

A Call to Moral Clarity: Rejecting Antisemitism as a Political Wedge

We, as Rabbis and Cantors, are deeply committed to fighting the rising tide of antisemitism in the United States. The resurgence of this age-old hatred is alarming, and we unequivocally stand against it in all its forms. We must also be clear: the way in which the Trump administration claims it is combating antisemitism is not about protecting Jews — it is instead overtly abusing the issue to divide Americans, undermine democracy, and harm other vulnerable communities.

History has shown that the safety and flourishing of American Jews are tied directly to the health of our democracy. As Rabbi Michael Knopf reminds us, “as democracy recedes, Jews become increasingly imperiled.” This is why we cannot allow the fight against antisemitism to be twisted into a wedge issue, used to justify policies that target immigrants and other minorities, suppress free speech, or erode democratic norms. Antisemitism is real, and it must be fought, but not by those who traffic in its imagery and tropes to suit a partisan political agenda.

Detaining and deporting student activists without due process, even if we as Jewish clergy strongly disagree with their perspectives or rhetoric, will not ultimately make our community safer. Already, we have seen students arrested without a warrant, sent to detention centers without their families being notified, and threatened with deportation without a hearing. Immigrant students have been targeted not only because of their alleged political views and participation in protest, but because the Trump administration is laying the legal groundwork and administrative framework for more mass deportations, testing boundaries to see what the public will tolerate.

The president’s attacks on universities are straight out of the autocratic playbook. As Jacob Miller, a Jewish student leader at Harvard, points out, “politicians are seizing on Jews as their perfect political pawns.” Defunding universities, threatening to deport student protesters, and using Jews as a justification for authoritarian tactics does not make us safer; it makes us more vulnerable. We reject these cynical attacks on higher education — institutions that have long been strongholds of Jewish academic and cultural life — under the pretense of protecting Jewish students.

Rabbi Sharon Brous powerfully stated recently, “these actions themselves constitute a form of antisemitism.” Capitalizing on Jewish fear to justify oppressive policies does not fight antisemitism; it distorts its meaning and undermines the very democratic structures that protect us all. It is alarming that some of the same political actors who now claim to champion Jewish safety have also defended Nazi sympathizers, promoted antisemitic conspiracy theories, and sought to dismantle civil rights protections.

We affirm the Jewish teaching that “God is One” — a reminder, as Rabbi Elliott Tepperman teaches, that our liberation is bound up with the liberation of all people. We reject efforts to pit us against other marginalized communities, even at times of disagreement, knowing that when any group is targeted, all are at risk. American Jews have always stood for democracy, free

speech, and justice — not just because these values are moral, but because they are essential to our safety and our future.

We call on our fellow Jews, Jewish institutions, and all people of conscience, to remain vigilant against the real dangers of antisemitism across the political spectrum while refusing to let the fight against it be co-opted for authoritarian ends. We must stand firm in our values: protecting democracy, defending the vulnerable, and building a society where no community is used as a political pawn — because we are only safe when everyone is safe.

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