

How a Group of Mothers Is Taking on Anti-Semitism at America's Universities

A rapidly expanding Facebook group of mothers is leading a pressure campaign against Harvard, UPenn, and other U.S. colleges.



(Illustration by The Epoch Times, Getty Images, Shutterstock)

By Dan M. Berger | Dec 14, 2023 Updated: Dec 15, 2023

A Facebook group of predominantly Jewish mothers saw one of its projects bear fruit when University of Pennsylvania President Liz Magill resigned on Dec. 9, four days after her controversial congressional testimony.

Elizabeth Rand, founder of new group Mothers Against College Antisemitism (MACA), said the thing that really got her back up on the subject was a photo from a pro-Palestinian demonstration at George Washington University that showed an Israeli flag in a garbage can.

Ms. Rand, an insurance lawyer who describes herself as a political moderate, said campus anti-Semitism had never really

been on her radar. It wasn't an issue when she was a student at the State University of New York at Stony Brook in the 1980s, she said.

Now, her only child, a high school senior, is applying to colleges, and she decided that she had to do something.

After the Oct. 7 attacks on Israel that killed about 1,200 Israelis, wounded thousands, and saw 240 taken hostage, college students across the United States were massing to rally in support, not of the Israelis murdered that day, but of their killers, the terrorist group Hamas.

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At the University of Maryland, "Holocaust 2.0" graffiti was chalked [onto a sidewalk](#) near a photo display of Israelis held hostage by Hamas.

At Cooper Union College in New York on Oct. 25, about 50 Jewish students were [locked inside its library](#) by a staff member as pro-Palestinian protesters stormed past security and pounded on its doors and windows.

At The George Washington University (GW) in Washington, [messages projected in lights](#) high on building walls at night included "Glory To Our Martyrs" and "Divestment from Zionist Genocide Now."

Harvard University's Hillel chapter reported on Nov. 29 that protesters were shouting, "Globalize the intifada."

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights opened an [investigation](#) into whether the nation's oldest university failed to protect Jewish students from harassment, as required by federal law.

"I'm protecting my son like any mother would," Ms. Rand told The Epoch Times. "You don't want your children to be subjected to this nightmare."

On Oct. 26, she publicly launched MACA on Facebook. Four days later, she made it private. It already had 10,000 members, and it continued to grow. A few days later, it had about 45,000 members, and now has more than 53,000, she told The Epoch Times.

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Posters showing some of those kidnapped by Hamas in Israeli are displayed on a pole outside of New York University as tensions between supporters of Palestine and supporters of Israel increase on college campuses across the nation, in New York City on Oct. 30, 2023. (Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

It's a formidable group of organized and predominantly Jewish mothers sharing information and outrage.

Informational posts on Dec. 12 included the Harvard Corporation's reaffirmation of support for President Claudine Gay, who, like Ms. Magill, told Congress on Dec. 5 that "it would depend on the context" whether Harvard permitted calls for Jewish genocide.

Another post was an article by lawyer Nathan Lewin on how the First Amendment doesn't protect harassment and threats and how Supreme Court justices have affirmed this in various opinions.

There was also a letter posted to GW President Ellen Granberg by a group member. In it, the writer describes how her husband died in the World Trade Center attack on Sept. 11, 2001, how she had set up an endowed scholarship at GW in his memory—and how she now demands her money back for the college's failure to protect Jewish students from anti-Semitism amid its claims to "protect free speech."

"This tolerance of hatred is only applied selectively, and these calls for violence would not be tolerated if made against people of other religions, backgrounds or race," she wrote.

As the group launches actions, Ms. Rand said it has tried to promote one activity every day to funnel the energy of its members.

Letter-Writing Campaign

One group-wide initiative—an email-writing campaign to UPenn's board of trustees—yielded results on Dec. 9 with Ms. Magill's resignation.

Two days earlier, it was [reported](#) by the university's student newspaper, The Daily Pennsylvanian, that the board of the Wharton School had asked Ms. Magill to step down.

The board said in the letter that it had met eight times since Nov. 16 and had tagged UPenn leadership for permitting a "dangerous and toxic culture" to exist at the university.

Ms. Magill's resignation was followed the same day by that of Scott Bok, chairman of the UPenn Board of Trustees and a supporter of Ms. Magill.

