Inclusion Delusion: The Antisemitism of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Staff at Universities

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Contrary to their responsibilities, university diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) staff often contribute to hostile conditions for Jewish students.

Searching Twitter feeds of 741 DEI personnel at 65 universities shows the vast majority of tweets on Israel are critical to the point of being antisemitic.

By comparison, these same DEI staff devote one-third as much attention to China as Israel on Twitter and are mostly favorable toward the communist country.

Universities ostensibly employ diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) staff to create more tolerant and welcoming environments for students from all backgrounds. A previous Heritage *Backgrounder* documented that the number of people devoted to DEI efforts has grown to about 45 people at the average university.[1] This *Backgrounder* examines whether these large DEI staff are, in fact, creating a tolerant and welcoming environment on college campuses. In particular, this *Backgrounder* examines the extent to which DEI staff at universities express anti-Israel attitudes that are so out of proportion and imbalanced as to constitute antisemitism.

To measure antisemitism among university DEI staff, we searched the Twitter feeds of 741 DEI personnel at 65 universities to find their public communications regarding Israel and, for comparison

purposes, China. Those DEI staff tweeted, retweeted, or liked almost three times as many tweets about Israel as tweets about China. Of the tweets about Israel, 96 percent were critical of the Jewish state, while 62 percent of the tweets about China were favorable. There were more tweets narrowly referencing "apartheid" in Israel than tweets indicating *anything* favorable about Israel whatsoever. The overwhelming pattern is that DEI staff at universities pay a disproportionately high amount of attention to Israel and nearly always attack Israel.

While criticism of Israel is not necessarily antisemitic, the inordinate amount of attention given to Israel and the excessive criticism directed at that one country is evidence of a double-standard with respect to the Jewish state, which is a central feature of a widely accepted definition of *antisemitism*.[2] Frequently accusing Israel of engaging in genocide, apartheid, settler colonialism, ethnic cleansing, and other extreme crimes while rarely leveling similar criticisms toward China indicates an irrational hatred that is particularly directed toward Jews and not merely a concern for human rights.

The evidence presented in this *Backgrounder* demonstrates that university DEI staff are better understood as political activists with a narrow and often radical political agenda rather than promoters of welcoming and inclusive environments. Many DEI staff are particularly unwelcoming toward Jewish students who, like the vast majority of Jews worldwide, feel a strong connection to the state of Israel. The political activism of DEI staff may help explain the rising frequency of antisemitic incidents on college campuses[3] as well as the association between college and graduate education and higher levels of antisemitic attitudes.[4] Rather than promoting diversity and inclusion, universities may be contributing to an increase in anti-Jewish hatred by expanding DEI staff and power.

The Context

There has been a sharp increase recently in antisemitic incidents worldwide,[5] in the United States,[6] and particularly on college campuses.[7] According to Hillel International, the main university organization for Jewish students, there were 244 antisemitic incidents reported during the mostly virtual 2020–2021 school year compared to 181 during the prior year when everyone was on campus for in-person instruction.[8]

DEI staff are supposed to be working to prevent such incidents rather than foment them. According to the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education Standards of Professional Practice, "Chief diversity officers work with senior administrators and campus professionals

to develop, facilitate, respond to, and assess campus protocols that address hate-bias incidents, including efforts related to prevention, education, and intervention."[9] DEI staff are supposed to prevent hate/bias incidents directed at any student group: "Chief diversity officers have ethical, legal, and practical obligations to frame their work from comprehensive definitions of equity, diversity, and inclusion—definitions that are inclusive with respect to a wide range of identities."[10]

But the activities of many DEI staff lend credence to the title of David Baddiel's recent book that "Jews don't count."[11] Not only do DEI staff fail to attend to Jewish concerns, including scheduling events on Jewish holidays, but there have been reports of diversity officials expressing antisemitic attitudes. The most prominent example of this from the corporate world was when Kamau Bobb, the head of diversity at Google, wrote that Jews have an "insatiable appetite for war" and an "insensitivity to the suffering [of] others."[12] Amazingly, Bobb was only reassigned to work on STEM education efforts for Google.[13] Bobb let the mask slip by accusing "Jews" of these crimes rather than simply saying "Israelis" or "Zionists." If DEI staff maintain that cover, they might be able to get away with expressing virulent antisemitic statements without even being reassigned to new positions. This *Backgrounder* examines empirically how common these kinds of antisemitic statements are from university DEI staff.

The Method

The previous *Backgrounder*, "Diversity University," identified 2,933 DEI staff at 65 "Power Five" universities. Primarily using Google searches, we found 797 Twitter accounts linked to these DEI staff. Of those 797 accounts, 56 were "protected" so that tweets could not be viewed. That left 741 accounts that could be searched for antisemitic content.

Almost all of these were personal accounts, not operated by the universities themselves. Thus, they provide a window into what these DEI staff believe and how those beliefs may shape their university work.

The publicly available Twitter feeds of these DEI staff were searched for comments related to Israel and, for comparison purposes, China. The specific search terms to find comments related to Israel were *Israel*, *Palestine*, *Palestinian*, and *Gaza*. The search terms for China were *China* and *Chinese*. The searches found all mentions of these terms in the tweets, retweets, and "likes" of tweets associated with these accounts. Researchers coded whether each tweet indicated a positive or negative view toward Israel and China, respectively.

CHART 1

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Staff Tweets about Israel and China

ISRAEL

CHINA

28 positive

133 positive

83 negative

605 negative

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on search of 741 Twitter accounts belonging to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion staff members at U.S. universities. For more information, see the methodology.
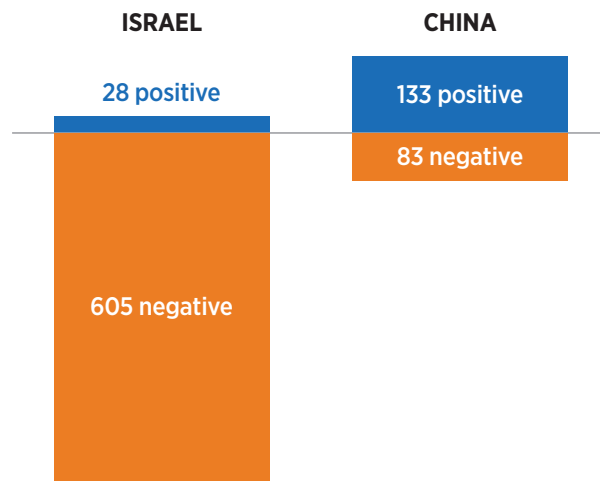
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Of course, this approach does not find all public communications from DEI staff regarding Israel and China. Not all DEI staff have accounts on Twitter. Some accounts may not have been found by Google searches involving their name and institution, especially if individuals avoid mentioning their real name and employer on social media. Some people automatically delete their tweets, retweets, and likes periodically, making it impossible to find earlier communications. People may describe Israel or China using words other than those that were used as search terms. Moreover, the application used to facilitate searching truncates some tweets and places a cap on how many tweets can be searched per user. For all of these reasons, the results presented in this *Backgrounder* are a conservative undercount of public communications. Nonetheless, the patterns that this imperfect method yield are likely an accurate presentation of the broader picture of DEI staff sentiment toward Israel and China.

The Results

DEI staff have a disproportionate interest in Israel relative to China and are far more likely to be critical of Israel than they are of China. In total, there were 633 tweets regarding Israel compared to 216 regarding China—three times as many—despite the fact that China is 155 times as populous as Israel and has 467 times the land mass. China has also had many reasons to be in the news recently, including being the origin of the pandemic, conducting a brutal crackdown on pro-democracy forces in Hong Kong, mass imprisonment and

mistreatment of China's Muslim Uyghur population, increasing confrontation with Taiwan and other countries in the Pacific Rim, and severe internal repression of political dissent and private corporations. One who is genuinely interested in human rights around the world had many more reasons to be paying attention to China than to Israel.

Of the 633 tweets regarding Israel, 605 (96 percent) were critical of the Jewish state. Of the 216 tweets regarding China, 133 (62 percent) expressed favorable sentiment.

Examples of Tweets About Israel

The severe tone and extreme content of the tweets, retweets, and likes critical of Israel are even more illuminating. There is no reason to identify individual DEI staff, but quoting from their tweets and counting the use of hyperbolic rhetoric is important.

For example, the word *apartheid* appears 43 times in DEI staff public communications about Israel. One retweet by a Multicultural Student Affairs staff person asserted that "the State of Israel is guilty of the human rights crimes of apartheid and persecution. Settler colonialism is fundamentally violent. And it begets violence." Another remark retweeted by someone in an Office of Inclusion and Diversity stated that "one cannot teach radical geog/critical urban theory without a curriculum on this settler colonialism & apartheid." A tweet by a Multicultural Student Center staff person declared, "Condemn the Apartheid State of Israel for their Human Rights Violations against the Palestinian." An assistant director of an Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity lamented, "no apology for a pro apartheid Zionist organization holding a reception? I guess there's no justice for Queer Palestinians here."

Some variant of the word *colonial* appears 39 times in tweets, retweets, or likes by DEI staff. A person working for Graduate School Diversity Programs liked the message, "Y'all love to add the word liberal in front of the most evil things and it's unhingedddd. Wtf is a liberal Zionist? What's next? Liberal Nazi? Liberal colonizer? Liberal murderer? Liberal imperialist? Liberal fascist?" One staffer at a Multicultural Student Involvement and Community Advocacy Center endorsed the following: "You cannot disentangle the colonization experienced by indigenous ppl from the racism experienced by black ppl from the xenophobia experienced by latinx ppl from the imperialism experienced by palestinians. They're all different extensions of the same oppressive project." A person in an LGBTQ Equity Center retweeted, "Re Palestine, you gotta understand: there's no 'controversy.' Most people

CHART 2

Frequency of Terms Found in Tweets by DEI Staff Members at Major Universities
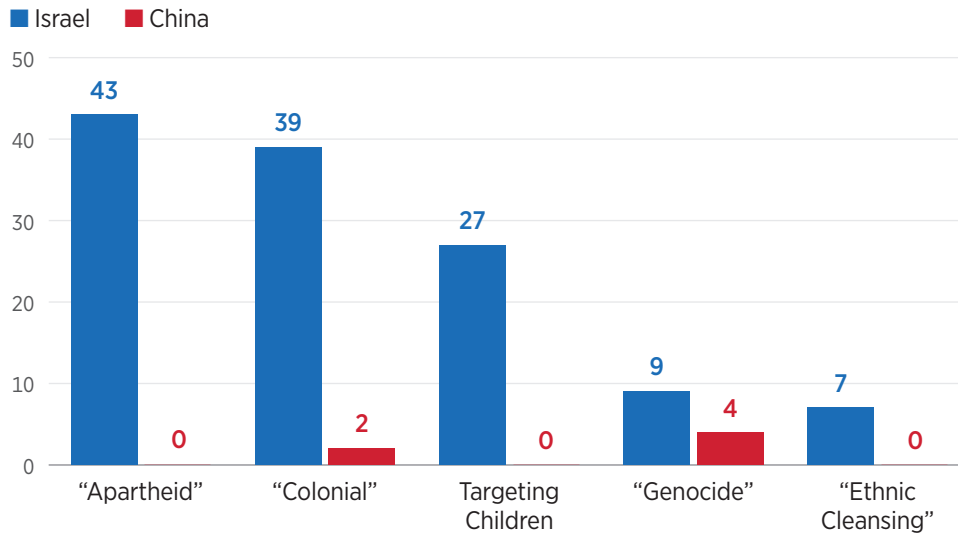
■ Israel ■ China

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on search of 741 Twitter accounts belonging to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion staff members at U.S. universities. For more information, see the methodology.

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around the world know that Israel brutally colonizes the Palestinians. The issue is only 'controversial' because Zionists pitch a fit whenever anybody speaks this truth."

The word *genocide* appears nine times, the term *ethnic cleansing* appears seven times, and the accusation that children are specifically targeted appears 27 times. The assistant director of an Asian Pacific student center tweeted, "#Gaza is under attack. This is genocide. #FreeGaza." One DEI staffer retweeted, "what you need to understand is that these are entire BLOODLINES being wiped out. generations upon generations completely GONE. their indigenous history with them." A staffer in a Center for Educational Outreach retweeted, "israel has a particular loathing for children. they target them with violence specifically and intentionally every single day."

The public communications of DEI staff embrace the genocidal phrase *from the river to the sea*[14] five times. One message declares that "'from the river to the sea' means that we will decolonize every block and every grain of sand in palestine. go ahead and fuel people to make us look like we're bloodthirsty for the death of jews when you've just killed 42 family members

in one airstrike." Another states, "Every Israeli bomb and bullet used against Palestinians and paid for by USA dollars has been consummated by the blood and soil of American Indians. From the river to the sea and from sea to shining sea, we shall be free."

