

# Heightened Antisemitism and Hatred of Israel: A Reflection of Ideological Shifts in American Society and Education

Yaron Gamburg | No. 1799 | December 14, 2023

The October 7 massacre in the western Negev and the subsequent war with Hamas have generated a notable surge in antisemitism and hatred of Israel in the United States. This phenomenon is characterized principally by a high level of hostility displayed toward Israel, numerous violent acts targeting Jews, and significant participation by younger people in protests, particularly Millennials and Generation Zers, many of whom refuse to see Israel as a victim of aggression and, rather, justify the actions of Hamas. These phenomena are deeply rooted in ideological currents that have spread within American society in recent decades, anchored in radical ideologies that emphasize racial, gender, and social inequalities and are heavily influenced by post-modernist thought with anti-liberal tendencies. These views, despite their controversial nature, have been systematically incorporated into both the public and higher education systems, and today significantly shape the perspectives of the younger generation, including approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and attitudes toward the Jewish community.

There was a noticeable outbreak of hostility and antagonism toward Israel among the American public following the October 7 massacre and the outbreak of the war against Hamas. Similar to the anti-Israel sentiment evident during previous rounds of fighting, this current wave of protest was manifested in three principal arenas: demonstrations in urban centers, protests on university campuses, and a sharp rise in anti-Israel and antisemitic content on social media platforms, particularly TikTok and Twitter.

At the same time, the current protests are marked by several features that distinguish it from previous protests, including:

- a. The protestors displayed an unequivocal and unapologetic ideological alignment with Hamas, advocating the liberation of Palestine “from the river to the sea” as a legitimate demand.

- b. There was a noticeable readiness among demonstrators to resort to violence against Jews and supporters of Israel, which has led to multiple antisemitic incidents in urban areas and on university campuses.
- c. Silence, disregard, and delayed or blurred reactions have marked the responses of university administrations to both the October 7 atrocities and the subsequent violence targeted at Jewish students.
- d. A novel form of protest emerged, characterized by the systematic removal of posters with pictures of the hostages posted by supporters of Israel.
- e. The protests were spearheaded by Palestinian and Muslim organizations but also saw significant participation from other minority groups, including anti-Zionist Jewish factions. Prominently, the organization Jewish Voice for Peace played a significant role, organizing events at high-profile locations such as the Capitol in Washington, D.C. and the Manhattan Bridge in New York.

The heightened anti-Israeli and antisemitic hostility in the United States is rooted in radical ideological ideas that have spread across American society and the education system over the past two decades. Beneath these ideological shifts lies the practical adoption and implementation of ideas based on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and radical beliefs about gender, social justice, and anti-colonialism in American public life, including in higher and public education systems.

Originating in the 1970s among US academics and human rights activists, CRT posits race as a social construct rather than a biological reality, embedded in legal systems to perpetuate existing inequalities and power dynamics. A key offshoot of this theory is "intersectionality," linking various forms of injustice worldwide. This perspective equates the oppression of Palestinians and Israeli colonialist occupation with racism against African Americans, discrimination against the LGBTQ community, violence against women, and other global oppressive practices. Thus, it advocates bringing together disparate "oppressed" groups to present a united front against suppression by the majority.

Despite their weak scientific basis and the internal contradictions that were noted already in the 1990s, these views have coalesced into a potent ideological force, influencing the discourse fragmenting American society. The American culture war intensified with the rise of "cancel culture," which has become a pivotal tool for proponents of this new ideology in their opposition to what they perceive as the dominant and "oppressive" majority. The advent of "cancel culture" signified a new phase in the ideological struggle, evolving from a conflict among academic and media circles to various tangible forms, including boycotts, ostracism, and damage

to the reputations and economic interests of those targeted by "cancel" efforts. This culture has harmed free speech by defining the boundaries of acceptable public discourse, significantly heightening political and social polarization in the United States. It has drawn criticism not merely from the right side of the political map, but even from figures such as former President Barack Obama, who warned of the consequences of "cancel culture."

Despite increasing criticism, the radical ideologies gained momentum against the backdrop of a series of dramatic events, particularly after the 2020 killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis policeman. Subsequent years saw a surge in violent incidents, including vandalism and severe confrontations with the police. The post-October 7 antisemitic events likewise testify to a shift toward physical violence. These ideologies are often labeled as "woke," or "wokeness," or "wokism," a term from the African American struggle against racism, signifying "alertness to racial prejudice and discrimination."

The impact of CRT on academic discourse and university administrations has grown steadily, evidenced in the establishment of frameworks aimed at promoting students from all minority groups, with the exception of Jews. Many universities created new departments under the banner of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) to enhance minority student representation and support their integration. These new departments have become padded bureaucratic entities, acquiring notable status and substantial budgets. However, they have fallen short of achieving their stated objectives. Concurrently, public criticism has escalated due to the perceived negative impact of DEI departments on free speech on campuses, undermined academic excellence, and above all, their contribution to greater social polarization within universities. Following the October 7 massacre, DEI offices were notably inactive in addressing antisemitic incidents on campuses, because they do not recognize antisemitism as a form of oppression or discrimination. This stance was highlighted during a recent Congressional hearing with the heads of three elite universities, leading to calls for their dismissal. There has also been public criticism of universities' reliance on donations from Arab countries in the Persian Gulf – \$8.6 billion in donations from 1986-2021, over half of which came from Qatar.

The situation in the US public education system is similarly complex. Since the start of the decade, there has been growing evidence of public schools teaching approaches to race, gender, and social justice based on CRT and other radical ideologies. Parent groups have organized to oppose the inclusion of CRT in school curricula, turning the issue into a significant political battleground in many states.

Conservative governors have attempted to ban such content from study; late in his term, President Donald Trump issued an executive order titled “Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping,” which prohibited federal agencies from endorsing CRT-based views or funding related activities.

President Joe Biden rescinded this order and extended unequivocal support to teachers' unions in curriculum development. As a result, CRT-based education has permeated most state education systems in the US, barring a few conservative states like Florida and Arizona. A 2023 Manhattan Institute study found that a majority of young Americans aged 18-20 have been exposed to CRT and radical gender ideology in public schools. Predictably, American parents have responded: over the last six years, home-schooling has increased by 50 percent, and there has been a 4 percent drop in public school enrollment. Republican circles are responding with new legislative initiatives to facilitate parents' ability to move their children from public, union-controlled schools to private or independent alternatives.

In recent years, there have been increasing reports of anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli material being included in the curriculum of some public schools as part of the study of radical theories. Following the events of October 7, Jewish teachers reported hostility from students, with one incident in a New York high school where students physically threatened a Jewish teacher who had posted a photo of herself attending a pro-Israel rally. While the instances of antisemitic violence in schools are currently less widespread compared to those on campuses, the trend is clear. This hostility is fueled by woke ideology, which casts Israel as an illegitimate state and perceives Jews as part of a privileged white majority, exempt from oppression or discrimination.

Leaders of prominent Jewish organizations, like the ADL, foresaw the harmful potential of these skewed perceptions but were largely ignored. Jewish American commentator Bret Stephens has critiqued woke ideology for its elements that should alarm any Jew: the belief that racial traits define a person's moral worth; a noticeable inclination toward antisemitism; and totalitarian thinking. Despite these red flags, many progressive Jewish groups have long backed these concepts. After October 7, they were shocked to find that none of their allies in these movements denounced Hamas's inhumane brutality. The most effective and swift responses to the situation in American academia came from Jewish philanthropists threatening to withdraw university donations, and business leaders refusing to hire Hamas sympathizers. Members of Congress, predominantly from the Republican Party, went on the offensive, accusing

universities of fostering antisemitism. In contrast, the Democratic administration, which relies on the support of the minority community and teachers' unions, offered a more measured reaction, focusing on sharpening protocols to combat antisemitism and Islamophobia and condemning university leaders at a hearing. This lack of a comprehensive governmental response to the issue of radical educational content ensures that the debate over radical study material will continue to be a point of contention between the political parties.

These developments shape American society and its future generations, with deeply ingrained processes that are impacted by a range of demographic, economic, cultural, and political trends. While the US is Israel's most important ally and these trends are disturbing, Israel cannot directly influence them. However, it is crucial to remember that a strong, stable Israel is the principal bastion for global Jewish communities. Israel can help diaspora Jews face the challenges of new antisemitism by steadfastly upholding its core tenets as the Jewish state: ensuring the security of its citizens, upholding the Law of Return and Jewish immigration from all denominations, and preserving its Jewish and democratic identity.

---

Editors of the series: Anat Kurtz, Eldad Shavit and Judith Rosen