While a positive development for the group, MACA's letter-writing campaign, mounted on Dec. 4, wasn't the sole cause for those actions, and Ms. Rand is the first to recognize that.

A major donor's yanking of a \$100 million donation was a factor, as was Ms. Magill's testimony to Congress on Dec. 5. However, a barrage of emails can be hard to ignore, Ms. Rand said.



(L-R) Claudine Gay, president of Harvard University, Liz Magill, president of University of Pennsylvania, and Sally Kornbluth, president of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, testify before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce in Washington on Dec. 5, 2023. (Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images)

"I don't know that in any one of these situations, we can take full responsibility," she said, citing the "mounting pressure" contributed by her group. "But I think we can take partial responsibility [for Ms. Magill's resignation]."

Ross Stevens, CEO of Stone Ridge Asset Management and a UPenn alumnus, informed the university in a letter that he intended to cancel a donation of \$100 million in Stone Ridge shares held by the university since 2017 if it didn't replace its president.

Ms. Rand called Ms. Magill's resignation "a good first step. I'd like to see [Harvard President] Claudine Gay and [MIT President Sally] Kornbluth go, too."

She has no activist background, she said, but practices insurance law, filing forms with the state for associations.

"I work in a compliance department. I'm not in any way a trial lawyer, a litigator, a civil rights lawyer. I am none of those things."

Ms. Rand has one piece of useful outside experience, however. In 2021, she founded one of Facebook's biggest Holocaust-related groups, one for people who are generally interested in the subject rather than for those with a close personal connection to it. She thinks it's the second-largest such group on Facebook.

Many of its 16,000 members aren't Jewish, said Ms. Rand, a fourth-generation American who only in recent years, with some research, found very-distant relatives who were killed in the Holocaust.



Captured Jewish civilians who participated in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising are marched out of the city by Nazi troops, in Warsaw, Poland, on April 19, 1943. (Frederic Lewis/Getty Images)

An Inspiration: MADD

One big inspiration for Ms. Rand in founding the group was the success of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). That group was formed in 1980 by Candace Lightner, whose 13-year-old daughter, Cari, was killed while walking to a California church carnival, struck by a driver with three DUI convictions, and just two days out of jail after his fourth DUI arrest.

That group was also led by average people who organized around a common cause, Ms. Rand said. And it accomplished significant changes, including federal legislation pressuring states to raise the drinking age to 21 and toughen drunk-driving enforcement.

"They did two things," she said. "They managed to affect change legally. But they also changed the entire landscape socially. Like nowadays, it's completely unacceptable to drink and drive,

right?" At 60, she's old enough to remember when that wasn't the case.



I'm getting an education. ... It was not on my radar, college campuses in general. I knew as much about what went on there as I did about horse racing. Just nothing.

Elizabeth Rand, founder, Mothers Against College Antisemitism

Just weeks ago, Ms. Rand said she saw something similar, with the moms complaining on Facebook. "And I thought, this is a parallel situation. This is a bunch of moms who are sick of what's going on," she said.

Ms. Rand moved fast to adapt to MACA's exploding popularity. She found administrators for the group so that she wouldn't have to run it personally—monitoring posts, making rules, and keeping things civil—while holding down her full-time job. She has tried to keep it apolitical.

"I'm getting an education. Because, like I said, it was not on my radar, college campuses in general. I knew as much about what went on there as I did about horse racing. Just nothing," Ms. Rand said.

Her own college experience on the Stony Brook campus in the 1980s didn't help her much. Anti-Semitism wasn't an issue then. Now that she's talking about it with people, she said, she's hearing that the issue on campuses has been on some people's radar for as long as 20 or 30 years.



People walk through Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., on Dec. 12, 2023. (Joseph Prezioso/AFP via Getty Images)

"I'm learning, wait, this is nothing new. It's been going on for decades at some of these schools," Ms. Rand said.

It washed ashore with the intellectual waves that have made such deep inroads on college campuses, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and critical race theory, she said. These theories classify Jews as white oppressors and Israel's very existence as white colonial oppression. Colleges not only teach these theories but often have administrative DEI departments.

"The rhetoric around us [the Jews] is that we're all-powerful," Ms. Rand said. "We control everything. And we're evil white people. And we don't deserve the same benefit of the doubt that other people constantly [get]. We are victims, but we're not allowed to be seen as victims.

