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[**"Antisemitism" and Antisemitism**](https://substack.com/app-link/post?publication_id=310897&post_id=159072868&utm_source=post-email-title&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=3dhwo&token=eyJ1c2VyX2lkIjo1NjY4NTg0LCJwb3N0X2lkIjoxNTkwNzI4NjgsImlhdCI6MTc0MTk3MDAwNiwiZXhwIjoxNzQ0NTYyMDA2LCJpc3MiOiJwdWItMzEwODk3Iiwic3ViIjoicG9zdC1yZWFjdGlvbiJ9.RjAz2S8LXv__KfZTrtlJ7VwzpNOq5P3wQB8FKVWaemA)The abuse of the word and the spread of the phenomenon

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*"And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath." Esther 3:5*Fascism places emotion over reason. Words are to become just tools to achieve the vision of the Leader. In our [post-truth](https://substack.com/redirect/6c296803-36c7-4218-bbd0-a4a593e5ed30?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) world, this takes the very [special form](https://substack.com/redirect/02f9d212-691f-4432-a88e-c40fe8715015?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) of the inversion of meaning: fascists call other people "fascists" and antisemites call other people "antisemites." This is taking place right now, in the United States, before our eyes, at the highest levels of our government.An example from abroad might help us to see what is happening. The notion that all of Russia's enemies are the "fascists" has become [more entrenched](https://substack.com/redirect/02f9d212-691f-4432-a88e-c40fe8715015?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) as the [Russian state](https://substack.com/redirect/831b76be-25f4-490f-a4f0-7d8663354e98?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) has become [fascist](https://substack.com/redirect/727dba7c-ee5b-46b3-93fa-ecd8f030f19a?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE). Putin has for fifteen years justified his actions by reference to the leading Russian [fascist thinker](https://substack.com/redirect/92dfa463-c4c8-4ede-8dd4-cde9aef0593a?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE). Russian authorities ludicrously justified their full-scale invasion of Ukraine as a struggle against antisemitism. They claimed, absurdly, that it would amount to "denazification" if they overthrew the democratically-elected president of Ukraine, who is of Jewish origin, and installed their own government. This is fascism in the name of "fighting fascism." And it is antisemitism in the name of "fighting antisemitism."[**Upgrade to paid**](https://substack.com/redirect/2/eyJlIjoiaHR0cHM6Ly9zbnlkZXIuc3Vic3RhY2suY29tL3N1YnNjcmliZT91dG1fc291cmNlPXBvc3QmdXRtX2NhbXBhaWduPWVtYWlsLWNoZWNrb3V0Jm5leHQ9aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZzbnlkZXIuc3Vic3RhY2suY29tJTJGcCUyRmFudGlzZW1pdGlzbS1hbmQtYW50aXNlbWl0aXNtJnI9M2Rod28mdG9rZW49ZXlKMWMyVnlYMmxrSWpvMU5qWTROVGcwTENKcFlYUWlPakUzTkRFNU56QXdNRFlzSW1WNGNDSTZNVGMwTkRVMk1qQXdOaXdpYVhOeklqb2ljSFZpTFRNeE1EZzVOeUlzSW5OMVlpSTZJbU5vWldOcmIzVjBJbjAueUVKN01zaUdkRHQzNzEzTmRQVWpIaTItdVI1MUZBNHFSY2lkVkQ3MVJBVSIsInAiOjE1OTA3Mjg2OCwicyI6MzEwODk3LCJmIjp0cnVlLCJ1Ijo1NjY4NTg0LCJpYXQiOjE3NDE5NzAwMDYsImV4cCI6MTc0NDU2MjAwNiwiaXNzIjoicHViLTAiLCJzdWIiOiJsaW5rLXJlZGlyZWN0In0.ZM-VcIJIW27X_dz1gGCN4-9efLbTtHGExehgBq8UcyQ?&utm_medium=email&utm_source=subscribe-widget&utm_content=159072868)Russian officials have handled the contradiction in various ways. Vladimir Putin says that the Ukrainian president is [not really Jewish](https://substack.com/redirect/b077335d-36d4-4a54-bd30-b7b111b77b07?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE), implying that Putin himself [decides](https://substack.com/redirect/5f84aca0-7774-4aff-a906-0c7bd5bcce3b?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) who is Jewish and what that means. This is a central trope of modern antisemitism, associated most famously with Karl [Lueger](https://substack.com/redirect/c061cccb-54bd-43a4-b40a-f75854e76d3d?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE), who was mayor of Vienna when young Adolf Hitler arrived there in 1908, and who set the ideological tone of the city. Hitler's Holocaust killed about two million Jews in what is now Ukraine, including members of Zelens'kyi's family. The Russian foreign minister [claimed](https://substack.com/redirect/4ea3042d-e84c-497a-a262-0d141b031fcf?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) that Hitler was Jewish. The idea was to suggest that the Ukrainian president, because he is of Jewish origin, is like Hitler. The Russian foreign minister has also questioned whether Zelens'kyi is fully human.The point of repeating antisemitic tropes while claiming to fight antisemitism is to evacuate any meaning from the term "antisemitism" and to erase the lessons of the Holocaust. And there can hardly be a more antisemitic action than that.Antisemitism is a terrible problem in our battered world, and it is worse from year to year, moment to moment. There are antisemites among Americans, among American young people, and among college students. This is no reason, however, to attack higher education or undermine the legal and moral basis of the American republic. Antisemites claim that they themselves can make up what they like about history, they can decide who is a real Jew, that the Jews brought suffering upon themselves. Antisemites meanwhile apply the word "antisemitic" to other people who are simply doing things that the actual antisemites do not like. The absurdity is part of the point: the claim that Jewish democrats are the real antisemites or the real Nazis or the real Hitlers is meant to disorient well-meaning people who assume that there must be some logic somewhere, and to provide guidance for malicious people who actually wish to further antisemitism.I remember a certain feeling of confusion from February 2022 and the initial Russian war propaganda. I am afraid that the same confused atmosphere prevails now in the United States. The American government's war on higher education and freedom of expression is proceeding according to the same antisemitic rules of engagement as Russia's war against Ukraine.The Musk-Trump policy today is to defund, harass and persecute American universities on the grounds that they permit antisemitism. The word "antisemitism" is being used to justify actions that, aside from many other wrongs, will harm Jews, and we should consider whether they are designed to do so.The federal government is [undertaking to deport](https://substack.com/redirect/1f9bc859-074b-4314-9dde-127e0111c6ad?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) [Mahmoud Khalil](https://substack.com/redirect/7b3a9d0d-503b-4328-900d-0d2206932490?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE), a Columbia University graduate, on the grounds that as a student he led protests against the Israeli assault on Gaza. There is no accusation that Khalil committed a crime. He is being singled out, in what amounts to a test case for American authoritarianism as a whole, for the expression of his views. The Constitution protects his right to freedom of expression no less than it protects that right for American citizens. If it does not apply [to him](https://substack.com/redirect/2ccd5c5f-9880-4bf5-b11d-87c21fc6fd87?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE), in other words, it [applies to no one](https://substack.com/redirect/6079fdd3-38c1-4e86-996d-7a47915b1bab?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE).According to Trump, Khalil is the "[first of many to come](https://substack.com/redirect/ec111c77-1c76-49bb-aaa8-84e006f876a3?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE)." Without evidence, Trump associates Khalil in a general way with "pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity." These are slurs designed to generate emotion, and neither Trump nor anyone else in government has provided any evidentiary basis for any of them. The stigmatization of a particular individual and his particular cause is a template for doing the same to other people and other causes. The stigmatization of specific protests at specific universities is being used to delegitimize higher education and freedom of expression."Anti-American activity" is a very broad category of behavior, and of course, when simply defined at a given by the president, perfectly arbitrary. Manufactured fear of Islam and of Palestinians and their allies is being used to justify an assault on the rule of law in the United States.At the same time the word "antisemitism" is also being deployed in a familiar and concerning way. The notion is that antisemitism is such a problem that we should accept obviously authoritarian policies to combat it. But will authoritarianism help Jews? And is this particular policy of deportation in any way designed to support Jewish Americans? This seems unlikely to be the motivation of those who made the policy.Deporting a Muslim who has committed no crime in the name of Jews is not exactly a favor to Jews. It looks more like a provocation by the federal government, designed to generate strife among communities. And making exceptions to constitutional protections of free speech and free assembly in one case undermines the rule of law as a whole.The specific target of the campaign is also revealing. Khalil was a student at Columbia University, now the showpiece of a larger federal assault on higher education. There will be an investigation of sixty American universities for supposedly allowing antisemitic discrimination against their students. This investigation, like Khalil's arrest, is framed as opposing antisemitism and as supporting Jews.(I should say that I have worked for more than two decades at Yale University, one of the [targeted institutions](https://substack.com/redirect/45ea85ea-176d-4dfe-8f5f-2a54109e2c9a?