



[The Hypocrisy Behind Efforts to Suppress Anti-War Free Speech](#)

In response to growing outrage regarding Israeli human rights violations in Gaza, anti-war demonstrations have sprung up at universities across the United States. These have been particularly notable at schools in states such as New York, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Michigan, including Columbia University, New York University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Yale University, Harvard University, Stanford University, and the University of Michigan. Many of the student coalitions and groups that have been taking part in the overwhelmingly peaceful rallies have conveyed disappointment at the distorted media coverage, stating that they are “frustrated by media distractions focusing on inflammatory individuals who do not represent” the movement, with these instigators often being non-students detracting away from the majority. Doing so paves the way for a system of collective punishment, whereby students who are lawfully exercising their right to freedom of expression in order to draw attention to an ongoing injustice are unfairly targeted and suppressed based on the alleged actions of a few. They have also pointed out that the main threat posed to the safety of students at these universities is the harassment and intimidation tactics used by school and security officials, not the solidarity gatherings themselves. As such, prominent social justice advocacy organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) have accused some university officials of creating a climate of repression and harm for students peacefully protesting for an end to Israeli human rights abuses against Palestinians in Gaza.

The clamping down and suppressing of anti-war free speech is a theme that is commonly observed, and this has only become more apparent since the onset of the War on Gaza back in October. Among those in academia, both students and faculty face resistance for speaking out against injustices towards Palestinians. This suppression is problematic, as it runs counter to standards of academic freedom and the rights of free speech and expression. There have been numerous instances of people in this sector being blacklisted, fired from jobs, having job offers rescinded, or losing out on other opportunities – all for merely exhibiting support for Palestinian human rights. In one high-profile recent case, the University of Southern California (USC) announced that it decided to cancel the commencement speech of its 2024 valedictorian Asna Tabassum. The move was made under the guise of “unspecified safety concerns,” but was clearly due to Tabassum’s pro-Palestinian online advocacy. In the aftermath of the decision, hundreds of students and faculty members have taken part in peaceful marches on campus opposing it, and a petition calling on USC to reinstate Tabassum’s speech has garnered over 40,000 signatures.

One of the most widely-used forms of censorship related to the issue, the labeling of legitimate and justifiable criticism towards the Israeli government’s actions as antisemitic is inaccurate and dangerous, because it is used as a tool to shield Israel from fair rebuke by suppressing anti-war free speech. Furthermore, it disregards the diverse nature of the voices that are speaking out in support of human rights, which includes an array of citizens from various ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. In fact, a large number of those participating in the anti-war and pro-human rights solidarity demonstrations, on college campuses and elsewhere, are young Jewish Americans. Valid criticism of Israeli war crimes and human rights abuses is not the sole thing that can quickly elicit accusations of antisemitism – so do rally chants as well. While human rights activists highlight that the chant “from the river to the sea” merely expresses a desire for Palestinian dignity and recognition, biased defenders of Israel claim that it advocates for its destruction. Impartial experts point out that the phrase is simply a call for the dignity and full civil rights of Palestinians, and thus labeling it as antisemitic in any way is inaccurate. There is also a blatant double

standard when it comes to focus on the phrase, as Israel's Likud party platform literally demands that "between the sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty," yet this does not get criticized in the same manner.

Despite the attempts to suppress and discourage anti-war free speech, it is heartening to see the sheer volume of principled citizens who continue to try and draw attention to injustices against Palestinians. This is evident in the ever-increasing number of students at colleges throughout the country that are standing up for Palestinian rights. Inspired by ongoing demonstrations at other schools and the burgeoning momentum of the solidarity movement, students are gathering on campuses by the hundreds and calling on their universities to cut ties with companies that are contributing to Israeli human rights violations in Gaza. Among their aims are for entities to halt doing business with military weapons manufacturers that are supplying arms to Israel. All told, the expanding prevalence of the anti-war protests and rallies, even in the face of various forms of intimidation, shows the extent of the deepening discontent with Israel's destructive War on Gaza.