



COMMENTARY

Why Jews Belong Under The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Umbrella

By Debbie Epstein Henry | December 19, 2023 at 11:00 AM

"Including Jews under the DEI umbrella would accomplish three things. First is education. Providing more knowledge could bring more understanding. Second is bridging differences. Fostering communication will help build relationships and facilitate productive dialogue. Third is community. Jews need a safe space to connect and explore the range of experiences we are facing."



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Isolation. This is one feeling I didn't anticipate after learning of the massacre of more than 1,200 Jewish civilians and the kidnapping of 240 civilians on October 7th. I was deeply hurt that among the hundreds of diversity, equity, and inclusion ("DEI") law firm professionals I've worked with for 25 years, only two have checked in with me since then. As I wondered why, I've surmised that while these colleagues see me as an ally, they don't see me – a Jew – as needing allyship and protection too. This is what I seek to change.

It's time to invite Jews into the DEI circle. Many firms have DEI initiatives that address systemic discrimination against people of color, the LGBTQ+ community, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and others. Many firms also have affinity groups organized around a shared identity that help to combat workplace discrimination and promote DEI. But Jews are typically excluded from these DEI efforts.

Including Jews under the DEI umbrella would accomplish three things. First is education. Providing more knowledge could bring more understanding. Second is bridging differences. Fostering communication will help build relationships and facilitate productive dialogue. Third is community. Jews need a safe space to connect and explore the range of experiences we are facing.

In order to invite Jews in, it's important to address the five reasons why, I believe, Jews have not been welcome and why we belong.

1. Some believe Jews are not marginalized and we hold disproportionate power so we don't belong with underrepresented groups.

While many Jews have attained financial and professional success, mistakenly concluding that all Jews have power has led to pernicious stereotypes. Additionally, Jews have suffered historic discrimination and we are not safe. Jewish institutions are under attack. We are also being threatened on college and law school campuses, in the streets, and in countless other spaces. Indeed, as of October 24th, the Anti-Defamation League ("ADL") Center on Extremism reported incidents of harassment, vandalism, and assault against Jews had increased by 388% over the same period last year.

2. Many say Jews are white and part of a dominant majority and don't need protection.

While the majority of Jews in Israel are not white, in the U.S., we are. However, Jews were deemed not to be white by the Nazis and that was part of the purported justification for murdering six million Jews. Additionally, Jews are indisputably a tiny minority – a mere 0.2% of the world's population and only 2% of the U.S. population.

3. The Israel debate is "complicated" and some see the Israelis as "occupiers," "settlers," or "colonizers" who run an "apartheid" government.

Condemning the butchering and kidnapping of civilians is not complicated. Terrorism is the use of violence against civilians and Hamas is a U.S. government-designated terrorist organization that murdered more than 1,200 Israeli civilians. Irrespective of what one thinks of any government, one is never justified in slaughtering innocent civilians. And one can denounce terrorism and also decry the deaths of Palestinian civilians.

4. Some say they are not antisemitic; they are just anti-Zionist.

Zionism is a movement to support a Jewish homeland in Israel. Regardless of whether you believe that anti-Zionism equates to antisemitism, the dramatic rise in antisemitic incidents demonstrates the two are inextricably linked. From the “Gas the Jews” pro-Palestinian protest in Sydney to the Jewish apartments marked with Stars of David in Berlin, it’s clear that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are conflated and Jews are in danger.

5. Some worry that including Jews may create tension in the DEI community because some who oppose Israel are already under the diversity umbrella.

While it may be uncomfortable to have Jews and those who oppose Israel participate in DEI initiatives together, it’s necessary. Since George Floyd’s murder, much of the DEI emphasis has been to be uncomfortable and facilitate courageous conversations. It’s time that Jews be part of these conversations along with Muslims, who have been included in DEI initiatives for more than a decade.

Incorporating Jews into DEI initiatives is overdue. By signing the [ADL’s Workplace Pledge to Fight Antisemitism](#) and using [ADL](#) and [Shine the Light](#) resources, firms can take the necessary steps to ensure that all employees feel safe and included.

As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: “In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.” It’s not too late for us to combat the rise in antisemitism, together.

[Debbie Epstein Henry](#) is a lawyer turned author, professional speaker, consultant, and communication coach with an expertise in careers, workplace dynamics, women, and law. Debbie is a member of the board of trustees of Brooklyn Law School. She’s also a Jew and an advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion.