

Anti-Israel Activity on Campus, 2014-2015: Trends and Projections



INTRODUCTION

Student groups seeking to control the message about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on campus continue to sponsor and promote programs and initiatives which seek to isolate and punish Israel.

Many of the groups and individuals engaged in this anti-Israel activity have initiated programs and actions promoting [Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions](#) (BDS) campaigns against Israel. The founding goals of the BDS movement and many of the strategies employed in BDS campaigns are anti-Semitic. While not all advocates of BDS are anti-Semitic and may be driven by perceived legitimate criticism of certain Israeli policies toward Palestinians, many individuals engaged in BDS campaigns are driven by opposition to Israel's very existence as a Jewish state. In ADL's view, denying solely to the Jewish people a universal right— that of self-determination – is fundamentally anti-Semitic.

While BDS campaigns on many campuses are still in the planning stages, over 150 explicitly anti-Israel programs have taken place or are scheduled to take place on U.S. campuses so far this academic year, marking a 30% increase from last year when there were 105 similar programs scheduled to take place during the same timeframe. At the same time that these events have been taking place, anti-Israel groups have hurled accusations suggesting that the pro-Israel community is engaged in a collective effort to stifle their speech.

[American Muslims for Palestine](#) (AMP), the leading organization providing anti-Israel training and education to students throughout the country, started the new school year by launching their second annual "International Day of Action for Palestine on College Campuses." The AMP initiative called for students to launch actions and boycotts to "end the Zionist influence on our university campuses."

At least twenty-one campuses answered AMP's call to action through sponsoring anti-Israel rallies, teach-ins and discussions. At the University of California-Davis, for example, the campus [Students for Justice in Palestine](#) (SJP) chapter, the [Jewish Voice for Peace](#) (JVP) Bay Area chapter, and Davis Stands with Ferguson held a silent demonstration where participants held signs with slogans such as "Long Live the Intifada" and "From Gaza to Ferguson the Right 2 Resist."



Students at UC Davis protesting at the "International Day of Action for Palestine on College Campuses" (October 2015)

Prior to AMP's latest call, student groups on many U.S. campuses had already begun to organize anti-Israel programs. For example, at Brooklyn College, the campus SJP chapter conducted a "die-in" where students layed on the ground smeared with fake blood simulating Palestinians allegedly killed by Israel. The New York City chapter of SJP also recently invoked [anti-Semitic stereotypes](#) in a statement promoting the Million Student March, a national day of protest over tuition fees, student debt and wages for campus workers. The group referred to those who run the City University of New York (CUNY) as a "Zionist administration."

In addition, academic departments have sponsored or co-sponsored anti-Israel events on at least ten campuses. For example, on September 15th Israeli anti-Zionist author [Miko Peled](#) spoke at an event at Michigan Technological University, which was sponsored by the Center for Diversity and Inclusion. [Remi Kanazi](#), an Organizing Committee member of the [US Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel](#) (USACBI), spoke at John Jay College at an event co-sponsored by the Department of Gender Studies.

This report will discuss anti-Israel activity so far this and the major increase in anti-Israel activity that took place during the [2014-15 academic year](#), when groups like SJP organized over 30% more campaigns and events intended to delegitimize Israel than in the previous year. These efforts, on some campuses, resulted in increased tension between pro-Israel and anti-Israel students, and at times also created an atmosphere where pro-Israel students felt uncomfortable voicing their views.

Also, since the beginning of 2014, many student groups have also organized events which couched hostility towards Israel in social justice terms and linked the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to other causes such as the BlackLivesMatter movement. These sorts of events were quite common last year and anti-Israel student groups received increased support from other minority student-groups on many campuses. It appears that this trend is continuing this year.



A student at the Brooklyn College "Die-in" (October 2015)

ANTI-ISRAEL PROGRAMMING AND BDS CAMPAIGNS DURING THE 2014-15 ACADEMIC YEAR

During the 2014-15 academic year, university and college campuses in the U.S. experienced a major increase in anti-Israel programming and Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns against Israel. Student groups sponsored at least 520 anti-Israel programs on U.S. campuses in 2014-15, a 38% increase from the 375 anti-Israel campus programs during the previous academic year. Many of these programs promoted false claims about Israel, including that Israel is an apartheid state or that it is not interested in achieving peace with the Palestinians.

In addition to organizing anti-Israel programs, student groups also initiated 29 BDS campaigns on U.S. campuses in 2014-15, a 21% increase from the 15 BDS campaigns in the previous academic year. Student governments or student bodies actually voted on and sometimes debated 19 of the 29 campaigns. From those 19 votes, there were ten campaigns that received endorsement from either their student government or student body, compared to five from the previous year, marking a 100% increase in the number of BDS campaigns that received endorsement.



