially elite universities, there seems to be a climate in which it is difficult to show empathy for the Jewish-Israeli victims of a pogrom and to condemn the act and the perpetrator unequivocally. "By any means necessary," as some posters at pro-Palestinian demonstrations read, includes pogroms.

How could this happen? Two factors seem to be particularly important. Both are very pronounced at elite universities. On the one hand, since the 1960s, numerous courses of study have been established in the humanities that are committed to postcolonialism, founded by Edward Said, among others, which accuses the West of having a binary view, but which it practices itself.

This led to the spread of a dogmatic and at the same time diffuse postmodernism and postcolonialism with references to critical theory, which solidified into a binary worldview among some teachers and students. The world is divided into oppressors and oppressed, privileged and disadvantaged. Social relations are perceived exclusively as power relations, whereby one's own position is of course regarded as powerless – even at elite universities. Knowledge production is also only an instrument for maintaining power.

### **Anti-Semitism as a masterful glue**

Resistance must be offered. Against whom? Against imperialism, the state, the system, they say. However, this does not mean all states, not all imperialisms, not all patriarchal structures, at least not if they are located outside Europe or North America. The contradictions are obvious. Anti-Semitism offers itself here as a masterful cement of contradictions.

Interestingly, some of the thought patterns anchored in postcolonialism can be traced back to the anti-Zionist propaganda campaign of the Soviet Union between 1967 and around 1988. The radical anti-Zionism developed during this period associated Israel with racism, settler colonialism, imperialism, fascism, Nazism and apartheid, as Izabella Tabarovsky demonstrates.

The slogans that can be heard at anti-Israel demonstrations today are strikingly similar to those of the past, except that today they are propagated in the West at elite universities and in mass demonstrations, and not only in left-wing splinter groups.

On the other hand, the billion-dollar [influence of Arab investors](#) is evident. It was not until Saudi Arabia and after September 11 that Qatar reinforced large sums of money were invested in the development of, for example, Middle East studies programs, which successfully contributed to the establishment of anti-Israel positions in Middle East studies. The influence of targeted propaganda by organizations such as BDS and Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) cannot be overlooked.

### **Declaration of bankruptcy of elite formation**

An anti-Zionist worldview, in which there are only oppressors and oppressed, and in which organizations like the SJP may not be criticized because they belong to the oppressed of this earth, seems to be so widespread and deeply rooted among some students and also in parts of the professorship that even such a barbaric and brutal pogrom as that of October 7 cannot break this worldview.

These worldviews are a declaration of bankruptcy of elite education. Humanity has become a rain of ashes because of Hamas, writes Elfriede Jelinek. The rain has made it all the way to the elite universities.