Angela Davis,[15] the former vice presidential candidate for the Communist Party who was accused of supplying the guns that resulted in the killing of a judge, features prominently in DEI staff tweets. So does former CNN commentator Marc Lamont Hill, who was fired by the network for his antisemitic statements.[16] One LGBTQ center staff person who is also an instructor tweeted, "I ordered 'Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique' which I think I'm going to pair with Angela Davis' 'Freedom is a Constant Struggle' in my LGBTQ activism class in the spring!" The director of an African American Cultural Center posted a photo with the following description and quotation from Davis: "The Black Panther Party & a Palestinian delegation at the first Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers, 1969. 'The Black radical tradition is related not simply to Black people but to all who are struggling for freedom ... our histories never unfold in isolation.'—Angela Davis."

While American Jewry is rarely mentioned specifically in these public communications from DEI staff, their alleged role in facilitating Israeli crimes is often in the subtext. An Outreach and Engagement librarian retweeted, "Tell U.S. Jewish leaders: Stop defending #Gaza assault." One multicultural consultant liked the message, "Jewish people are not responsible for the actions of the Israeli government, but we are responsible for calling out violence and human rights abuses when we see them, especially when the people committing the violence claim to be doing so in our name." A DEI staffer at a Big Ten school was clearly describing the supposedly insidious influence of American Jews when he liked this message: "There's a vast philanthropic-lobbying complex in the US that works tirelessly to present Israelis as benevolent, peace-loving, and fundamentally reasonable victims of Palestinian aggression, and meanwhile in actual Israel no one bothers with the pretense."

The relatively small number of tweets, retweets, or likes by DEI staff favorable toward Israel—28 in total—are tepid compared to the fire-breathing tone of those that are critical. Sometimes the praise is mixed with criticism of Israel. For example, a leader of an Office of Diversity and Inclusion liked this mixture of praise and criticism: "Dear Israel, you have a story to tell that is important and often glorious. But you don't tell your story by keeping people out. You tell it by opening your arms, sharing the complexity and challenges and inviting exchange and ideas." An associate dean for diversity and inclusion praised Israel's democracy while denouncing its leader: "The beauty of a democracy is the right of people to elect the wrong person. Jerusalem, Israel."

Other positive comments lamented insufficient attention to Israeli and Jewish contribution to progressive causes: "why no coverage in the media?: Thousands of Jewish protesters join 500,000-strong Women's March... via @timesofisrael." But most of the favorable tweets were about trips to Israel, Israeli scientific innovations, or expressions of support for memorials. The closest thing to a full-throated defense of Israel can be found in this tweet liked by an associate at a Multicultural Engagement Center: "The Jewish people are indigenous to Israel, the birthplace of our identity and unique culture, and have maintained a documented presence for over 3,000 years." But this tweet is the only one like it among the more than 600 tweets, retweets, and likes found in DEI staff Twitter feeds.

Examples of Tweets About China

The favorable tweets about China also tended to be more tepid than those that were critical, but they were far more common. For example, some positive tweets focused on partnerships between the DEI staff person's U.S. university and government or educational institutions in China. One Big Ten DEI official stated, "A real pleasure to meet China's Vice Minister of Ag and Rural Affairs Han Jun in Beijing last night to discuss Ag and food innovation.... Wonderful conversation with great plans for the future." An assistant provost at another university praised the success of her institution's president at establishing partnerships with Chinese universities: "President Stresses Internationalization Opportunities on Trip to China. [University president] signed five cooperative agreements with Chinese universities and was a featured speaker at an event for globalization in academia."

Another common type of tweet favorable to China was to extoll China for its efforts to combat COVID-19. An associate dean for diversity, equity, and inclusion endorsed this message: "Chinese medics have just arrived in London to help us fight Covid-19. The media won't tell you for some reason." A multicultural consultant at another university affirmed, "Thank you to psychologists from Wuhan, China for helping @APA to learn from their experiences of #COVID and improve our ability to care for the #mental-health & needs in the #USA."

Other DEI staff expressed favorable sentiment toward China to counteract what they perceived to be anti-Chinese bias. A staff person at a Center for Multicultural Affairs expressed concern: "when are people going to realize that anti china propoganda [*sic*] directly correlates with a rise in hate crimes against Asians."

