

Combating Antisemitism in 2025

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When I was in college, I participated in several protests. I know, shocking! I recall one occasion when a large group of us staged a nonviolent if not quiet sit-in at the college president's office. I don't recall the issue—likely the experience of women on campus or the college's investments in apartheid South Africa. I also participated in a very large demonstration for Soviet Jewry on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

Suffice it to say that these protests were worlds apart from what took place a year ago at Columbia University and at several other American academic institutions. In some places, campus property was violently occupied. Protestors denied access to campus facilities to all but demonstrators. Protestors disrupted the business of the university—above all, education and research. Campus policies were violated—and, at Columbia and too many other places, not enforced.

Antisemitism was a significant element of many of these protests. Often, Jewish students were singled out for condemnation or excluded from campus spaces, because they're Jews who have not renounced the Jewish State. Even Jewish religious observances were disrupted.

No college or university should tolerate that behavior. If an institution permits students to be excluded from campus activities or to face harassment or worse because of their religious identity, that college or university is in violation of Title 6 of the Civil Rights Act, and it should face the legal consequences. Students and others who perpetrate violence, vandalism, or harassment should be prosecuted if they have committed crimes or suffer institutional consequences if they have violated campus policies.

President Trump and his administration have acted strongly against institutions that they judge to have violated federal antidiscrimination laws. In recent weeks, our government has withheld hundreds of millions of dollars from each of several institutions. It has also detained and threatened deportation of foreign citizens who are in this country legally but who have allegedly broken our laws, supported terrorism, or interfered with American foreign policy.

The Union for Reform Judaism, Central Conference of American Rabbis, and American Conference of Cantors expressed reservations. In the wake of the arrest and threatened deportation of Mahmoud Khalil, the public face of pro-

Palestinian protests at Columbia, Reform leaders reminded us that “we must be wary of the danger of trampling on civil liberties and tarnishing the transparent justice system that is a hallmark of our nation...[A]s Americans, we must protect due process, the essential right to protest, and the expression of free speech, even when such speech is hateful, causes pain, or targets us. There [is] a range of appropriate ways to condemn and address such problematic speech. As the case proceeds, we expect the government to make its case rooted in the law and that Mr. Khalil will be given the opportunity to defend himself as due process demands.”ⁱ

As a member of a Facebook group for parents of students at Brandeis University, I regularly see the need for such a statement. In that social media group, parents complain of supposedly impermissible and antisemitic campus protest at a school where my son Daniel is a student. Parents who are rightly disgusted by the hateful slogans of anti-Israel protestors, call for the university to put an end to such demonstrations on campus. Those protests, though, are constitutionally protected free speech adhering to appropriate campus policies. Students, including Daniel, report that these protests are laughably small, and that Jewish students have never been unsafe or seen their rights violated by such demonstrations since October 7, 2023.

Adam Lehman, the CEO of Hillel International, is also concerned.

Lehman understands the problem. For example, he writes: “While many universities improved their policies and enforcement of those policies this academic year, we have continued to observe and address a historically high rate of issues. We’ve catalogued more than 1,300 discrete incidents of campus antisemitism already this academic year. And ... the majority of these are issues of conduct — not speech.

“Among those conduct-based incidents, more than 350 involve threats or violence, and more than 200 involve vandalism targeting individual students, Hillel buildings, and other Jewish campus organizations. And, for those who contend that universities are fully capable of addressing campus antisemitism on their own, recent and longer term history indicate otherwise. There are numerous cases from the last 18 months when universities only chose to pursue basic remedial actions such as enforcing their existing codes of conduct after Title VI investigations, lawsuits, or other government action spurred them to do so.”

Still, he added, “[W]e also believe that due process for those accused of wrongdoing is essential — whether through mandated protections in legal settings or consistent, fair, and responsive disciplinary procedures at the university level.”ⁱⁱ

Lehman shares the words and sentiments of Jacob Miller, a Harvard senior and former Hillel President, who charges that the Administration's actions against elite colleges and universities aren't really about antisemitism at all but threaten interests that Jews share. Miller wrote this week about the millions withheld from universities on the pretext of fighting antisemitism: "The expansive nature of these billion-dollar cuts suggest[s that] Trump's interest is not narrowly fighting antisemitism on campus, but rather neutering universities and their ability to conduct research. Institutions of higher learning are cornerstones of liberal democracies and act as bulwarks against authoritarianism. It is telling that Trump's team wants them demolished."

Miller continues: "Indeed, Vice President JD Vance gave a now-infamous speech three years ago entitled 'The Universities are The Enemy' — long before October 7th brought antisemitism so prominently to the surface of many university campuses.

"As the assault on higher education proceeds, politicians are seizing on Jews as their perfect political pawns. Let me be clear: I've had dozens of meetings with various University officials. Never once have I been approached by a current Trump official and never once, to my knowledge, has the Trump administration consulted Jewish student leadership in any formal way.

"Anyone familiar with campus life knows funding cuts will have little effect on Jews' experience at Harvard — besides degrading the quality of research and instruction. Worse, they could set back research significantly and destabilize the academy, one of the institutions in which Jews have historically thrived."ⁱⁱⁱ

This week, we begin reading the book of Leviticus, replete with commandments that Israelites bring sacrifices of the finest products of their flocks, herds, and fields to the Jerusalem Temple. The Hebrew word for "sacrifice," קרבן, (*korban*), does not have the meaning of giving something away for a higher purpose, as the English word does. Instead, it means "to draw close."

In the last eighteen months, some Jewish students have faced criminal antisemitism on their college campuses. Laws and campus policies must be vigorously enforced.

Many more, though, even Brandeis students, have faced discomfort, walking by protests that do not impede their activities but subject them to protestors' often hateful chants.

I wonder if that discomfort isn't a sacrificial קרבן (*korban*), drawing Jewish students closer to one another and to Jewish life. The increase in campus Jewish activity is well documented.

Just as important, that discomfort is a worthy sacrifice for the preservation of American values—First Amendment freedom of speech and the rule of law that have preserved Jewish safety in America for more than two centuries. If Jewish discomfort preserves America as a refuge for our people, a sacrifice that draws American Jews closer to our nation and its value, it's a worthy and patriotic sacrifice.

Amen.

ⁱ [Reform Movement Statement on Importance of Rule of Law and Due Process | Union for Reform Judaism](#).

ⁱⁱ [From the Desk of Adam Lehman: Building Stronger Campuses for Jewish Students and All Students - Hillel International](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ Jacob M. Miller, "I was Hillel President. Trump Claims His Funding Cuts Help Jews—He's Wrong," *The Harvard Crimson*, March 31, 2025, [I Was Hillel President. Trump Claims His Funding Cuts Help Jews — He's Wrong. | Opinion | The Harvard Crimson](#).