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE), where I have taught the history of the Holocaust, sat on the advisory group of the [Yale Program for the Study of Antisemitism](https://substack.com/redirect/878f0268-57c7-4169-8266-5e58d1e41481?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE), and served as faculty advisor for the [Fortunoff Archive of Video Holocaust Testimonies](https://substack.com/redirect/bd4d9f0c-fbd4-40eb-8e6e-d290ddc76832?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE" \t "_blank), one of the early initiatives to collect survivor testimony. I say this for transparency about my own affiliations and commitments, not to speak for colleagues at any of these institutions or for these institutions themselves.)But why was [Columbia put first](https://substack.com/redirect/e9bd3d6e-c2f5-4732-9589-bfbd2d9eb62f?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE)? It is in New York. More than twenty percent of its undergraduate students are Jewish. No matter the experiences or attitudes of these students, their university suddenly losing four hundred million dollars is unlikely to improve their education and life chances. Columbia students can [speak](https://substack.com/redirect/691846d9-d5fe-4df8-934d-9679601fbdf6?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) for [themselves](https://substack.com/redirect/ead734d8-b86a-4604-8898-64f4560f052f?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE). My guess is that Columbia was selected as the symbolic first target less because of the presence of antisemitism than because of the presence of Jews.And I think that this is something that actual American antisemites will immediately have grasped. The city of New York is coded for antisemites as Jewish. The antisemites in America, seeing Columbia and New York punished, will see Jews being punished -- and they will be pleased by this. The same goes for universities as a whole. Universities are often understood by antisemites to be Jewish. The attempt to bring universities to heel will be met by antisemites with approval.

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By American journalistic habit, Musk-Trump's public framing of the anti-university campaign as opposition to antisemitism is accepted. But these basic elements of context are enough to put that into doubt. History teaches clear lessons about breakdowns in the rule of law and about campaigns against cities and universities. These are very often associated with antisemitism. It is very hard, for me at least, to think of historical examples of campaigns against universities and freedom of expression that were intended to benefit Jews. The only reason journalists and the rest of us have to believe that these efforts are made on behalf of Jews is Trump's assurances.But how likely is it that this administration, in fact, would act from a [sincere concern](https://substack.com/redirect/a54d2b39-467a-45b2-aaba-24deae8bedd9?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) for the well-being of Jews?The Trump team recently engaged in an action of [highly public Jew-baiting](https://substack.com/redirect/8a33bbd3-0df9-4c62-93db-3380fb54e429?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) inside the Oval Office. Elon Musk performs the Hitler salute and claims that people whom he does not like are "[Soros puppets](https://substack.com/redirect/8cfdfd46-c705-41f9-9b0c-addd0a5c4259?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE)"; in other words, Musk endorses the theory of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. Musk has [enabled antisemitism](https://substack.com/redirect/ec6b7a7c-b494-4ea3-a722-b4d8e7685e3d?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) by the way he has chosen to [run Twitter](https://substack.com/redirect/0863c8b5-3330-4bd6-a75f-9332f2dbf867?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE). He trivializes the Holocaust by making jokes about Himmler and Goebbels or by blaming [public sector workers](https://substack.com/redirect/0a12b8ac-29cf-4a97-ba5f-b55de7da7c8d?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) for the Holocaust. JD Vance visited Europe in February to endorse the German far right. The secretary of defense is a Christian reconstructionist who [associates with](https://substack.com/redirect/25084cb5-e360-4016-86c5-e6ec9d458cc5?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) a [very well-known promoter](https://substack.com/redirect/a2907419-c916-4502-8277-7b40ff9f6800?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) of antisemitic ideas. Under the new [leadership of the FBI](https://substack.com/redirect/b004e82c-393e-4511-ae1a-11956ef11337?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE), the American far right, the center of American violent terrorism, will receive [much less attention](https://substack.com/redirect/64d904f4-9ce2-4654-a99b-bd34c5e31422?