

# [***The Kids Are Alright | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C0K-HG51-JBR6-90M0-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** If the student-led protests achieve nothing politically in the U.S., they have at least given hope to the hundreds of thousands of Gazans facing violence, famine, and displacement.

**Body**

"Columbia is a far different place today than it was in the spring of 1968 when protesters took over University buildings," reads an apologetic opening line of an article in [*Columbia University's website*](https://news.columbia.edu/content/new-perspective-1968) over their poor handling of anti-war and anti-racism protests. Fifty-six years later, the same establishments [*continue to violently suppress*](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/world-us-canada-68924299) student voices as they protest against a U.S.-backed Israeli "[*genocide*](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68667556)" of Palestinians in Gaza.

It is inevitable for some outside of the encampments—entrenched across university campuses [*globally*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/08/pro-palestine-student-protests-campuses-europe-arrests-police)—to brush past the underlying message of the student-led protests. Blaming the naïvety of youth for not having a dynamic understanding of Middle Eastern ***politics*** falls in line with the history of similar anti-establishment platforms in the United States. Protests against the Vietnam War, for civil rights, again apartheid South Africa, and other demonstrations have all stemmed from student-led movements. They too were repressed at the time. If we are to learn anything from America's past, it is that when the youth speak, we should listen. With time, we discover that many in the past were often on the wrong side of history and apology letters, like Columbia University's, are retrospectively written.

Take the Vietnam War for example. The [*U.S. military*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/u.s.-military?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) engagement in the Southeast Asian country is now considered what many thought at the time: It was "[*doomed to fail*](https://www.history.org.uk/publications/resource/10669/doomed-to-fail-americas-intervention-in-vietnam)." As students took to the ground to protest against U.S. military expansionism at the time, they were met with fatal violence with the [*Kent State University massacre*](https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20240503-kent-state-university-1970-protests-that-shook-the-us) in Ohio at the hands of the National Guard.

Prior to the protests against the Israeli aggression in Gaza, the last time a student encampment was established at Columbia University was in 1985, against apartheid South Africa, a now universally abhorred government, which was not always the case. The 1980s protests were inspired by the [*youth uprising from Johannesburg's Soweto*](https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/june-16-soweto-youth-uprising) that eventually led to the end of South Africa's apartheid government. This shows that these movements do not reflect a "youthful dissatisfaction that seem silly to the experienced," as [*Dan Perry wrote for Newsweek*](https://www.newsweek.com/are-youth-out-control-old-out-touch-opinion-1897577?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), but highlighted the power of protest.

In lazy attempts to delegitimize the pro-Palestinian movements today, claims of terrorism and antisemitism are branded in much the same way as terrorism and anti-white racism were labelling anti-apartheid protests. Like many forms of Palestinian resistance, the African National [*Congress*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/congress?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) was labeled by the U.S., U.K., and other governments worldwide [*as a terrorist organization*](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/african-national-congress-19281#:~:text=The%20ANC%20was%20condemned%20as,ban%20was%20repealed%20in%201990.). Nelson Mandela, a global hero, Nobel Peace prize winner, and U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient remained on the [*U.S. terrorist watch list up until 2008*](https://time.com/5338569/nelson-mandela-terror-list/). Labeling anyone as a terrorist or antisemitic immediately discredits their opinion and is used to silence Palestinian movements.

If the claim that the protests were dangerous to Jews are true, why then are many American Jews actively participating in the protests? Jewish Voice for Peace is a Jewish advocacy organization and has been an [*avid supporter of the pro-Palestinian protests*](https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/2024/05/03/jvp-statement-on-the-attack-on-the-ucla-student-encampment/). Many of these supporters have been visibly Jewish, from [*wearing Star of David necklaces*](https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-05-09/are-you-a-zionist-checkpoints-at-ucla-encampment-provoked-debate-among-jewish-students#:~:text=Members%20of%20Jewish%20Voice%20for,encampment%20on%20campus%20May%202.) to kippahs. Jewish participants even celebrated the [*Jewish holiday of Passover*](https://www.cbsnews.com/philadelphia/news/protest-at-penn-philadelphia-seder-passover/), organizing joint prayers and meals at the encampments.

The claims of antisemitism are an indolent conflation that anti-Israeli (a Jewish-supremacist nation state) rhetoric is the same as anti-Jewish (an Abrahamic religion) sentiments. The two are not related. What is antisemitic is to suggest that all Jews must share one political ideology.

There are some bad apples within all revolutionary movements, but spoilers do not negate the entire cause. When Zionist professors in America are spewing anti-Arab or Islamophobic hate, politicians have not extrapolated that the entire Zionist mission is racist despite evidence otherwise. Zionist students at University of Massachusetts Amherst were found [*chanting "kill all Arabs"*](https://theintercept.com/2024/04/24/umass-amherst-palestine-protests-harassment/) at fellow pro-Palestinian students, echoing the chants of "[*death to Arabs*](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/israeli-crowds-chant-racist-slogans-taunt-palestinians-during-jerusalem-day-march)" by Jewish nationalists in Jerusalem in 2023. Ultimately, it was through the [*genocide of Arabs*](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/5/23/the-nakba-did-not-start-or-end-in-1948) during the Nakba that the state of Israel was founded in 1948.

It is disappointing that many have been worried about alleged Zionist-free zones at the student encampments, created to prevent violence at universities, while they remain silent over actual Arab-free zones created in an apartheid Israel through restrictions on movement and [*color-coded ID*](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/may/03/columbia-pro-palestinian-protest-south-africa-divestment)s differentiating Arabs from Jews.

Although the protests have disrupted some classes across universities across America, it is important to remember that only through peaceful protest that change can be made. After all, it was former President [*John F. Kennedy who said*](https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-first-anniversary-the-alliance-for-progress), "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."

If the student-led protests achieve nothing politically in the U.S., they have at least [*given hope*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/01/world/middleeast/us-college-protests-gaza-palestinians.html) to the hundreds of thousands of Gazans facing violence, famine, and displacement. Instead of questioning the protests on U.S. campuses, maybe we should be addressing Israel's aggression and the White House's complicity.

*Ahmed Twaij is a freelance journalist and filmmaker focusing mainly on U.S.* ***politics****, social justice and the Middle East. His Twitter is* [*@twaiji*](https://twitter.com/twaiji)*.*

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

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2391472/pro-palestinian-demonstrators-dance-street.jpg)

**Graphic**

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators dance in the street

Kent Nishimura/Getty Images

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators dance in the street near the George Washington University administrative offices on May 9, 2024, in Washington, D.C.

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