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OPINION UPWARD MOBILITY

Will Jewish Students Be Safe This Fall?

Harvard impanels two task forces and drops suspensions for unlawful conduct.

By [Jason L. Riley](#) [Follow](#)

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Pedestrians walk past the Gaza Solidarity Encampment at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, April 30.

PHOTO: MONICA HERNDON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The national discussion about antisemitism on college campuses that followed the Hamas terrorist attack in Israel last year was welcome and overdue. But as a Journal editorial in December warned, “it won’t amount to much if the only result is the resignation of a couple of university presidents.”

The presidents of the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard resigned, but old habits die hard. And it isn’t clear that Jewish students returning to campus in the fall will feel any safer than they did in the spring, when buildings were occupied, property was destroyed, classes were held remotely, and graduation ceremonies were canceled.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reported this month that Penn suspended several students who were part of an illegal anti-Israel encampment that ended in May with the arrest of 33 people. Yet Penn looks to be an outlier. Last week Harvard reversed an earlier decision to suspend students who participated in pro-Hamas demonstrations on its campus that violated school policy and local ordinances. The Harvard Crimson wrote that it was at least the second time administrators caved in to pressure from student activists and sympathetic faculty members.

“The decision to drop the suspensions and ease charges against other disciplined students represents a dramatic reversal,” the Crimson explained. “It’s not the first time Harvard has flip-flopped in its attempts to take disciplinary and administrative actions against pro-Palestine protesters. The College initially placed 20 members of the encampment on involuntary leaves of absence before reinstating them just days later, after the occupation ended.” The editors said that by going easy on the student activists, “Harvard may have further emboldened pro-Palestine student groups ahead of the return to campus in September.”

At Columbia, where protesters called for Tel Aviv to be “burned to the ground” and said that “Zionists don’t deserve to live,” three deans were caught mocking Jewish students’ concerns about antisemitism on campus. In text messages with one another, the deans dismissed Jews as privileged, implied that their complaints were overblown, and suggested people on campus were exploiting wealthy Jewish donors. “Amazing what \$\$\$\$ can do,” read one of the messages.

After the texts were made public, Columbia announced that the officials would be held accountable. A Columbia spokesperson said the school was “committed to combatting antisemitism and taking sustained, concrete action to ensure Columbia is a campus where Jewish students and everyone in our community feels safe, valued, and able to thrive.” Nevertheless, the deans were placed on leave rather than fired. What are the chances that a school official who made similarly disparaging remarks about gay or Muslim or black students would still have a job at Columbia?

On too many elite campuses, little seems to have changed. Schools are making a show of addressing antisemitism, but they’re also equivocating. At Stanford University, anti-Israel students broke into the building that houses the offices of the president and provost. An

instructor told students that “Israel is a colonizer” and tried to justify the Hamas attack. The school responded by announcing the formation of one task force to investigate antisemitism and another to investigate anti-Muslim sentiment on campus.

Harvard likewise was incapable of addressing hostility toward its Jewish students without pretending that Islamophobia at the school is a problem of equal significance. Is anyone surprised that Harvard and Stanford concluded, in separate reports unveiled last month, that one is the flip side of the other? “Harvard’s task forces on antisemitism and anti-Muslim bias each found a climate of discrimination and harassment on campus,” according to the New York Times. The report concluded that “the situation for pro-Israel students was ‘dire’ and that pro-Palestinian students were being suppressed.” How convenient!

The inability or unwillingness of our elite schools to clean up their act helps to explain why future employers are taking matters into their own hands. Sullivan & Cromwell, a top Wall Street law firm, announced last week that it will screen applicants from top universities to determine whether they participated in antisemitic campus protests. Rival law firms have already implemented the practice, as have federal judges looking to hire law clerks. To the extent the other employers in other professions decide that products of elite schools who exhibit such hatred need not apply, these institutions will be forced to re-evaluate what constitutes tolerable student behavior.

The same higher-education elites who want to punish people on campus for using the wrong pronoun are quick to defend free speech in the service of political causes they support. But disrupting classes, threatening fellow students and calling for the genocide of Jews isn’t protected speech. It’s unlawful conduct, and it shouldn’t be indulged at our colleges and universities.

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