Students at the University of California-Davis after a BDS resolution was passed (January 2015)

Although none of the resolutions or referenda are binding on the college or university, or are likely to alter university policy, these initiatives created a divisive atmosphere on some campuses. For example, at Loyola University, leading up to the student government vote on a BDS resolution, there was a week-long program organized called “Loyola Divestment Week,” which featured several events promoting BDS and the Loyola divestment campaign. Before the program began, Loyola’s President, Father Michael Garanzini, published an open letter to the Loyola community stating that the university would not take up the matter of divestment and that the Loyola BDS campaign had created a divisive atmosphere that “pits student against student.”

The polarizing effect of the BDS campaign at Loyola University was also visible during and after the student government vote on the BDS resolution, as students reacted on Twitter with the hashtag “#LoyolaDivest.” One student remarked on Twitter during the vote that there were a “handful of privileged white people on one side of the room” and that the “rest of humanity [was] on [the] other.” Another student followed up

with the same sentiment and wrote “Never understood ‘white tears’ more than now – white jewish [sic] students are ‘uncomfortable’ while the Palestinians are suffocating,” and lastly, another student celebrated that the campus Hillel was allegedly losing members, claiming that “#divestment made them uncomfortable and afraid” and that, “That’s a win for #LoyolaDivest no one should join Hillel.”



Tweets from pro-BDS students during and after the student government BDS vote at Loyola University.

On other campuses, many student groups also organized programs that effectively worked to demonize and delegitimize Israel and Zionism, while promoting BDS campaigns as just and non-violent solutions to the problems at hand. Examples of these programs included guest speakers who promoted false allegations about Israeli apartheid and racism; rallies and protests that decried alleged Israeli human rights violations such as ethnic cleansing, and in some cases weeklong programs such as Israeli Apartheid Week, Anti-Zionism Week, or Palestine Awareness Week, which continued to wane in popularity, but took place on dozens of campuses last year.



A mock checkpoint promoting BDS, setup during Palestine Awareness Week at University of Michigan (October 2014)

Out of the 520 anti-Israel events that took place last year, ADL tracked over 50% which focused on various elements of the BDS movement and BDS campaigns. Through these events, which were almost always open to the public, anti-Israel student groups attracted increased attention to their campaigns and also garnered more support on campus from students, faculty, and various student groups than in previous years. Furthermore, anti-Israel student groups also made an additional effort this year to disseminate informational materials, sometimes on a weekly basis, to promote BDS campaigns and false allegations about Israel.

ADL believes that this uptick in anti-Israel programming and BDS campaigns is a result of increased organizing by non-campus groups such as AMP, [Jewish Voice for Peace](#) (JVP), and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). All three groups sponsor programs to assist students on campus with BDS campaigns and their national conferences often include specific sessions for students to discuss BDS strategies and past success. The increase is also likely related to students beginning the 2014-15 academic year with increased momentum as a result of rallies and demonstrations that took place in the U.S. during Operation Protective Edge, the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza during summer 2014.

In addition, JVP, the largest Jewish anti-Zionist group in the U.S., has at least eight active campus chapters. It recently created an Academic Advisory Council, composed of professors, faculty, and scholars. Also, Ramah Kudaimi, Membership and Outreach Coordinator for the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, recently led a social media training webinar for campus organizers who plan on launching new BDS campaigns against Israel. This shows how outside organizations such as JVP have made it a priority to assist and influence anti-Israel campus activity.

CONCERTED EFFORTS MADE IN COALITION BUILDING

In addition to sponsoring an increased number of anti-Israel programs and BDS campaigns, campus chapters of groups like JVP and SJP also appeared to make a concerted effort to engage in coalition building with various groups on campus that focused on a consortium of issues. Together, the groups co-sponsored events and signed onto statements endorsing each other's causes, which effectively sent a message to the general campus community that their missions were aligned.

Through concretizing these alliances, anti-Israel student groups were able to garner increased support for BDS and other anti-Israel initiatives from diverse student groups that they previously had been unable to reach. In past years, it was almost always SJP and its affiliates that were responsible for initiating BDS campaigns and organizing anti-Israel programs. However that changed over the past year, as SJP and its partners on campus worked to broaden support for BDS and other anti-Israel initiatives by backing different movements and offering support to various groups.

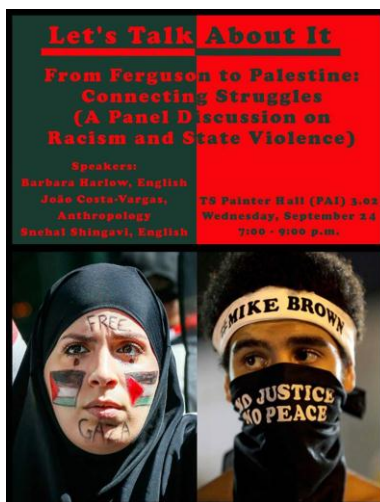
At the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year, the U.S. headlines were dominated by high profile police brutality cases that took place in Ferguson, Missouri and New York City. As the news that summer also frequently focused on Gaza and Operation Protective Edge, SJP chapters around the U.S. seized the opportunity to connect the unrelated events through sponsoring programs on campus, which linked the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to police brutality in the U.S. and attracted new audiences to the call for BDS.



