



HJAA

## The Soil Beneath the Encampments *How Israel and Jews Became the Focus of Hate at Harvard*

A Report by the Harvard Jewish Alumni Alliance (HJAA)  
May 2024

*“Harvard signals that Jews are only acceptable so long as they don’t fully embrace Judaism and choose to practice their religion. The second half of the year taught me that the only hope of surviving Harvard as a Jew was to not dress “too Jewish,” and to not request the university accommodate Jewish holidays, speak Hebrew, or, God forbid, actually support Israel’s right to exist.”*  
- Anonymous recent former student

*“I can hear the protesters chanting “globalize the intifada” in the morning from my bed... Students can call zionists blood-thirsty vipers, and that’s okay... We keep meeting with the Administration, and nothing happens. They are not enforcing their time, place, and manner restrictions. These students are getting a pass which leads me to wonder: what’s going to happen next year?”*  
- Charlie Covit, Freshman

### Executive Summary

#### Background on the Harvard Jewish Alumni Alliance (HJAA) and Report

On October 8<sup>th</sup>, as the terrorist attack on Israel that murdered 1,200 people was still ongoing, more than 30 Harvard student groups signed a statement that “h[e]ld the Israeli regime entirely responsible for all unfolding violence.” In the following weeks, many Harvard students rallied in support of a genocidal terrorist group that had just committed crimes against humanity while simultaneously condemning Israel as a racist, apartheid, and genocidal state worthy of elimination.

**This paradox was a wake-up call:**

**Something was profoundly wrong at our beloved alma mater.**

**Hence, the [Harvard Jewish Alumni Alliance](#) was formed. We now have 3,000 members.**

Shortly after HJAA launched, a small group of HJAA members—none of whom knew each other in advance—came together to research the day-to-day experiences of Jewish and Israeli Harvard students and to examine and explore the root causes of the hatred on display.

To do that, we—professionals in the fields of education, executive search, literature, medicine, social work, and software development—had extensive conversations with 50 current and former Jewish students and faculty members about their experiences at Harvard, both inside and outside the classroom. These discussions mainly took place between November 2023 and February 2024.

At the same time, seven HJAA members studied Harvard’s educational program. Although we had limited access, we examined course catalogs for the past two school years, school and department websites, event calendars, the offerings of various centers and programs, and selected syllabi.

**While considerable focus in the media has been on student-generated antisemitism, we wanted to explore if and how Harvard as an institution - its faculty and educational programs - might be fueling the hatred we were witnessing.**

This report is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive. That would require full access to classrooms and a year, if not more, of effort. However, as the crisis at Harvard has been unfolding rapidly, we felt the imperative to release our findings—not as a final document, but to spur more research and action to counter the degradation of standards and alleviate the pain felt by too many.

**What we found was worse than we had anticipated.**

## Main Findings

### **Harvard Has Been a Hostile Environment for Many Jewish Students, Including in the Classroom Since and Before October 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Through conversations with 42 Jewish students, we learned that they had been systematically targeted and excluded *not only by other students but also within classrooms and by professors*. Every student we interviewed, except one, discussed feeling alienated and excluded, if not outright harassed.**

While we realize that 42 students may seem like a small sample (roughly 6% of the Jewish population at Harvard), it is nonetheless informative that their feelings were so similar. We recognize not every Jewish student is affected. As a former student stated, “It is ok to be Jewish, but any student who is ‘too Jewish’ suffers.” “Too Jewish,” she explained, means showing any external sign of being Jewish or expressing support for Israel. (Student A)

What follows are some of the remarks from students, starting with their experiences in the classroom. All the students except for two insisted on anonymity because they feared academic, social, and even physical retribution if their identity became known. In fact, those students insisted we scrub any information that might even potentially identify them.

- “[The professor] said, ‘Where are you from?’ I said, ‘Israel.’ He looked at me and said ... ‘I need to ask you to leave the class.’ No other visiting student was asked to leave.” Kim Nahari, Sophomore
- “I attempted to attend the History department’s Palestine event but was turned away by an organizer who recognized me, despite my having registered, with him giving the excuse of a lack of space.” (Student B)

- “[T]here's a big class on the Holocaust that's like a general education class, so it's not just for people in a major. My friend took this class, and there was a teaching fellow who ... was saying things like it really wasn't that bad. And look at all the ways that Jews contributed to the Holocaust happening.” (Student C)
- “I took a class in the Spring of '23 called *Religion, Nationalism and Settler Colonialism* [at Harvard Divinity School].... The class was just a 12-week hate fest.” (Student D)
- “On October 11<sup>th</sup>, the Religion and Public Life department [of the Divinity School] released their statement trying to contextualize and rationalize the violence.... The professor offered no apologies. She is inviting a Palestinian speaker next week who publicly said that Israel made up the stories about babies being beheaded and women being raped.” (Student D)
- “Almost everybody I know, including myself, does not represent their true attitudes in the classroom.” (Student E)
- A faculty member echoed this student: “It’s indoctrination, not education. The last place you will have a free, interesting discussion is a Harvard classroom.” (Faculty A)