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE). Antisemitic incidents increased during Trump's previous term, during which Trump characterized participants at a neo-Nazi gathering ("the Jews will not replace us," Charlottesville) as "very fine people." Trump says that Jews who do not vote for him [are not loyal Americans](https://substack.com/redirect/1a55522d-bc3a-46c6-8ce6-99deb5e4f837?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE). He refers to people and institutions with whom he disagrees as "globalist," which is a code for "Jewish" that every antisemite understands. His supporters [antisemitically attack](https://substack.com/redirect/d70a5b11-b3fc-4aa2-b1b0-74833f1ab868?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) Jewish judges who rule in ways that Trump does not like, including in the case of Mahmoud Khalil.[**Upgrade to paid**](https://substack.com/redirect/2/eyJlIjoiaHR0cHM6Ly9zbnlkZXIuc3Vic3RhY2suY29tL3N1YnNjcmliZT91dG1fc291cmNlPXBvc3QmdXRtX2NhbXBhaWduPWVtYWlsLWNoZWNrb3V0Jm5leHQ9aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZzbnlkZXIuc3Vic3RhY2suY29tJTJGcCUyRmFudGlzZW1pdGlzbS1hbmQtYW50aXNlbWl0aXNtJnI9M2Rod28mdG9rZW49ZXlKMWMyVnlYMmxrSWpvMU5qWTROVGcwTENKcFlYUWlPakUzTkRFNU56QXdNRFlzSW1WNGNDSTZNVGMwTkRVMk1qQXdOaXdpYVhOeklqb2ljSFZpTFRNeE1EZzVOeUlzSW5OMVlpSTZJbU5vWldOcmIzVjBJbjAueUVKN01zaUdkRHQzNzEzTmRQVWpIaTItdVI1MUZBNHFSY2lkVkQ3MVJBVSIsInAiOjE1OTA3Mjg2OCwicyI6MzEwODk3LCJmIjp0cnVlLCJ1Ijo1NjY4NTg0LCJpYXQiOjE3NDE5NzAwMDYsImV4cCI6MTc0NDU2MjAwNiwiaXNzIjoicHViLTAiLCJzdWIiOiJsaW5rLXJlZGlyZWN0In0.ZM-VcIJIW27X_dz1gGCN4-9efLbTtHGExehgBq8UcyQ?&utm_medium=email&utm_source=subscribe-widget&utm_content=159072868)Like Karl Lueger in Hitler's Vienna, and like Vladimir Putin during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Donald Trump assigns to himself the right to decide who is Jewish and who is not. On March 12th Trump [said](https://substack.com/redirect/b1c5ab1b-0311-4e1a-8a2f-695a4f6a6ad3?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) that Senator Chuck Schumer is not Jewish but Palestinian: "Schumer is a Palestinian as far as I'm concerned. He's become a Palestinian. He used to be Jewish. He's not Jewish anymore. He’s a Palestinian." Trump is using Palestinian here [as a slur](https://substack.com/redirect/65b006ac-4066-4fb0-a180-250d44f6f698?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE), as if it were some lesser human state that can result from wrong action, as opposed to being a normal human identification with a people. He is also, like Putin and Lueger before him, claiming that Jewishness is something that does not belong to Jews, but to those who rule them. It is the rulers who decide who are the good Jews and the bad Jews, the real Jews and the fake Jews. The point of all this is that all Jews, and Jews especially, have to be obedient to the ruler, or else.What, then, to conclude?Americans are being trained to see antisemitism as something other than the oppression of Jews by non-Jews -- which is of course a very real, very dangerous, and [growing](https://substack.com/redirect/a86e9590-644d-42ce-ac11-305bb43c0702?j=eyJ1IjoiM2Rod28ifQ.kFpUcYOwd45YzH5TooVJwc0ePmMsOgRT5XSGDf1wBGE) problem in the world.Rulers who deploy the word "antisemitism" can themselves be antisemites or promoters of antisemitism. The abuse of the word "antisemitism" is meant to generate a sense of plausibility, confuse opposition, and create more space for the actual phenomenon of antisemitism. And this misdirection is an integral part of the effort to replace a constitutional order with an authoritarian one.Jews in the United States are being instrumentalized in an effort to build a more authoritarian American system. The real and continuing history of the oppression of Jews is transformed into a bureaucratic tool called "antisemitism" which is used to suppress education and human rights -- and so, in the end, to harm Jews themselves.As the word "antisemitism" becomes the cover for aggression, we lose the concept. And then, when actual antisemitism manifests itself, there will be no way to describe it, since "antisemitism" will have come to mean something like "the power of arbitrary rulers to suppress freedom of assembly and freedom of speech under cover of disinformation and propaganda." At the moment the word takes on that meaning, such power will have been achieved. Words will have become just tools to achieve the vision of the Leader.[**Share**](https://substack.com/app-link/post?publication_id=310897&post_id=159072868&utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email&utm_content=share&utm_campaign=email-share&action=share&triggerShare=true&isFreemail=true&r=3dhwo&token=eyJ1c2VyX2lkIjo1NjY4NTg0LCJwb3N0X2lkIjoxNTkwNzI4NjgsImlhdCI6MTc0MTk3MDAwNiwiZXhwIjoxNzQ0NTYyMDA2LCJpc3MiOiJwdWItMzEwODk3Iiwic3ViIjoicG9zdC1yZWFjdGlvbiJ9.RjAz2S8LXv__KfZTrtlJ7VwzpNOq5P3wQB8FKVWaemA)Thinking about... is a reader-supported publication. 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