

# [***American Jews and Israel: It's Complicated | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BY3-WRY1-DY68-12YH-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** The encampment on George Washington University's campus was loud and triumphant.

**Body**

The encampment on [*George Washington*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/george-washington?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) University's campus was loud and triumphant. Brown University had decided to seemingly cave in to their pro-Palestine group that had been camping out on the central space the school calls "the Green," earlier in the week. Next October, student protesters will be allowed to present a case before a board for the university to cut ties with anything related to Israel's war machine.

Of course, other schools, like UCLA and University of Texas at Austin and Columbia University had gone a different way, with arrests and the suspension of the student protesters. But the key point undergirding the excitement that I saw yesterday at the encampment seemed to be that things were *moving!*

"From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free!" was the incessant refrain. Up on the temporary rostrum, men and women (big children playing at ***politics*** and filled with the joy of righteousness) were waving enormous Palestinian flags and carrying bullhorns. Sometimes there were "inspiring" words shouted out, sometimes the chants switched to Arabic. Chances that 95 percent of the people in the keffiyeh-wearing crowd knew what was being blared were near zero.

It was a relief that the people leading the crowd on were showing their faces. The vast majority of the tent-dwellers and hangers-on were masked, some—in a grotesque parody of covid days wearing the good-old KN-95s. Others had wrapped their Arab headdresses around their mouths, expecting a sandstorm to spring up on a humid day in the middle of the concrete and asphalt of downtown Washington, D.C.

Self-identified faculty and staff who were part of the mob stood at the intersection where the encampment began, walking east. They held the kind of large banner that usually precedes a marching band at a St. Patrick's Day parade. Holding it up as if waiting for a photograph to be taken. I, obligingly, took one. It's a bit dull, so you won't see it here. Other members of the faculty walked up to the line and began shaking hands in solidarity.

Around a corner and a block away—with only a [*Starbucks*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/starbucks?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) in between—a smaller rally in support of the Jewish students of GW was being held. Adults from all around had made the trip downtown to support these kids, many of whom spoke of feeling unwelcome at a place where their parents spent [*up to $80,000 a year*](https://www.google.com/search?q=george+washington+university+total+cost&newwindow=1&sca_esv=b51f433a1d832308&sxsrf=ACQVn0-PWFJEF1LEBmi9PsO_8rqTAloI9w%3A1714742004868&ei=9OI0ZuyONNKp5NoPppu96Ak&ved=0ahUKEwjs2NLgx_GFAxXSFFkFHaZND50Q4dUDCBA&uact=5&oq=george+washington+university+total+cost&gs_lp=Egxnd3Mtd2l6LXNlcnAiJ2dlb3JnZSB3YXNoaW5ndG9uIHVuaXZlcnNpdHkgdG90YWwgY29zdDIFEAAYgAQyBhAAGBYYHjIGEAAYFhgeMgYQABgWGB4yBhAAGBYYHjILEAAYgAQYhgMYigUyCxAAGIAEGIYDGIoFMgsQABiABBiGAxiKBTIIEAAYgAQYogQyCBAAGIAEGKIESMteUABY0ltwBHgBkAEAmAGiAqABjyCqAQYzMi45LjK4AQPIAQD4AQGYAi--wHCAhYQABiABBhGGPsBGJcFGIwFGN0E2AECmAMAugYGCAEQARgUugYGCAIQARgTkgcJMzUuMTAuMS4xoAerzQY&sclient=gws-wiz-serp). The colorway of the day was blue and white, with a sizeable number of Israeli flags in the crowd.

Here, any of the speeches focused on the hostages taken on Oct. 7 as part of the terror spree that killed 1,200 people in Israel. One hundred thirty-three people are still held by [*Hamas*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hamas?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) in Gaza, though no one knows how many are still alive, or the violence they have suffered. Judging from the brutal acts of Hamas on that Saturday, including torture, sexual violence, and the beheadings of children, these past seven months must have been worse than hell for the civilian prisoners.

Speakers included family members of those hostages—signs with photos of the missing were held up by the crowd—but mostly the people in front of the microphone were college students at GW, American University, the University of Maryland and other institutions.

The relationship between Jews and Israel is undoubtedly confusing to people who are not Jewish (and to many who are). Many Jewish people feel an enormous affinity for the Jewish State, some because of family ties; some because of the history shared by those of us who have had the audacity to live openly as Jews outside our ancestral homeland over the centuries; and some out of religious devotion. A call to celebrate next year in Jerusalem ends every Passover celebration.

But to be in favor of an idea, or even a place, is not to accept all its faults. Nor is it a desire to be a part it. All Jews are invited to immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return (we call it making Aliyah), but few of us do. We choose to be American, and it's a choice we make every day.

To be Zionist is to be in favor of an idea and ideal. It is a desire for self-determination, safety, and acceptance, not a blessing on Prime Minister [*Benjamin Netanyahu*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/benjamin-netanyahu?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) or his policies. But safety and acceptance, regardless of an individual's ***politics***, is in increasingly short supply in the United States, and not to be found in encampments like the one at GW.

A smugness radiated as I walked through but generated no warmth or welcome. Certainly not of ideas that are at variance with the protesters' own. Certainly not among the rigid idealists who have made it their business to take on the cause of a people they do not know, in a region they know little about. They try to fit a narrative of white oppression and colonization on a native people, some of whom came home after finding nothing but violence and hatred abroad.

They certainly have not heard of the millions of Israelis whose families lived for thousands of years either in Israel itself or in Iraq, Syria, Iran, Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco from where they were violently driven out by their Arab neighbors after 1948. (Their skin is often as brown as any Palestinian's). Of the black Jews of Ethiopia, we will not speak.

Jews, who have known little more than loathing and misunderstanding and death in Europe and around the world, believed that they had found safe haven in Israel and in the United States, between which the majority of Jews live. And for a while we had.

As Franklin Foer wrote in *The Atlantic*, that time [*may have come to an end*](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2024/04/us-anti-semitism-jewish-american-safety/677469/).

As the father of a young, proud Jewish son, I hope Foer is wrong.

*Jason Fields is a deputy opinion editor at Newsweek.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2387936/george-washington-university.jpg)

**Graphic**

At George Washington University

Jason Fields

Influencer Lizzy Savetsky spoke to the crowd at the pro-Jewish student rally at George Washington University, on May 2, in Washington, D.C.

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