**Jewish students also were harassed, bullied, and excluded by other students well before October 7<sup>th</sup>. Since then, it just got louder, prouder, and more visible.**

- “It’s so much harder for the students who are visibly Jewish. I have a friend who wears a kippah who was physically cornered by a group of students demanding he denounce the so-called genocide.” - Charlie Covit, Freshman
- “Last year, I had a mezuzah outside my dorm, which was taken down.” (Student F)
- “Israelis are the only people where their nationality is held against them. Doesn't happen to my friend who is Russian.... [My Israeli friend] was called a war criminal.” (Student G)
- “‘A Zionist state cannot happen without apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and colonialism.’ That was on the wall during apartheid week. And they get people to believe them.” (Student G)
- “No other group gets compared to the Nazis... Because of my Jewish and Zionist identity, people think I am a monster. I have heard people say, ‘Zionists should be slain.’” (Student H)
- “All the ... [orthodox] guys on campus have started wearing baseball caps.” (Student I)
- “They use the word Zionist so they can say that they’re not antisemites....” (Student J)

**Jewish students feared for their safety.**

- “They are saying, ‘I am scared to be a Jew here right now.’” (Student E reporting on the sentiment of fellow Jewish students.)
- “This felt to me like they wanted dead Jews.” (Student H)
- “All the protests are right outside Mass Hall.... There were days I was afraid to leave my room.” (Student I)

**Harvard, Through its Curriculum and Faculty,  
Planted and Spread the Seeds of Hate Well Before October 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Our research found that when student protesters rally for Hamas as freedom fighters and lob at Israel labels that represent the world’s worst evils, they are repeating what they are taught in classrooms and at department-sponsored events.**

**It begins with a distorted, often inaccurate recurring narrative—practically a script—taught across departments, courses, events, and faculty advocacy. That narrative**

promotes the view that Israel—a tiny country with half of the world’s Jewish population—is the last remaining colonial settler power embodying the world’s worst evils: racism, apartheid, and genocide. The narrative promotes the view that the Palestinian people are innocent victims of Jewish (white) oppression and that known terrorist groups are simply [“political movements.”](#)

**Many Harvard programs and departments, in all or part, promulgate this narrative.**

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) is out in front, followed by the School of Public Health and the Divinity School. Faculty promoting this narrative also span the departments of Anthropology, African American Studies, English, Ethnicity, Migration and Rights, Government, History, Music, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Social Studies, Sociology, Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality, and Visual Arts, as well as Harvard’s Kennedy School, Law School, Medical School, Carr Center for Human Rights, the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, and the Weatherhead Institute of International Affairs

**In 2022-23, Harvard held at least 20 events that spread the virulently anti-Israel narrative.**

Examples include:

- Jerusalem: Examining Settler Colonialism and Undoing Colonial Knowledge Production
- Settler Colonialism, Structural Racism and the Palestinian Right to Health
- Palestine Trek: Bearing Witness to Apartheid, Military Occupation, and Settler-Colonialism
- Colonial Cartography in Palestine-Israel and the Decolonising Potential of Counter-Maps

**In January 2024, [112 faculty joined the new Harvard Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine](#) (FJP). Under the umbrella of [the US Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel \(USACBI\)](#), this new faculty group calls for a boycott of Israel and all companies that “sustain Israeli apartheid, settler colonialism, and systematic human rights.”**

Faculty have the right to voice their opinions and sign documents as individuals. They don’t have the right to post an indisputably antisemitic cartoon, as FJP did in February 2024. While that cartoon was taken down after being criticized, those responsible were never penalized, and the group put an equally offensive post in its place. In protests and the recent encampments, FJP’s faculty and staff have linked arms with Harvard’s version of Students for Justice Palestine to drive the anti-Israel narrative and - intended or not - the subsequent hostility to Jews on campus.

**Partnerships and visiting speakers and professors magnify false narratives and hate.**

- The School of Public Health partners with the terrorist-supporting **Birzeit University** in the West Bank. Birzeit [prohibits Israeli Jews from campus, hosts military parades for Hamas](#), and posted [“Glory for Martyrs”](#) three days after October 7<sup>th</sup>. Harvard students can take a three-week course at BIRZEIT.
- In 2022-23, Harvard hosted Emad Shahin, CMES Shawwaf Visiting Professor, who taught five classes on the modern Middle East, including [Jihad, War and Peace in Islamic Law and Practice](#). (Previously, Shahin had been convicted in absentia of "conspiring with foreign armed groups, including Hamas and the Lebanese group Hezbollah," to destabilize Egypt.) Shahin’s course describes terrorist groups as “contemporary political movements.” A cursory look found this excerpt from the required reading: “[T]he suicide bomber belongs in an important sense to a liberal tradition of armed conflict.”

