

Standing up to Campus Anti-Semitism

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"The century-long relationship between American Jews and the nation's elite universities has rotted away. Now is the time for all of the good people involved—students, parents, donors—to get out, and fast."

Our colleague, Jerry Gordon, forwarded this [article](#) by Leil Leibovitz on the topic of Jewish students in our universities, which was published in *Tablet Magazine*, a Jewish publication. Leibovitz contrasts his own experience as a Jewish immigrant with what universities have become in terms of how Jewish students are treated. He specifically addresses

New York University, where he himself taught, and which is currently in the middle of a controversy over campus anti-Semitism. The article is long, but well worth the time. Many of the points raised by Leibovitz remind me of so much of what I have observed teaching part-time at the University of California at Irvine (1998-2016). To illustrate that, I have selected the below sentences from the article.

"Just how inhospitable that place has become was evident this month, when the university's branch of Students for Justice in Palestine [won](#) the Presidential Service Award, one of the highest honors NYU bestows on members of its academic community. The decision shocked and angered many in NYU's Jewish community, who noted that the group's actions frequently veered into the violent and the anti-Semitic:"

Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) was co-founded by UC Berkeley professor, Hatem Bazian, a Palestinian who got his higher education in the US-specifically at San Francisco State University, where he was a prominent and annoying activist. This is a man who in 2004, called for an "intifada" in the US. He has a long list of anti-Semitic statements on his resume. SJP itself is a brown-shirt organization with chapters on over 100 US campuses. Their specialty is intimidation and disruption of Jewish pro-Israel events. At UC Irvine, SJP is serving a two year suspension after disrupting such events in May 2016 and May 2017, the latter of which I was present and videotaped.

"American universities are openly breaking their bonds with the Jewish community by embracing active discrimination against Jewish students and rejecting their intellectual, emotional, and moral attachments to the values of equal human dignity, universal rights, critical inquiry, and rational thought."

In the face of all the disruption and intimidation of Jewish students, most university administrations have chosen to turn

a blind eye rather than confront the issue head on and throw the bullies out on their ears. There is a simple reason: Most campus anti-Semitism in the US, as is the case in Europe, is coming from Muslims as exhibited by the largely Muslim SJP, the various chapters of the Muslim Student Association (or Union, as it is called at UC Irvine) and their allies on campus, within the community and among left-wing faculty. It is all masked as a concern for human rights for the Palestinians, but what it really is is nothing more than Jew hatred, a Jew hatred that can never accept a Jewish state in the Muslim Middle East. (The Christian minorities are being persecuted and driven out of the Middle East as we speak. Few Jews still reside in any other Middle Eastern country aside from Israel.)

UC Irvine administrators and chancellors as far as I can remember have pooh-poohed charges of campus anti-Semitism and still deny the problem exists. They point with pride to their own Olive Tree Initiative (OTI), whereby students of all religions participate on guided tours of Israel and the West Bank hearing both sides of the issue. The reality is, however, that the entire enterprise is weighed toward the Palestinian narrative. I am aware of at least four Jewish students at UCI and UCLA who joined SJP after going on a tour. The West Bank tour guides hired by OTI are themselves leaders of the International Solidarity Movement. In short, OTI is a fig leaf.

"Jewish students from well-heeled American families may still vie for places at Yale or Princeton; proud Jewish parents may still giddily direct the family minivan to Cambridge while touring prospective colleges;..."

In my view, Jewish prospective students and their families face a hard choice. In many respects, a particular university may seem the best choice, but if they will not protect the rights and safety of Jewish students, why not turn elsewhere? Of course, the argument can be made that this problem infects

so many universities that the choices would be severely limited. This is true. The other side argues that more Jewish presence is needed on campuses like UC Irvine to counter the poison dished out by SJP and their allies and to present Israel's side of the argument. Here I run the risk (as a Gentile) of stereotyping, but I am merely repeating the words of so many of my Jewish allies: Many, if not most, Jewish students would prefer to avoid the hassle altogether and just go about the business of studying and trying to enjoy college. They represent a diversity of religious devotion, political persuasions, attitudes towards Israel, and do not match the intensity of the pro-Palestinian groups. Muslim students, no matter their national origin, are pretty much united in opposing Israel and opposing it vehemently.

In the case of UCI, I have always maintained that 99% of the students (predominantly Asian-American) are not anti-Semitic and are uninvolved in the ugliness, but the SJP-MSU types regularly succeed in giving the university a black eye nationally with their antics. I have met several Jewish students over the years who have told me that their time at UCI was not a pleasant period in their lives.

To compound it all, Jewish students who choose to stand up and speak out get very little support from the very national organizations who should be in the forefront. This has been a particularly serious problem at UCI, where the Orange County Jewish Federation, and Hillel have actually worked over the years against any effort to bring attention to the problem. These groups have actually cracked down on those students who wanted to fight. The reason as I see it at UCI is that these two organizations are way too embedded in the university, too cozy with administrators, and depend on a Jewish student presence on campus in order to justify their own existence. Along with the moribund Anti-Defamation League, they would prefer to deny there is a problem and that Jewish life on campus "is thriving" to use their own quotes. How many times

over the years have I attended anti-Israel events at UCI and engaged in hard questions to the vitriolic speakers while the leaders of these three organizations stood around and said nothing!

“On the most basic level, Jewish donors must ask themselves why they should continue to financially aid and abet institutions that offer very little by way of accountability or transparency, while incubating hate.”

Indeed. If there are solutions to this dreadful problem, this would be one of them. Jewish donors should announce that their favored university will be getting no more money from them as long as this problem remains unaddressed. That is one of the suggestions, I and others have made in the case of UC Irvine. It is still a valid idea today. As Leibovitz says, let the Saudi and the Qataris pour money into this pit. (Actually, I would rather see a complete halt to all Arab money flowing into our universities to promote their anti-West, anti-Israel agenda).

If an institution like NYU wants to give out awards to SJP, I say NYU is no place for any Jewish student. But it is not just Jewish students, their families and their organizations who need to bring pressure on universities. The rest of us also need to stand with our Jewish fellow citizens and demand an end to brown shirt activity on our campuses. Gentile donors should also stop giving. Gentile students and their families should also pick a university where Jewish students are protected. Hitting universities in the pocketbook is a big part of the solution.