"We are seen as people who control things, as people who are wealthy, as people who are old money. Never mind that that's completely untrue. This is our image.



American universities have been neglecting excellence in order to pursue a variety of agendas—many of them clustered around diversity and inclusion.

Fareed Zakaria, journalist

"We're oppressors. We're white oppressors, therefore we cannot also be victims. However, we obviously are."

Oppressors and Victims

Conservatives have long raised the alarm about collegiate trends: what colleges promote and support, what professors study, and what students are taught. Last week's testimony, though, raised questions with many not inclined previously to criticize universities.

CNN's Fareed Zakaria, a national media figure for years with stints at CNN, Newsweek, Time, and The Washington Post, wrote a column laying out Americans' declining faith in universities and the value of a college degree.

"American universities have been neglecting excellence in order to pursue a variety of agendas—many of them clustered around diversity and inclusion," he wrote.

"It started with the best of intentions. Colleges wanted to make sure young people of all backgrounds had access to higher education and felt comfortable on campus.

"But those good intentions have morphed into a dogmatic ideology and turned these universities into places where the pervasive goals are political and social engineering, not academic merit."



A sign designates a building as a safe space at the Jewish student organization Hillel society's building at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., on Dec. 12, 2023. (Joseph Prezioso/AFP via Getty Images)

Attorney and author Heather Mac Donald wrote a conservative perspective.

"The real issue on campuses isn't anti-Semitism but the anti-Western ethos that has colonized large swaths of the curriculum," she wrote in The Wall Street Journal.

"Elite schools once disdained Jews because they were seen as outsiders to Western civilization. Now, they are reviled as that civilization's very embodiment.

"Students explain that their hatreds come from what they learn in class, that the West is built on white supremacy and oppression.

"Israel is cast as the Western settler-colonialist oppressor par excellence."

Campus demonstrations and others in which students have taken part have featured thousands of students chanting slogans such as "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," which not unreasonably can be seen as calling for the eradication of the world's only Jewish state.

The slogans, the anger of mass demonstrations, and the harassment of outnumbered or lone Jewish students have left many of them fearful.

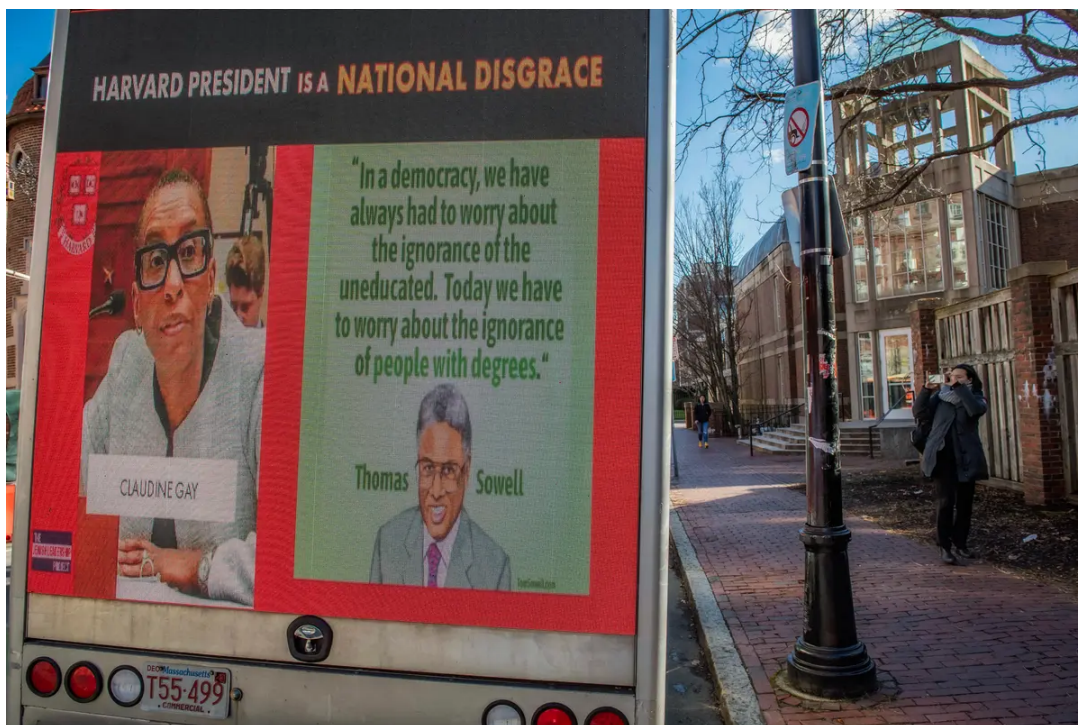
"It's almost like we need the Guardian Angels group to walk students around campus," Ms. Rand said, recalling the late 1970s-era volunteers wearing red berets—some called them vigilantes—who were willing to escort people in the New York City subways.

