

# [***Berkeley Prof: Proud Jewish Students Will Not Abandon America's Campuses | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BJD-HGR1-DY68-117W-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newsweek.com

March 14, 2024 Thursday 8:41 AM EST

Copyright © 2024 Newsweek Inc. All Rights Reserved



**Length:** 911 words

**Byline:** Ron E. Hassner

**Highlight:** I moved a mattress and suitcase into my office on the U.C. Berkeley campus to support the students and urge campus leaders to educate students, faculty, and staff about antisemitism and Islamophobia.

**Body**

The news for Jews at top-U.S. educational institutions is alarming. At Columbia, Stanford, Harvard, Brown and on other campuses, students have been assaulted and insulted, inside and outside the classroom. A month ago, anti-Israel protesters began illegally barricading the main gate to the Berkeley campus and harassing students wearing Stars of David or T-shirts with Hebrew lettering. Two weeks later, the same protesters attacked Jewish students attending an Israel lecture, broke through the door into the lecture hall injuring several students, hurled antisemitic slurs, smashed glass, and choked another student. Because these violent antisemites lack the courage of their conviction, they are masked and have evaded prosecution so far.

Earlier this week, 300 Jewish students marched peacefully across campus to protest the administration's hapless response to these outrages. [*I moved a mattress and suitcase into my office*](https://www.timesofisrael.com/an-israel-studies-professor-at-berkeley-is-staging-a-sit-in-for-his-jewish-students/) on the U.C. Berkeley campus to support the students and urge campus leaders to educate students, faculty, and staff about antisemitism and Islamophobia.

The students' reaction to my sit-in over the past few days is a source of great comfort and strength. Jewish and non-Jewish students alike arrive in my office/living room by the dozen to eat, chat, find joy in one another's company, and share about incidents of harassment and violence. I have been surrounded by scores of enthusiastic youths who hold their heads high despite slights and intimidation. Community members have contributed food and support. Messages from Brazil to Australia offer courage and comfort. Prospective parents thank me for drawing attention to the plight of Jewish students. Some vow never to send their kids to my campus.

This last conclusion is deeply troubling. Jewish students and their allies cannot afford to abandon elite universities. For one, they deserve the best education they can get. Berkeley has built the largest Israel Studies institute in this country. It has a venerable Center for Jewish Studies, its own Jewish museum, fantastic Hillel and Chabad Jewish student centers, an antisemitism education initiative, and dozens of classes on Israel and on Judaism. If the community does not invest its youth, time, and money in these institutions, they will fade away. Who will fill our classes on the Holocaust, the Talmud, or Israeli ***politics***, if our campus is empty of Jews? Who will mount exhibits at our Jewish museum, or stage conferences on Jewish history, if our Jewish funders channel their support elsewhere? Who will fill Shabbat tables at Hillel or Chabad if all Jewish students flee to parochial schools? Who will vote for Jewish student representatives or compete for spots in Jewish clubs if there are no Jews here?

The goal of antisemites and their anti-Israel allies is to create Jew-free campuses. They do not seek to affect the policies of Israel and can never hope to do so (Israelis care as little about the opinions of U.S. teenagers as Americans care about the opinions of Israeli teenagers). Instead, anti-Israel bigots, BDS agitators, and antisemites hope to scare Jews away from top universities. In the distant past, Jews ran from one place where Jews were persecuted to the next, seeking temporary shelter before the next attack sent them packing again. Zionism now empowers emancipated Jews to run *toward* the places where antisemites lurk, to confidently stand shoulder to shoulder with fellow Jews. It is time for Jewish students and their parents to make that stand and help faculty to stamp out bigotry.

Some Jewish parents tell me that they fear for their children on our campus. That fear is wildly exaggerated. Aggression and violence on campus, unlike anti-Semitic attacks in the world outside campus, are extremely rare. Our Helen Diller Institute for Israel Studies has hosted dozens of talks since Oct. 7, attended by hundreds of students, and teaches a thousand Berkeley undergraduates a year about Israel, all without interruption. What are overprotective Jewish parents teaching their children about their values, confidence, and future? How will these kids face the very real threat of antisemitism, without the "adult supervision" of faculty, after they graduate if we do not teach them today about fighting for their rights on campus?

My motivations for asking Jews to flock to Berkeley are, in part, selfish. I am sleeping on the floor of my office because of students and for students. My colleagues and I are here for them. I hope, in turn, that they and their parents will not abandon us.

If they do flee our campus for fear of antisemites, where will they find refuge? There was a time when only a handful of universities in our country had a reputation for bigotry. The rot of Jew-hatred has now been exposed at all top institutions of higher learning in the United States. Which university will they run from next and where will they go the next time a so-called "anti-Zionist" denies their right to self-determination, their right to self-defense, and their right to a Jewish education?

Enough! This is your campus too! Jews and allies: join me in Berkeley!

*Ron E. Hassner is Helen Diller Family Chair of Israel Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and co-director of the Helen Diller Institute for Jewish Law and Israel Studies. He has been staging a sit-in against antisemitism in his Berkeley office since March 7.*

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

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2362117/rally-against-antisemitism.jpg)

**Graphic**

Rally Against Antisemitism

Andrew Lichtenstein/Corbis via Getty Images

Students hold a rally in support of Israel and demand greater protection from antisemitism on campus at Columbia University, Feb 14.

**Load-Date:** March 14, 2024

**End of Document**