Pro-BDS Protesters at Loyola University (December, 2014)

This trend of connecting Israel to issues of police brutality in the U.S. continued throughout the school year, as students continued to link problems in cities such as Baltimore and New York City to Tel-Aviv and the West Bank. Anti-Israel groups and individuals went about this through sponsoring panel discussions on the topic, writing articles in campus newspapers, and by holding signs and leading chants at anti-Israel rallies.

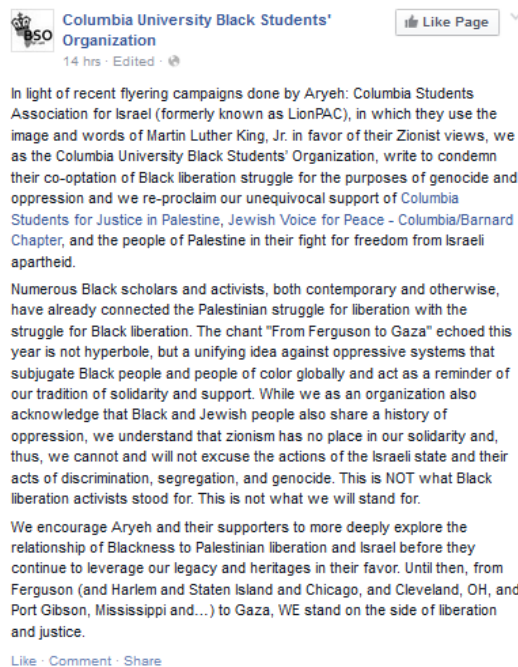
For example, the Palestine Solidarity Committee at the University of Texas-Austin sponsored an event in September 2014 titled “From Ferguson to Palestine: Connecting Struggles,” which featured two UT-Austin professors and was co-sponsored by UT-Austin’s Pre-Law National Black Law Student Association and the Association of Black Psychologists. Students from various SJP chapters also held signs at an April 2015 protest outside of the Israeli Consulate in New York City with slogans such as “From Baltimore to Palestine Occupation is a Crime” and “Black Crimes = Gang Violence, Arab Crimes = Terrorism, Hispanic Crimes = Illegal Immigration, White Crimes = Self Defense + Mental Illness.”



A flyer which promoted the “From Ferguson to Palestine: Connecting Struggles” program at the University of Texas-Austin (August, 2014)

Another example of anti-Israel groups delivering similar messages occurred at the University of California-Berkeley during a March 2015 presentation by anti-Israel journalist Rania Khalek titled “Palestine: A Laboratory for Global Repression.” In her comments, Khalek accused Israel of fostering the repression of minority populations around the world through the exportation of military technology tested in Gaza, and she also compared Israel to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), claiming that ISIS and Israel “have shared values.” Furthermore, Khalek proclaimed that Israel’s economy functions through the persecution of the Palestinian people and she stated that “it’s going to continue to function as a factory for cutting-edge repression technology that sustains and reinforces racism and inequality and white supremacy around the globe.”

At Columbia University, both the SJP and JVP chapters gained support from Columbia’s Black Students’ Organization (BSO). The BSO issued a statement on Facebook in support of both SJP and JVP and against a Columbia pro-Israel student group called Aryeh: Columbia Students Association for Israel. In the statement, the BSO condemned Aryeh for a flyering campaign which used the image and words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The BSO condemned the Aryeh flyers because of their “co-optation of Black liberation struggle for the purposes of genocide and oppression” and encouraged the group and its supporters “to more deeply explore the relationship of Blackness to Palestinian liberation and Israel before they continue to leverage our legacy and heritages in their favor.”



The Columbia University Black Students’ Organization (BSO) statement in support of Jewish Voice for Peace and Students for Justice in Palestine (April, 2015)

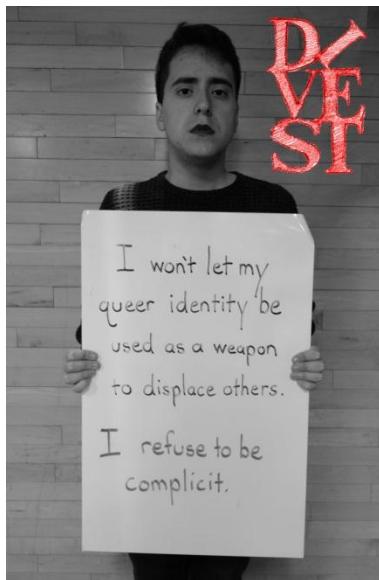
These types of partnerships on campus paid off for SJP and its partners who worked to create diverse coalitions that initiated and endorsed BDS campaigns. These sorts of groups were formed on many campuses, including at Northwestern University, Stanford University, New York University, University of Pennsylvania, Marquette University, Princeton University, University of Texas-Austin, University of Michigan, Loyola University, and University of California-Davis. The names of the groups varied from

