

NEWS & POLITICS

The DEI Complex Will Never Protect Jews

The problem isn't that the system—of affinity groups, diversity officers, microaggression policing, and more—hasn't included Jews until now. It's that the system itself is dangerous.

BY ARMIN ROSEN

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HE VAST DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND inclusion (DEI) complex has sucked away incalculable sums of money and institutional energy and now all but defines the purpose of American higher education. For this industry to overlook the needs and anxieties of Jewish students during the toughest times they've ever faced would invite hard questions about what campus DEI is even for. Surely, there's no way the DEI establishment, a former oddity of higher education that rose to shape the morals, sentiments, and business models of the mainstream corporate, entertainment, and cultural world—would botch something so simple as providing basic moral or rhetorical support to a besieged minority group when the stakes are this high. If the DEI offices' hearts aren't in it—Jews being rich white people

whose near ancestors just happened to have been the Nazis' chief targets—they could at least feign a strategic interest in Jews, thus protecting themselves from future accusations of willful neglect.

Young Jews have never felt more alone on American campuses as they have during these past two weeks. Classmates and soon-to-be-former friends have rallied in large numbers to celebrate the burning and torture of 1,400 Israelis. Professors have announced their glee at the redemptive spilling of settler blood.

University administrators who treat every scratch of racist graffiti as a kind of communitywide soul-murder have discovered a newfound sense of nuance when faced with the 21st century's worst butchery of Jews.

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It is irresponsible and self-indulgent for Jewish college students to plead with administrators to protect them. The administrators see what's happening and don't care. They understand their role better than you do. Adapt to reality and move on.

8:08 AM · Oct 25, 2023



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The nation's army of campus DEI staff

presumably exists for moments like this one, where an already unpopular minority group confronts an unanticipated surge of stress and potential danger. Yet DEI offices haven't even bothered with pro forma expressions of fake concern. This week, I called or emailed over a dozen equity divisions at prominent colleges and universities to ask whether they had released any statements, held any events, or created any new programming for Jewish students since the Hamas rampage of October 7 and the wave of campus unrest that followed. The answer is no—of course not.

The fact Jews put their names on buildings and otherwise lavishly support many of these institutions apparently makes no difference to DEI bureaucrats. For example, I received no response from any of the diversity czars at the

University of Pennsylvania, where internal dissension over the administration's refusal to condemn the Hamas attack has already cost the most Jewish of Ivies hundreds of millions in pledged funding.

One of the few responses I did receive came from the University of Michigan—which makes sense, since according to a 2021 Heritage Foundation report, the school had 163 DEI employees, the most in the nation. A representative of the university directed me to two statements from Santa J. Ono, the school's president. Neither announcement made any specific mention of Jews, while the list of “support resources” appended to each press release did not include any service that the university Office of Diversity, Equity and

Inclusion was itself offering. Which is as clear an answer as one might ask for, I guess.

The City University of New York might have just purged the final Jews from the institution's 80-member senior leadership team, but a staffer still helpfully pointed me toward two post-attack statements from Chancellor Felix Matos Rodriguez. His short concern-blurbs from October 7 and 9 deserve credit for naming Hamas as the perpetrator of the violence that set off this latest round of war. Still, the latter statement contains a startling admission that CUNY campuses have become an incubator of sympathy and justification for some of the darkest acts imaginable. "We want to be clear that we don't condone the activities of any internal organizations that are sponsoring rallies to celebrate or support Hamas' cowardly

actions,” Rodriguez wrote in anticipation of these exact events. “Such efforts do not in any way represent the University and its campuses” he continued—a suggestion that according to his own statement is clearly false.

George Washington University, the site of an act of vandalism against a Torah in 2021, is so serious about social justice on campus that the website of its Office for Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement puts a self-flagellating land acknowledgement at the very top of the page: “We acknowledge the truth that is often buried: We here in the D.C. area are on the ancestral homelands of the Piscataway, Anacostan, and Nacotchtank Peoples, who were among the first in the Western Hemisphere. We are on Indigenous land that was stolen from the Piscataway, Anacostan, and Nacotchtank. We

pay respects to the Piscataway, Anacostan, and Nacotchtank elders and ancestors. Please take a moment to consider the many legacies of violence, displacement, migration, and settlement that inform and impact us all.”