A few people offered strongly worded praise of China. An LGBTQ staff person seemed to think that it would be better to be a trans person in China: "i wonder a lot if it would feel easier to come out to my parents if i was a ~binary trans woman~ or what the f*** ever b/c they at least have a frame of reference for trans women celebrities in China." Another DEI staff person endorsed this tweet from the *People's Daily* newspaper in China touting how China had improved the lives of people in Tibet: "China's Tibet Autonomous Region had lifted 530,000 people out of poverty during the five years to 2017, reducing poverty rate to 12.4% from 32.3% at the end of 2012, the regional poverty relief office said Friday."

The smaller number of tweets regarding China that expressed criticism tended to focus on human rights issues. An associate dean for diversity and inclusion retweeted, "Human rights experts estimate that 1.5 million Uighur Muslims and members of other ethnic minority groups, including Chinese-born Kazakhs, have been detained in Xinjiang since 2016." The assistant director of campus inclusion and community responded to a *Bloomberg* news headline that said, "China looks at cutting inequality in order to boost the economy" by asking, "Good for China. But also are they still doing that Muslim genocide? Why we ain't also talking about that?"

A number of negative tweets about China addressed the treatment of African residents in China. An associate provost for inclusive excellence retweeted, "In China, African residents are alleging anti-black racism resulting from the coronavirus pandemic." Others expressed concern about Chinese efforts to use technology for surveillance. An assistant dean for equity and inclusion endorsed these concerns: "Google built prototype of a censored search engine for China that links users' searches to their personal phone numbers, thus making it easier for the Chinese government to monitor people's queries."

The extreme language used in tweets regarding Israel almost never appeared in tweets regarding China. There are no occurrences of the words *apartheid* and *ethnic cleaning,* nor is China ever accused of targeting children in these tweets, retweets, and likes. The term *colonial* does appear twice, but it is used favorably toward China. For example, one tweet asserted that people "talk about China like a British colonial officer from 1850." The term *genocide* does appear four times in tweets about China, but that is less than half as common as the term was used with respect to Israel.

The overall picture, however, is that DEI staff were less likely to offer criticisms of China than of Israel, and those criticisms tended to be less strongly worded. It would be impossible to review the inordinate attention that DEI staff pay to Israel relative to China, the nearly universal attacks on

Israel versus general praise of China, and the dramatically different tone used in discussing Israel and China without concluding that DEI staff have an obsessive and irrational animus toward the Jewish state.

The Definition of *Antisemitism*

Some people might object that just because DEI staff express criticism of Israel frequently and forcefully does not necessarily mean that they are antisemitic. According to a widely accepted definition of *antisemitism*, however, criticism of Israel constitutes antisemitism when it exhibits certain characteristics. This definition was formulated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)[17] and has been endorsed by governmental bodies around the world, including the European Parliament, the U.S. State Department,[18] and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights,[19] which oversees the activities of DEI staff at universities.

The IHRA definition suggests the following as examples of antisemitism:

- "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor";

- "Applying double standards by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation";

- "Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis"; and

- "Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel."

The tweets, retweets, and likes of DEI staff documented here provide instances of all of these antisemitic qualities. The frequent use of terms such as *apartheid* and *colonialism* are meant to portray Israel as a racist endeavor and deny its right to exist as the homeland of the Jewish people. The forceful denunciation of Israeli responses to rocket and terrorist attacks prominently feature a double standard, as only the Jewish state is expected not to defend its citizens in a way that all other countries would. The sparsity of criticism of China relative to Israel is also strong evidence of a double standard. Accusing Israel of genocide or ethnic cleansing is clearly meant to equate Israeli policy with that of the Nazis. And demanding that U.S. Jewish leaders denounce Israeli actions or accusing them of hypocrisy for failing to do so are clear examples of holding Jews collectively responsible for Israel's behavior.

Conclusion

According to Gallup data, 95 percent of American Jews support Israel.[20] While that figure is lower among younger Jews, a large majority of Jews at American universities feel connected to the state of Israel as part of their Jewish identity. Even if the hyperbolic and obsessive criticism of Israel expressed by university DEI staff did not meet the definition of *antisemitism* (which it clearly does), attacking a central feature of Jewish students' identity would be entirely contrary to the stated purpose of having DEI staff: to welcome students from all backgrounds, make them feel included, and prevent or address incidents of hate and bias. But it is clear that DEI staff at universities actually function as political activists, articulating and enforcing a narrow and radical ideological agenda.

Truly achieving diversity, especially ideological diversity, and helping all students feel included requires a dramatic change in how universities approach DEI. Existing staff need to be dramatically reduced, and the remaining DEI infrastructure needs to be reoriented toward serving the true purposes of diversity and inclusion.

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