“Stanford out of Occupied Palestine” at Stanford University, “NU Divest” at Northwestern University, or “Penn Divest from Displacement” at the University of Pennsylvania, but for the most part left out any mention of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The last group, which was formed at the University of Pennsylvania in March 2014, was composed of eight existing student groups on the Penn campus - Penn Amnesty International, Penn Arab Student Society, Penn Disability Advocates, Penn for Immigrant Rights, Penn Non-Cis, Penn Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Student Labor Action Project and Students Organizing for Unity and Liberation. While the involvement of familiar anti-Israel groups was no surprise, more unexpected was the inclusion of groups that emphasize the rights of immigrants, LGBT individuals, the working class people, individuals with disabilities, and African-Americans.

In the group’s mission statement, they claimed to be targeting several corporations for divestment and stated that they were principled and unbiased when selecting companies by outlining multiple “displacements” as objects of their activism, including the “[disproportionate incarceration of] black, Latino and indigenous people” in the U.S.; environmental destruction on “Native lands;” the displacement of “working-class communities” in Appalachia, and the restriction of “marginalized communities both at home and abroad — immigrants in the U.S., and Palestinians under occupation.”

One of the group’s most effective outreach campaigns was their “Faces of Displacement” series, which featured photographs of Penn students holding up signs that stated, “We refuse to be complicit” followed by personal accounts of their connection to displacement. Of the 14 individuals photographed, four specifically mentioned Palestinians, including an LGBT student who denounced Israeli “pinkwashing,” which is the theory that Israel tries to showcase its progressive record on LGBT issues as a way to whitewash its policies towards Palestinians.



An individual photographed in Penn Divest from Displacement’s “Faces of Displacement” series.

The only other topic mentioned more frequently in the series was the “gentrification” of West Philadelphia – which was not listed as one of PDD’s delineated issues, and would not be addressed by divesting from the listed corporations – illuminating the group’s ability to galvanize support from the larger community.

ANTI-SEMITIC INCIDENTS ON CAMPUS

While it is important not to conflate anti-Semitism with every incident of anti-Israel activity, the rise in anti-Israel events on college campuses contributes to what some students experience as a hostile campus environment.

While most incidents of anti-Semitism on campus are unrelated to anti-Israel activity, sometimes anti-Israel activity does cross the line to anti-Semitism. The clearest example of this is the March 2015 incident involving the student at U.C.L.A., Rachel Beyda, who was subjected to discriminatory questioning about her fitness to serve as a member of a student board because she was Jewish. It turns out the students who raised questions were active proponents of the BDS campaign on the U.C.L.A. campus.

Other examples of anti-Semitic incidents on campus in the 2014-15 academic year include:

- In October 2015, anti-Jewish messages and large swastikas were keyed into the hood of 11 cars outside of an apartment complex on the University of California-Davis campus.
- In May 2015 at Drexel, a student came back to his residence hall to find a swastika and the word “JEW” taped next to his Israeli flag.
- Swastikas were spray-painted inside the house of a Jewish fraternity (Alpha Epsilon Pi) at [Vanderbilt University](#) in March 2015.
- At the University of California, Berkeley, the phrase “Zionists should be sent to the gas chamber” was found in a campus restroom in March and a swastika was found on a university owned building in February 2015. In February 2015, three swastikas were drawn inside a George Washington University residence hall.
- In September 2014, anti-Semitic fliers alleging that “9/11 was an outside job” and that “9/11 was Mossad” were posted on the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara.
- The night after Yom Kippur in 2014, two backwards swastikas were painted on the columns of the Alpha Epsilon Pi House, a Jewish fraternity, at Emory University.

ADL tracks anti-Semitic incidents, including those on campus in the annual [Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents](#). While data collection is not yet complete for the 2015 calendar year, ADL reported a total of 47 anti-Semitic incidents on 43 different college campuses in 2014, compared with 37 such incidents in 2013. While there has been an overall decline in recent years, this represents a 27 percent increase from 2013, or nearly one incident per week. These statistics only represent what is reported to ADL. Many other incidents still go unreported.

While such incidents are certainly disturbing, it is important to note that these incidents are relatively rare, and the vast majority of Jewish students report feeling safe on their campuses. When such incidents do occur, they are generally condemned by administrators and the wider campus communities at their respective colleges.