

THE MIRROR | GIANNA IOVINO



“The place where we are supposed to learn and grow into functioning members of society now makes us scared to love who we are.”

RELIGIOUS BACKLASH Junior Cameron Struble and countless others have faced harassment as a result of being Jewish.

Jewish hate

Harassment without consequence

by Cameron Struble

I am a proud Ashkenazi Jew. My religion is present in all aspects of my life and has an impact on how I function on a day-to-day basis. Judaism influences the way I dress and the way I prepare food. During high holidays such as Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, I dress modestly, cover my hair and use that time to bring myself closer to my faith. Learning Hebrew and Yiddish, the languages of my people, is incredibly important to me. I have been lucky enough to have never been personally attacked by hate speech.

However, that does not mean I haven't suffered its effects. Once, when my cousin and I were riding home on the bus, someone called him an antisemitic slur. Another time, someone pulled off my headscarf at school during a high holiday. Most notably, on Dec. 3, 2021, my friends and I truly feared for our lives.

During Chanukah of that year, I was scrolling on Instagram and saw a threat to kill all the Jews at school. I felt terrified to go to school. I feared for my life and the lives of all my Jewish friends. My friend group made a group chat so that we could check in on one another. We all told our parents, and a lot of us asked us to stay home from school. Many of us left school early because we didn't feel safe.

Fortunately, there was no shooting. But the entire situation was incredibly eye-opening. I am so thankful that my teacher at the time gave us a safe space to talk about how we felt.

Although nothing came of the threat, a number of school police surrounded the school. The person who posted the threat was never caught, and I am still furious that this person wasn't looked into further because this one person caused so many students so much fear and pain.

Looking back now, I am deeply saddened

by the hate that fuels people to the point of wanting to hurt other human beings simply for having different beliefs.

Everyday, antisemitic situations strike a little too close to home for Jewish students all across the country.

And with the recent attack on Israel by Hamas, divided opinions on Jews are once again at the forefront of our news and social media feeds.

I believe free speech should have limitations, especially when it comes to hate speech. Yes, it is your right to speak your mind freely, but when those thoughts start turning into threats against people for being of a certain race, religion or sexual orientation, I don't think that should fall under free speech.

Inciting violence is not protected under free speech, and it could be argued that spreading hate speech can influence violence and definitely cause harm to these groups of people. The First Amendment is often used as a cushion for dangerous people to influence young minds to hate, all in the name of free speech.

People often hear the word antisemitic and correlate it with other Semitic languages, like Arabic, Amharic and many others. However, the term antisemitism specifically refers to Jewish hate and discrimination.

A common misconception is that antisemitism started at the beginning of the Holocaust and ended after World War 2. There are also so many harmful stereotypes about the Jewish community that all classify as forms of antisemitism and often get thrown around as “jokes” due to lack of knowledge. Antisemitism is still very much alive today, and now, in the new age of social media, it is more accessible than ever. It is crucial to stay educated on this subject matter. Misinformation and lack of education only fuel the fire of hate and bigotry.

Hate speech should never be considered a joke. The “jokes” aren't funny. These are real people with real feelings, and the fact that a lot of us don't feel safe in our own school speaks volumes. The place where we are supposed to learn and grow into functioning members of society now makes us scared to love who we are.

We need to learn and grow and recognize that actions like those made on Dec. 3 are never okay, especially towards groups of people who are systematically hated.

We should always continue to educate ourselves about those who are different from us. I know there will always be lots of questions surrounding Jewish culture, and I welcome that.

Student Voices

Freedom of speech or freedom to hate?

In the wake of persisting antisemitism, homophobia, racism and sexism, students contemplate the legality of verbal abuses made against certain groups. Some acknowledge that hate speech falls under the umbrella of free speech, even with its hazardous impact, while others reinforce that freedom of speech doesn't give people the right to hurt one another.

Is hate speech free speech?

Devin Martinez
Junior



“Hate speech is a part of free speech if you accept the repercussions of your actions. The First Amendment protects a person from government action against them, but it does not protect citizens from other citizens. If you want to perform your free speech to the world, go for it, but don't be surprised when others do the same and resort to violence.”

Aneliz Venture Muñoz
Senior



“I don't believe that hate speech should be accepted as a part of free speech. It doesn't serve any other purpose than to belittle and discourage others for seemingly pointless things. The foundation of hate speech is to express hate or encourage violence towards a person or group based on something such as race, religion, sex or sexual orientation. The ability to downgrade someone just because they don't fit into old societal norms is stupid.”

Jana Cruz-Morales
Senior



“Hate speech is included in free speech because if it wasn't, then it wouldn't be free speech. If you are giving hate then it's your opinion. Everyone can take someone's opinions however they want to, but if you couldn't include your opinion in your speech then what you can say would be limited and it wouldn't be classified as free speech.”

Max Sandoval
Senior



“Considering hate speech free speech makes it more alarming to be a minority in America. There is little already in place to protect minorities. Including hate speech in free speech puts thousands of Americans in a more heightened state of fear. Already so much hate is targeted towards minority groups, protecting it would amplify acts of discrimination to dangerous levels.”