Impressive, no doubt. Yet the university’s equity bureaucrats apparently did not take a moment to consider the plight of Jewish students horrified at the butchery in Israel and the celebration it provoked among their peers.

When asked what that office itself did the week of October 7, I was directed toward two statements from university President Ellen M. Granberg—who, I should add, deserves credit for being one of the very few in higher education to describe the Hamas attack in appropriate moral terms. “We know there is a long and complex history associated with this

conflict,” she wrote. “Still, this does not justify the evil we have collectively witnessed.”

“If the DEI offices’ hearts aren’t in it—Jews being rich white people whose near ancestors just happened to have been subjected to the Holocaust—they could at least feign a strategic interest in Jews, thus protecting themselves from

future accusations of willful neglect.”

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Given the dearth of replies by either phone or email, it became necessary to look through Twitter feeds, event schedules, and recent announcements on the universities’ DEI pages in order to ascertain their level of activity in response to the worst crisis Jewish college students have faced lately. On Oct. 18, the Twitter feed of the Rutgers University Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community posted a

pair of graphics about “meeting the moment with humanity.” In one of them, the #RUWorkforinclusion hashtag appeared below a quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who was once one of the world’s leading opponents of the existence of the State of Israel. The office did not put out any statement in the immediate wake of the October 7 assault, although it did host a webinar on “micro-inequities” on Oct. 17. Presumably, even according to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the mass slaughter of Israelis might qualify at least as a “micro-inequity.” However there was no sign Jewish students were particularly encouraged to attend that or any other Rutgers DEI event.

Not to be outdone by its less rarefied rival to the north, the University of Virginia’s Division for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion held events on

microaggressions on both Oct. 17 and Oct. 18. Those who missed “I Felt That: Intro Microaggressions” must have been a little lost at “I Felt That: Microaggressions—The Remix (Intermediate)” the following night. The idea that the survivors of the Hamas massacre and their fellow Jews on campus might have also felt something worth recognizing was nowhere in evidence.

The University of North Carolina saw a faceoff between mourners and celebrants of the Hamas attack that nearly turned violent. Jewish students and their campus allies—assuming they have any—might have looked at the resistance enthusiasts in their midst and wondered in horror at exactly who they’d been going to school with. If they’d looked at the University Office for Diversity and Inclusion’s

web page, they'd have found an infographic about "inclusive excellence."

Nobody picked up the phone when I called Michigan State University's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, whose website includes handy and potentially disgrace-preventing instructions on how not to botch a land acknowledgement ritual. "Although land acknowledgements are powerful statements," the guide reads in boldface type, "they are only meaningful when they are coupled with authentic and sustained relationships with Indigenous communities and community-informed actions." Those of a Talmudic cast will be intrigued to learn that there is both an official land acknowledgement for Michigan State University and a shortened land acknowledgement for Michigan State

University that satisfies the rigors of equity Halacha. No one at the school's DEI office seems to be acknowledging the turmoil of the university's Jewish students, though.

For the past two weeks, DEI offices have had a chance to show they can be responsive to the real-life needs of young people facing a scary and unfamiliar crisis. But these offices clearly do not exist to serve Jews, or wish to recognize Jews might be capable of feeling pain, even when their friends and co-religionists have been slaughtered en masse. That's because DEI bureaucracies don't exist to serve actually existing people of any background. The purpose they serve is a theological one, and dogma enforcement is a big part of what universities do these days. The aforementioned Heritage study found that in the aggregate,

there were 1.4 times as many DEI staff as history professors across the 65 institutions surveyed. “Promoting DEI has become a primary function of higher education,” the report observed.

An equity office’s job is to engineer the values of the rising elite so that DEI and the wider ideological edifice it serves will remain powerful, protected, and even feared. These bureaucracies are not burning through institutional capital in order to salve the anxieties of Jewish students, because helping students was never the point. Their ambitions are of a different order: DEI embodies the moral authority of a larger system for distributing status and power. It doesn’t care about actual human beings—and as we’ve

learned since the massacre of October 7, it especially doesn't care about Jews.

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