

ZIINESS

WHAT IS HAPPENING AT COLUMBIA?!

Jewish students are being targeted at Columbia University, in the name of justice, by people calling themselves “progressive”.

We must be consistent as progressives and condemn ALL BIGOTRY: Including anti-Jewish bigotry!

Real progressives need to reclaim our space and declare that attacking Jews cannot be done in our name!

There is nothing progressive about antisemitism!



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As progressives, we care about freedom, equality, opportunity, human rights and dignity for all people. We uphold these inalienable rights by fighting for collective liberation—not the liberation of one people at the expense of another.

We know words have power, and we have a moral responsibility to choose them with intention—to avoid quick and easy slogans susceptible to misunderstanding.

For some, the intended goal requires more precise language: a call to free the Palestinian people from oppression, by their own two governments (Hamas and the Palestinian Authority), as well as from oppressive Israeli policies—a call for a Palestinian state, living side-by-side with Israel, in peace.

For too many, the phrase “free Palestine” means ending Israel “from the river to the sea.” This is received by Jews as a call for war, and a call to arms against half of the world’s 15 million Jewish people—**not an anti-war protest.**

There is nothing progressive about wiping out half of the world’s Jews.

We know the images out of Gaza are gut-wrenching and that all people of conscience, including the Jewish and Israeli people, want the war to end. But too many people who claim to want a ceasefire are simultaneously calling for violence against Israelis and Jews.

Even if some of the protestors are committed to non-violence, far too many are using violent language, or even committing violence, against Jews on college campuses in America.

There is nothing progressive about ethnically and/or religiously-motivated violence against student members of a marginalized group. There is nothing progressive about holding American Jews accountable for a war between Israel and Hamas.

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Some, like Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, who claims to be a progressive, have said what is happening at Columbia is simply “targeting and harassment against anti-war protestors, because it’s been pro-war and anti-war protestors.”

Rep. Omar’s framing suggests that the “anti-war” protestors are innocent progressives and that Jewish students are “pro-war” or warmongers. This statement is dangerous and wrong—Jewish students are not pro-war, they are anti-Hamas—and it activates a blood libel, consistent with ancient antisemitic tropes that have resulted in mass violence, often state-sponsored, against Jewish communities all over the globe.

There is nothing progressive about blood libel, or any other classical antisemitic trope or stereotype.

In reality, the protests at Columbia appear not to be “pro-war versus anti-war,” but pro-Hamas versus anti-Hamas. The following are just a few examples of chants and visuals against Jewish students at Columbia over the last several days:

- “Hamas, we love you. We support your rockets, too”
- Signs with Hamas symbols that say “I’m with them”
- “Say it loud and say it clear, we don’t want no Zionists here”
- “October 7 is about to be every day” (the largest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust)
- “Al Qasam [Hamas paramilitary wing] Next Targets →” pointing toward a group of Jewish students singing “One Day,” a song about peace by Matisyahu
- “The seventh of October will happen not one more time, not 5 more times, not 10 more times, not 100 more times, not 1000 more times—10,000 more times”
- “Uncultured a** b*****, go back to Europe, you are all inbred”
- “There is only one solution, Intifada Revolution”
- “Fuck Israel, Israel’s a bitch”
- “We say justice, you say how? Burn Tel Aviv to the ground”

We can’t believe this reminder is necessary, but there is nothing progressive about Hamas.

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In sworn Congressional testimony, Columbia President Shafik said she has not seen any protests on campus against Muslims, against Arabs, or against Palestinians—something we are grateful to hear, and expect will remain true. However, President Shafik and other representatives of the administration admitted that protests at Columbia have been “completely anti-Jewish” and that “anti-Jewish things were said.” One university leader mentioned “an event to harass admitted students who were Jewish” and President Shafik confirmed that there had been “slurs and chants [] Fuck the Jews, death to the Jews, fuck Israel, no safe place, death to the Zionist state, Jews out.”

Yes, hate speech is quintessentially protected in America, and unless there is incitement to imminent lawlessness or violence, universities typically cannot shut down pure speech unaccompanied by expressive conduct. At Columbia, unfortunately, much of this awful language has been connected to physical intimidation, harassment, and violence.

Whether it’s technically free speech or not, there is nothing progressive about this language, this hate, this fury directed at innocent Jewish students.

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It's true that there is a long legacy of progressive protest on university campuses in America—and often those protestors have been proven to be on the right side of history. But there is no righteous comparison between historic pro-democracy, anti-war protests to what is going on at Columbia today. The chants and images directed at Jewish students are not anti-war, they are pro-violence—as long as the violence is felt by Jews, whether here on American campuses or half a world away in Israel. There is no opportunity for this activism to help Palestinians in any way—it is purely anti-Jewish.

Moreover, these chants have been accompanied by harassment and violence: Jewish students have been hit in the face, punched, pushed, encircled and threatened. Their property has been forcibly taken away, their flags burned in front of their faces. An Arab Israeli activist was attacked trying to speak to a protestor in Arabic.

There is nothing progressive about violence, theft, harassment, or physical intimidation.

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As progressives, we should care deeply about the Palestinian people, and refuse to allow that care to over-simplify this complex conflict. Progressives must simultaneously do everything possible to avoid internalizing age-old antisemitic tropes, ideas and stereotypes that are systemic in our society and our world. There are too many who use the label “progressive” who have shown a callous indifference to Jewish pain and trauma; too many who say they “don’t have a problem with Jews,” their problem is with “Zionists”—a word core to Jewish identity that implies support for Jewish liberation in the Jewish people’s native homeland. Too often, they caricature Zionism with age-old antisemitic ideas, or more contemporary ones, like settler-colonialism, apartheid, or genocide—without really understanding these words or the dangerous and often bloody consequences of invoking them.

There is nothing progressive about refusing to confront implicit biases or bigotries, or refusing to be willing to learn about the heinous history of antisemitism.

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As progressives, we are conditioned to identify and respond to the real threat of white nationalism, which has been rising across our nation and world. Too often, we see that threat as the only threat—and feel inclined to consider a protest “peaceful” if it is led by people using the label “progressive.”

Too often, too, progressives misinterpret the Jewish experience or Jewish history to identify the Jewish people as “white”—a label which does not comport with the racialization of Jews as “impure perverters of the white race” to justify their mass extermination—an experience of Jews within our lifetime. Flattening Jewish identity to whiteness leads too many to write off Jews as “privileged”, which justifies the belief that Jewish pain is deserved, comparatively minor, exaggerated or weaponized to deflect from Jewish or Israeli wrongdoing. This perverse framing suggests that Jews are too powerful to need allyship or solidarity.

There is nothing progressive about ignoring, erasing or invalidating the pain and trauma of a historically persecuted minority community.

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As progressives we need to be clear about our boundaries.

It is progressive to care about Palestinian and uplift their suffering. It is not progressive to demonize or dehumanize Israelis or Jews.

It is progressive to want to free Palestinians from oppression. It is not progressive to want to destroy Israel or the Jewish people in the name of Palestinian freedom.

It is progressive to support the right to peaceful, non-violent protest and the right to free speech, no matter how provocative. It is not progressive to support harassment or physical intimidation, or incitement to violence, or actual violence.

It can be progressive to be pro-Palestinian—but not if you are anti-Israel, and certainly not if you are anti-Jewish. The true progressive position is to be clearly pro-humanity—and anti-antisemitism.