She said she thinks the problem lies less with the students than with the professors.

"My feeling is the staff, the professors, they all are 15,000 times worse than the students," Ms. Rand said. "You can write off some of the students' stuff to being young and ignorant.

"But when you have people at the top of their professional game, and they're professors at Harvard, Columbia, and they believe this ... that's a real problem. To me, that's much scarier than a bunch of kids who are getting their information from TikTok.

"But if you're able to be a professor at an Ivy League school, you're considered intellectual, and you're educated. And I think that's much more disturbing."



A truck displaying a sign calling the president of Harvard a disgrace drives around Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., on Dec. 12, 2023. (Joseph Prezioso/AFP via Getty Images)

Ms. Rand said the universities need to "clean house." And she's ready to help.

Having delegated the Facebook group's day-to-day administration to others, Ms. Rand is concentrating on its future.

She has formed a subgroup of professional women and wants to incorporate as a nonprofit group.

"We have hundreds of lawyers in this group," she said.

She hopes that some will do pro bono work, as she wants to sue universities for civil rights violations. Not all of them, though, as

she notes that some universities, including Brandeis and Florida, have stepped up and responded well in this area.

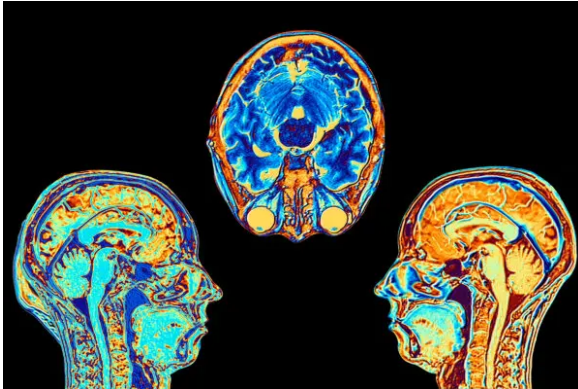
Some universities, such as UC–Berkeley, have already been sued. Jewish students filed a federal civil rights [lawsuit](#) against California's flagship university on Nov. 28 for allowing the "longstanding, unchecked spread of anti-Semitism" on campus.

Ms. Rand wants to raise enough money to support activities such as large demonstrations.

"If you're going to have people screaming 'Intifada!' there has to be somebody else swinging on the other side," she said.

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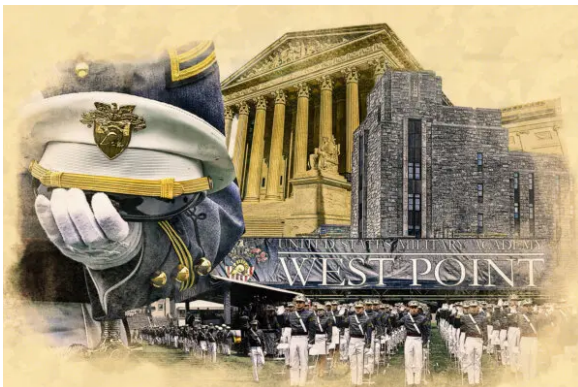
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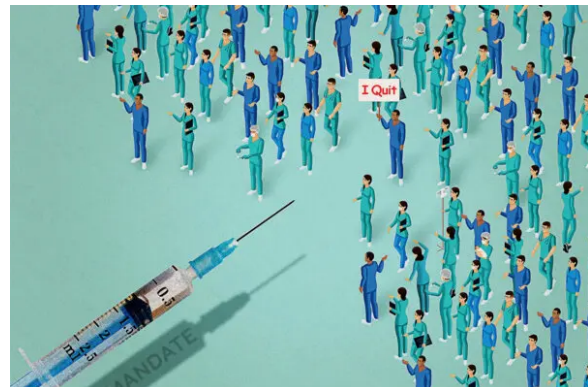
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