- Harvard opens its classrooms and event spaces to a steady stream of speakers and fellows with a paper trail of unchecked antisemitism. The views of these speakers include:
  - “Fascists. Terrorists. Colonizers. There is no morally defensible argument for supporting Zionism. [It’s blood-thirsty and violent.](#)”
  - “It’s also a historical fact that [American Jewish immigrants have always been a foundational building block for the white supremacist infrastructure](#) in this country....We know that from the data.”
  - “[Israel tests its weapons on Palestinian children.](#)”
  - “[What happened on 10/7? The burnt bodies were Hamas militants](#) & now we learn Israeli helicopter fire may have killed ravers!”

In rejecting this narrative, one student noted: “In terms of our education... people don't understand what Zionism is. They think it's white settler colonialism. People need to understand the history, not just the Holocaust, but of the Jewish people and why it's so important for there to be a Jewish state.” (Student E) But many students, Jewish and otherwise, don't know this information—and they aren't going to learn it at Harvard. When Harvard's instructors make Israel the world's worst oppressor while omitting facts disputing their claims, students, understandably, believe the one-sided narrative.

**Our review found only a few faculty and programs offering a more balanced or alternative perspective on the Hamas/Israel war or the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.** We found a few at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and some (largely before October 7<sup>th</sup>) at the Law School. An independent auditor will need to find if there is a critical mass of other examples.

**The Center for Jewish Studies (CJS) seems to prefer looking away.** In 2023-24, only one of its 40 courses (besides Hebrew courses) even partially focused on Israel. Between October 7, 2023 and April 2024, only three of CJS' [34 events](#) were on the Israel-Hamas war or the crisis facing Jews worldwide.

### **The Social Media Platform Exclusively Used By Harvard Students is Replete with Unchecked Antisemitism**

This year, Sidechat, Harvard's anonymous social media platform requiring a Harvard email address to log on, included posts like:

- “Gas the Jews”
- “stfu pedo lover! All of you Zionists are the same. Killers and rapists of children.”
- “Pro-genocide soph0more... looks just as dumb as her nose is crooked.”

Posts like these spurred Harvard, in January 2024, to ask Sidechat to better moderate content and restrict access only to undergraduates. After that, un-coded Jew hate perhaps tamped down some. There still are plenty of “life would be better if Zionism did not exist” and “Zionist Nazis.”

### **Harvard's Administration Continues to Be Unresponsive to Most Attacks on Jewish Students**

The Administration has repeatedly ignored Jewish students' complaints despite clear violations of Harvard's [non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies](#). There have been few to no consequences

for the perpetrators of hate speech and bullying. And now we have learned [there will be no consequences for those students, faculty, and staff in the protests and encampments](#) who have made Jews feel physically unsafe, disrupted and imperiled the wider Harvard community, and broken Harvard's own code of conduct.

As one student told us, “The double standard of the Harvard administration is very jarring. A gay law school student was assaulted by another law school student. An email went out to every student at the law school the same day saying that they were suspending the person. It has been three weeks since the assault [of a Jewish student at Harvard Business School], and only one of the people has been removed from an official Harvard position [but not suspended].”

As Freshman Charlie Covit observed: “There have been so many meetings, but nothing has happened.... Why can you scream ‘globalize the intifada’ outside my dorm room, and there is no punishment? What’s going to happen next year when they are choosing not to enforce their rules now?”

The Israeli student who was kicked out of a class for being Israeli said, “First, I reached out to Hillel, and I asked them what I should do. They told me to file a complaint through the DEI [office]. I had a conversation with my Resident Dean and Dean Khurana.... Everyone said, ‘Hey, I hear you.’ But, there was no follow-up.”

We, too, never received a response to an earlier draft of this report, which we shared with Interim President Alan Garber, Dean of the College Rakesh Khurana, and Executive Vice President Meredith Weenick on January 22, 2024. President Garber said he wanted to share the report with his Task Force on Antisemitism. In April 2024, the Task Force’s co-chair, Professor Derek Penslar, said he never got a copy.

## In Conclusion

In presenting this report, HJAA has no intention of stifling free speech or academic freedom. Our objective is to advocate for (as is stated in Harvard’s own code of conduct) “a community that is open, welcoming, and inclusive and that supports all community members in pursuit of the University’s mission of learning, teaching, research, and discovery.” Harvard’s mission also requires a safe learning and non-hostile work environment.

**We reject how the University is balancing free speech and academic freedom with Jewish students’ rights to access an education free from harassment and hate.**

Harvard’s double standard in applying its code of conduct is the basis for HJAA’s first stated request: that the Administration and Corporation “take swift, concrete and public action to enforce the University’s codes of conduct *uniformly and without exception*, and discipline students, faculty and staff who violate them.” A complete list of HJAA objectives is at the end of the report.

We prepared this report to help repair, restore, and strengthen Harvard. We hope it spurs further bipartisan—that is, nonpartisan—investigations at #Harvard and other educational institutions.

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